THE POLITICAL IDEOLOGY OF CONNECTICUT’S STANDING ORDER

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by

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INTRODUCTION

Between 1817 and 1820 the newspaper Connecticut Courant periodically updated its readers on the reports of a sea serpent off the north Atlantic coast. Ship captains pledged to swear under oath that they had seen the fearsome oceanic beast. At first this creature was only spotted off the Massachusetts coastline. Descriptions varied, with some sailors claiming the monster had a head the size of a horse, while others likened the size to that of a dog. There was consensus that the beast had the body of a snake. Disagreement ensued again on the creature’s length, with reports ranging anywhere from forty to eighty feet.¹ Not to be outdone, reports of a different leviathan in the waters of Connecticut surfaced in January of 1820. This sighting signified that the “monopoly” of sea serpent sightings in Massachusetts was broken. More importantly, a “winter Dragon [was] more consequential than a summer one,” meaning that the threat to Connecticut was greater than the rest of New England.² As public interest in the creature mounted, so did the number of skeptics who doubted the tales. Regardless of what anyone wished to believe, the true believers argued that a terrifying monster lurked underneath the waves in the north Atlantic.

In the early nineteenth century alarmed clergymen, politicians, and lawyers warned of another sort of monster lurking throughout New England. In Connecticut, this

¹ Connecticut Courant, August 26, 1817.
² Connecticut Courant, February 1, 1820.
menacing creature threatened to devour the good people of the state and the society they had built unless it could be stopped. To those who belonged to a church that was not part of the state’s religious establishment, or those who favored the politics of the Republican Party, the feared monster was the “Standing Order” of Connecticut, the coalition of Federalists and Congregational clergymen who controlled the leadership of the state. By and large, Federalists and Congregationalists shared the same perspectives on politics, society, and religion. Federalism had long been the dominant political party of Connecticut, exerting an almost suffocating control of the political system at all levels of government.¹ Most upsetting to the Republican coalition was the state’s ecclesiastical establishment. The Congregational Church had enjoyed the privilege of being Connecticut’s established church since the colony’s founding. It was on this issue that the political and religious dissenters chided the Standing Order in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. It was also on this issue that this coalition united around in order to finally wrestle control of the state government in 1818.

Conversely, for those within the Standing Order, the real hydra that threatened to destroy the state was the dual-headed monstrosity of Republicans and their religious dissenter allies. Federalists disdained the democratic populism of the Republicans while the established clergy could not tolerate the “unlearned” preachers and theological convictions of the “minor sects.”² The Republicans, also known as “Jeffersonians,” and religious dissenters of Connecticut attempted to discredit the Standing Order as an

archaic order of social and political hierarchy that was both corrupt and immoral. Most importantly, they were adamant in their conviction that Connecticut had prospered for approximately two hundred years based in part on the “steady habits” of institutions such as the state church. Remove the ecclesiastical establishment, they warned, and the harmony and prosperity of Connecticut, and possibly the nation, would be ruined.

Between the ascension of the Republican Party on the national scale in 1800 and their eventual takeover of the levers of power in Connecticut in 1818, each side in the political struggle battled to slay its monster. Each believed that their nemesis threatened to destroy the stability of the state, and perhaps even the very social and political fabric of the republic at large. The Congregational clergy believed the Republicans would undermine religion, promote atheism, and in turn drive the state into anarchy. On the other side, religious dissenters maintained that the Standing Order’s position of the state support of ecclesiastical establishments worked to undermine the effectiveness of both the government and the Protestant faith.

This work contends that each side held ideological convictions which drove their understanding of the necessity of an ecclesiastical establishment. In particular, the motives for those who defended the established church were based not upon selfish ambition, but rather upon well-constructed ideas about how best to maintain the prosperity of the American republic. The political ideology of the established clergy in relation to the defense of the church establishment is the focus of this work. In Connecticut, the adherents of the Standing Order valued traditional institutions and virtues not out of a “chronological snobbery” that viewed the past as inherently better
than the present. Rather, they cherished tradition because in their view the decisions and institutions of the past had created a present society which was superior to all other possibilities. The Puritans who had first settled and prospered in New England did so by following certain principles and traditions. Their descendants continued to be the leaders of country towns in part due to the stability and continuity of the traditions of the past.\textsuperscript{3} Their inclination towards the traditional structures and social systems that seemingly benefitted the continued success of the community included maintaining the conventional provision of holding the Congregationalists as the established church for the state.

This study seeks to look at the Standing Order afresh, without imposing historical value judgments on them, their ideology, or theology. In doing so it will treat them as a group that held legitimate ideas about what the future of the American republic needed in order to be successful and the role that Christianity played in developing that vision. Their vision for the nation may have lost – perhaps deservedly so – to that of the Jeffersonians and religious dissenters, but it was nonetheless a vision that ultimately had meaningful consequences for the development of the nation and the role of Christianity in shaping the political and social spheres.

The opinions, arguments, and justifications used by the dissenters and Republicans will also be examined in order to offer context and a contrary perspective of the social and political conditions in Connecticut. They too cared for the stability and growth of the nation, and in their vision the ecclesiastical establishment was detrimental

to reaching that objective. The goal of this project is not to paint a picture of “good vs. evil,” but rather to demonstrate that the convictions on both sides of the debate were grounded upon ideas, not ambitions. The established clergy of Standing Order, as well as their dissenter counterparts, believed that the outcome of the ecclesiastical issue was important for determining the future of the republic. Like the eyewitnesses of the sea monster, they were true believers in the righteousness and significance of their position. For the established clergy, the state church was a fundamental component of stability and prosperity in the land of steady habits.

THE POLITICAL AND RELIGIOUS LANDSCAPE

In the early nineteenth century the populist appeal of “Jeffersonian republicanism” had spread widely across the American social and political landscape. New England, however, largely remained an enclave of Federalist politics and traditional Congregational ecclesiology and theology, including state support for the Congregational Church. The strong “steady habits” of tradition and deference in Connecticut insulated the Federalists and Congregationalists from the social and political changes which were occurring throughout the nation, preventing them from suffering the fate of irrelevancy in that state as they had elsewhere in America.

As the nineteenth century unfolded, the Federalists became marginalized as a national party. However, they continued to dominate New England politics during this period in part because the economic interests of a vast number of New Englanders were secured in overseas trade. Consequently, many New Englanders, even those in the
artisan class which was overwhelming Republican everywhere else in the nation, were supportive of Federalist foreign policy and economic programs which were dependent upon trade with Great Britain.\(^4\)

The structure of Connecticut’s state government in the early 1800s looked considerably different from the one the state has today. It was also unique in its own time. Most states amended their constitutions to reflect the federal Constitution, providing a bill of rights which included a freedom of religion. Connecticut did not write a state constitution until 1818, preferring instead to operate upon a modified version of the original 1662 royal charter of the Connecticut colony. Of the original thirteen states, Connecticut and Rhode Island were the only two that did not write new state constitutions following the American Revolution.

More importantly, instead of the tripartite division of three separate but equal branches of government employed by the federal government and most states, Connecticut’s government had a unitary structure. The state’s General Assembly held legal, executive, and judicial authority. The General Assembly was comprised of an executive office (governor and lieutenant governor), and a two-chambered legislative body (Lower and Upper Houses). The Lower House was a large body of approximately two hundred representatives (two from each town) and the Upper chamber, known as the Council of Assistants, was comprised of twelve officers. Neither the executive positions nor the judiciary were independent. Further, the governor possessed very little power within the Assembly. The high courts of the state were presided by the executive offices

and the members of the Council. Although the system was modified over time, overall the unitary form of administration remained in place until the creation of a state constitution in 1818. This unitary structure of government reveals how the Standing Order wielded so much authority and influence in Connecticut. Without a check on the authority of the legislature, the Assembly’s power over the state government was absolute.

The Standing Order was not a formal organization. Rather, it was a term used to denote the strong, albeit informal, relationship between the political and ecclesiastical powers, a relationship that garnered the alliance significant influence and stability. The phrase described the political authority in Massachusetts as well, as its Standing Order was just as strong, if not stronger, than Connecticut’s. Specifically, the political component of Connecticut’s Standing Order was comprised of the majority of the representatives in the General Assembly, including almost every member of the Upper House as well as the governor and lieutenant governor. The ecclesiastical side consisted primarily of Congregationalists, though their support was neither exclusive nor unified. Connecticut’s few Separatist Congregational churches aligned against the Standing Order, as did some other renegade Congregational ministers, especially those who were Unitarians. Episcopalians largely sided with the Standing Order until they finally switched alliances to the Republican Party in 1817. Additionally, many lawyers trained

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5 This changed in 1806 with the General Assembly creating a law by which the members of the Supreme Court could not be elected officials. Although this act granted the judicial system a degree of independence, it was ultimately still subordinate to the General Assembly. See Michael Besso, “‘An Act…For Constituting, and Regulating Courts’ and the Development of the Connecticut Supreme Court: A Bicentennial Recognition.” Connecticut Supreme Court History, Vol. I, (2006): 49-54.
at the conservative strongholds of Yale and the Litchfield Law School contributed to the legal and political strength of the Standing Order.

The individuals who comprised the Standing Order did not share uniform political ideology across the board. As will be seen in Chapter Two, Federalists Zephaniah Swift and David Daggett were wary of the power of the Congregational clergy and worked to marginalize their influence. Nevertheless, they shared with the established clergy the belief that religion and religious institutions were important for the prosperity of the young nation. They also joined prominent clergymen such as Jedidiah Morse and Timothy Dwight in the conviction that New England possessed a unique identity, one that was to set an example for the rest of the nation to follow.

Although the political-ecclesiastical alliance made challenges to the established authority difficult, an ideological shift within the Standing Order had occurred during the Revolutionary period. In the decades before the American Revolution political control rested with the conservative economic and religious leaders who remained committed to the Crown and who rejected the New Light spiritual movement of the Great Awakening. Revolutionary Whigs and New Light Congregationalists rose to prominence as support for British polity Old Light theology eroded. This coalition became Connecticut’s Standing Order from the Revolution until the Republican takeover of Connecticut in 1817.6

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It is important to note that the early republic period was one of shifting political alliances as political parties had yet to solidify. Former school classmates and professional colleagues parted ways politically as the ideological ranks coalesced into the Federalist and Republican parties. For example, in the mid-1790s some “Yale men” such as Swift and Daggett gravitated towards the Federalists, while others like Abraham Bishop and Pierpont Edwards joined the Republicans. Further, in this era of party formation individuals had the freedom to dramatically swing from one party to the other. Infamously, Thomas Jefferson’s Republican Vice-President, Aaron Burr, conspired to run as the Federalist candidate for the governorship of New York. More closely to Connecticut, Oliver Wolcott, Jr. succeeded Alexander Hamilton as U.S. Treasury Secretary during the Washington administration, yet he became the first opposition-party governor of Connecticut in 1817.

Religion in America was instrumental in the development of the public life in the new nation. The swift rise of upstart Christian sects coupled with the powerful revivals of the Second Great Awakening demonstrated the high level of religious interest throughout the nation. In the new social free market of religious ideas and sects in the early United States the Methodist and Baptist denominations in particular experienced tremendous growth throughout the nation as itinerant circuit riders preached Christianity to the remote settlers on the western frontier. The shift in religious affiliation away from

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the traditional and established churches worked to shape and rearrange social ties, political associations, and public sources of respect and authority.\textsuperscript{9}

From the colonial period through the antebellum era the number of Congregational churches grew in Connecticut, but not nearly at the same rate as upstart sects such as the Baptists or Methodists. For example, while the number of Congregational churches in the state rose from 155 in 1750 to 252 by 1850, that rate of growth in that same span paled in comparison with that of the Baptists (twelve to 114) and the Methodists (zero to 185).\textsuperscript{10} In the early republic, the Congregationalists remained the single largest denomination in Connecticut. However their advantage in the total number of churches had eroded to the point where the dissenting churches as a whole outnumbered them. By the end of ecclesiastical disestablishment in Connecticut, Congregationalists had 207 churches compared with 241 for all other sects, including Separatist Congregationalists.\textsuperscript{11} To make matters worse for the established churches, dissenting congregations had established themselves in virtually every part of the state.

Many Congregational theologians regarded themselves as the defenders of America’s Puritan heritage as well as protectors of legitimate Calvinism. They gloried in

\begin{footnotes}
\item[11] The specific denominational breakdown of Connecticut churches in 1818 is as follows: Congregationalists, 207; Baptists, 88; Episcopalians, 77; Methodists, 55; Unitarians, 11; Separatists, 7; Quakers, 3. The statistic is derived from the ecclesiastical map of 1818 provided in Richard J. Purcell, \textit{Connecticut in Transition: 1775-1818} (Middletown, CT.: Wesleyan University Press, 1963), 65.
\end{footnotes}
the belief that the social and religious institutions of New England were superior to all others. If America was indeed a nation blessed by God then New England society would be the primary vessel through which the blessing would come. New Englanders were a special people, a community set apart by God to show the rest of the nation how a godly society should be structured. The conservative Congregationalists feared that if New England abandoned its Puritan and Calvinist traditions then society would not simply become irreligious, but delve into a similar state of anarchy and bloodshed as witnessed in the French Revolution. Therefore, in their view much was at stake in the battle for the future of society. It was up to the leaders of the Standing Order in the early nineteenth century to preserve a godly and stable society in Connecticut, and their prime way to accomplish this mission was through the ecclesiastical establishment.

The nature and practice of an ecclesiastical establishment varied in the colonial and early republic periods. For example, although the New England colonists were religious dissenters within the British Empire, they nevertheless established Congregationalism as their own church establishment. In the colony of New York, the minority Anglican population claimed to be the established church even though they were overwhelmed in a sea of Reformed presbyters. Despite early attempts in many colonies to establish one denomination as the singular church, the consistent influx of new migrants from Europe, coupled with the expanding American population, ultimately

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made such control and exclusivity untenable. This continued to be true of New England in the early years of the nineteenth century as the diffusion of the population into the frontier weakened the Congregationalists’ grip on religious dominance in Connecticut. As settlers moved westward, they were reached by the itinerant Methodist and Baptist ministers before a settled Congregational minister could set up a church in the area.

The benefits of being an established church in Connecticut were numerous. Congregational ministers enjoyed the privilege of preaching Election Day sermons and offering prayers at government meetings. The established clergy in Connecticut openly excluded other denominations from participating in state functions and they enjoyed a privileged status in Connecticut society. Yale College, an important institution for training Congregational ministers, was partially financed with state funds. Most importantly for the Congregationalists was the state’s ecclesiastical tax. The real power of the established churches rested at the local level as the local parish of each town held the authority to levy taxes upon their memberships. In many towns ministerial salaries were supplemented by tax money, which could also be used for financing material improvements to meetinghouses. Local civic leaders, in conjunction with the clergy, determined the tax rate for each ecclesiastical society. Enforcement was not uniform, as some parishes chose not to collect taxes at all, while others did not rigidly enforce the collection of taxes on those who refused to pay them. All persons in the state were registered as Congregationalists and paid taxes to that church unless they filed for a

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certificate with the town clerk stating that they belonged to another sect. Since the law
required everyone to belong to a religious society or organization, the irreligious either
remained members of the established church or disingenuously joined a dissenting
congregation in order to file for a certificate.14

HISTORIOGRAPHY

A half-century ago a popular interpretation of the early national period held that
the Jeffersonian/Republicans were the faithful transmitters of American ideals of
democracy and liberty. On the other hand the Federalists, with their aristocratic identities
and backwards-looking ideology cared more for their own prominence than that of their
communities or nation. Richard Buel, Jr., who recently has edited excellent primary
source compilations of Connecticut in the early republic, was a prime proponent of the
interpretation that Federalists were aristocratic reactionaries.15

As more recent historians have shown, Federalists were not against republican
government, they just had a different conception of it than did the Republicans. In 1993,
Nathan Hatch’s influential book, The Democratization of American Christianity,
interpreted the Congregationalists as a religious sect that waned in the nineteenth century
because they could not embrace the democratic styles and strategies employed by upstart

14 William L. Philie, Change and Tradition: New Haven, Connecticut, 1780-1830 (New York:
15 Alan K. Snyder, “Foundations of Liberty: The Christian Republicanism of Timothy Dwight and
compilations are Richard Buel Jr., editor, The Peopling of New Connecticut: From the Land of Steady
Habits to the Western Reserve (Hartford: The Acorn Club, 2011), and Richard Buel Jr and George J.
Willauer, editors, Original Discontents: Commentaries on the Creation of Connecticut’s Constitution of
1818 (Hamden, CT: The Acorn Club, 2007).
groups such as the Methodists. More recently, historians have shed new light on the religious faction of the Standing Order, showing that the New England clergy in the early republic were not interested in social control, and filled with anxiety about their loss of privilege in a changing society. In the mid-1990s works by David Kling and James Rohrer attempted to portray the Standing Order in a more favorable light. Kling’s *A Field of Divine Wonders* argues that the religious revivals in Connecticut during the early nineteenth century were audience-oriented and dependent upon lay leadership, demonstrating that the Standing Order adapted to the democratic age, and did not oppose it. Rohrer’s *Keepers of the Covenant* examines the flourishing missionary activity of the Congregational churches in the early nineteenth century, claiming that rather than retreating from society, Congregationalists actively competed in the religious marketplace with dissenting churches in attempt to expand their memberships.¹⁶

The efforts of Kling and Rohrer have been swallowed up in the scholarship devoted to the Republican political perspective. James Banner, Jr. argues that the Federalists are largely missing from the historiography of the early republic as the Jeffersonian perspective has become the lens through which historians perceive the period; the Federalists are on the periphery. In a critique of the modern scholarship on the Federalists which can be applied to the Standing Order in Connecticut, Banner

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contends that Federalists have been ignored and must be “rescued from the dustbin of historiography and the condescending regard of so many historians.”

Modern historians who still cling to the “Federalists/Congregationalists-as-reactionaries” argument usually do so by simply parroting the historiography of earlier generations. As for the involvement of the clergy in politics, Jeffrey Pasley, in an otherwise excellent monograph *The Tyranny of Printers*, uses no citation to state “The clergy were politically vocal, and they made sure that their pious flocks understood where the Lord stood on the issues of the day. In Connecticut, God was a Federalist.” This claim is an overgeneralization. True, many of the established clergy were politically vocal, but they were so only with special sermons, such as on election days or Fourth of July celebrations. James Rohrer has noted that the clergy largely omitted political references from their ordinary Sunday sermons, as well as in their benevolent society publications. By and large, there was a lack of overt political references given by the clergy in their regular Sunday sermons during the time of the battles over religious establishment in Connecticut.

Over the past decade, some historians have made an effort to lift the Congregationalists from the “dustbin of historiography.” This includes Jonathan Sassi’s 2001 book, *A Republic of Righteousness*, which examines the ways in which the New England clergy in the early republic were at the forefront of both social action and

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19 Rohrer, *Keepers of the Covenant*, 68.
developing a Calvinist theology that was relevant to a new generation of Americans. Sassi describes the Congregational clergy as social progressives who applied religious faith to social experience rather than as reactionaries who desperately sought to control society. More recently, religious historians Mark Noll and Ellis Sandoz have published works that argue for the importance of Christian conceptions of virtue and liberty in the rhetoric of the political leaders in the early American republic. Noll’s *America’s God* traces the developments of Protestant theology in America, showing how theology contributed to the social and political growth of the nation. Sandoz’s *Republicanism, Religion, and the Soul of America* examines the influence of Protestant theology and virtues in the political ideology of the leaders of the American Revolution.\(^\text{20}\)

Despite the contributions of these revisionists who have reexamined the place of the political and religious conservatives in the history of the early republic a skeptical tone remains on this subject in many professional circles. Studying the leaders and ideology of a movement that not only lost out to a Jeffersonian future but also seems hopelessly backwards and oppressive to modern sensibilities may appears to some as irrelevant. More in style are studies in social history as efforts to explore the history of more “ordinary” people. Thus, what has developed in modern historiography is a “post-Puritan paradigm” that ignores the contributions of the Standing Order on the history of not only New England, but the nation as a whole.\(^\text{21}\)


This project seeks to fill an important gap in the historiography of the Standing Order. Although modern analysis of the subject has been important for offering a different perspective of the Standing Order, these works do not connect the larger ideological ideas of the political and religious elites with the regular clergy and their parishioners. Nor do they examine the debate between the Standing Order and Republicans/religious dissenters concerning the necessity of religious establishment. The reexamination of the Standing Order in this dissertation will help to reframe the historical perspective of the Congregationalists from a group of conservative traditionalists to a collection of individuals who believed that establishment was vital for both the American people and society at large. Additionally, this work will also delve into the intellectual perspective of those in Connecticut who opposed the ecclesiastical establishment. Exploring the value of the church establishment from the perspective of both the supporters of the Standing Order and those who sided with the Jeffersonians will provide important insight into how issues of religion shaped the political and social battles in the early national period.

DEFINITIONS

Describing the ecclesiastical debate in Connecticut as one of religious establishment is somewhat of a misnomer. The idea of a religious establishment never pertained to other religions; the conflict was between Protestant sects. The reason for this was simple: New England was an almost entirely Protestant region. Catholics were unwelcome in the strong Protestant tradition of Connecticut. Practitioners of Eastern
religions were only temporary residents, travelers to the region and without a semblance of a distinct permanent ethnic or religious community. Jews were likewise a rare presence. There were hardly any Jews at all in Connecticut before the passage of the Constitution in 1818. Not until the 1820s did a few Jews set up businesses in Connecticut towns, and the first formal Jewish congregation was not established until 1843.\textsuperscript{22} The term “religion” will be used throughout this work in the discussion of faith in America generally and Connecticut in particular, with the understanding that its meaning applied almost exclusively to Christianity.

It was precisely this lack of religious diversity that enabled the Standing Order to proclaim that Connecticut was home to religious tolerance. In his \textit{System of the Laws of the State of Connecticut}, Connecticut superior judge Zephaniah Swift reasoned that the statute that all people were required to financially support religion necessarily included Jews, Muslims, and Hindus. His position was easy to hold because it was purely hypothetical: the religious institutions of those faiths did not exist in Connecticut.\textsuperscript{23} In their state, the Standing Order surmised, there existed no conflict between religious groups. Of course, that was because there were no religious groups outside of Protestant denominations. But within those groups, conflict was rampant.

Throughout this work the terms “sect” and “church” will be used interchangeably as synonyms used to describe individual Protestant traditions, such as Methodists, Episcopalians, Baptists, and Congregationalists. Sociologists Roger Finke and Rodney

\begin{itemize}
\item\textsuperscript{23} Zephaniah Swift, \textit{A System of the Laws of the State of Connecticut In Six Books. Volume I[-II]} (Windham, Conn.: John Byrne, 1795), 32; Cohn, “Civil Rights of Jews,” 22.
\end{itemize}
Stark make a distinction between the two, denoting a “sect” as a religious body that exists in a relatively high state of tension with its community, while a “church” is a religious body in a relatively low state of tension with its environment.\textsuperscript{24} Acknowledging this methodology, this study will nevertheless use the terms as synonyms and employ the phrase “minor sects” to specifically denote those religious bodies that were not part of the Congregational establishment. During the time period of this study, the term was a catch-all for the churches that did not belong to the Congregational-Presbyterian coalition. Although not all Congregational ministers supported the Standing Order, the term “minor sects” will refer exclusively to those Protestant traditions, including the Separatist Congregationalists, which were not members of established General Association of Congregational Churches. Additionally, the term “denomination” will be used along with “sect” and “church” as a synonym for Protestant ecclesiastical bodies.

CHAPTER OVERVIEW

Chapter One describes the ways in which the ecclesiastical establishment in early nineteenth century Connecticut affected both the established churches and the dissenting Protestant sects. It also examines the vast social and political changes of the time, including the social factors that weakened the traditional Congregationalist foundations of Connecticut society in the early republic period. Far from being reactionaries, the clergy of the Standing Order responded to the vast social changes in the early U.S. by articulating a vision for religious establishment and building religious programs that were

\textsuperscript{24} Finke, \textit{The Churching of America}, 44.
relevant to the culture. Chapter Two focuses on the three men who were crucial for mustering continued popular and political support for the ecclesiastical establishment, Timothy Dwight, David Daggett, and Zephaniah Swift. Dwight’s literary and theological contributions earned him national notoriety as well as influence over the students at Yale. As important leaders in the political realm, Daggett and Swift exerted legislative and judicial power, respectively, in upholding the ecclesiastical laws.

Chapter Three situates the ecclesiastical dilemma in Connecticut within the larger context of the importance and prevalence of religion in the early United States. It also studies the ideas that were important to supporters and opponents of the establishment, concepts such as virtue, republicanism, and liberty. Supporters of the Standing Order employed these ideas within a religious context and used them as justifications that the American republic depended on Christian principles to educate a virtuous citizenry and uphold a moral political class. Chapter Four delves deeper into understanding why the Congregationalists ultimately aligned themselves with the Federalist Party and religious dissenters gravitated toward the Republicans. The chapter also traces how the Calvinist theological constructs of original sin and human depravity informed how each side in the debate understood how the republic should be constructed. Further, the events of the French Revolution were a significant weapon in the establishment debate as each side used the violence in France as justification for the righteousness of their position. Finally, chapter Five explains that the Standing Order’s response to the Republican takeover of Connecticut politics and the subsequent creation of the state constitution
demonstrated that their motivations for religious establishment rested primarily upon religious and ideological grounds rather than simply retaining political power.

CONCLUSION

How was it that the political and spiritual leaders of New England, the birthplace of the revolutionary spirit that fueled the War of Independence in a quest for freedom and liberty against perceived oppression, remained the last region to offer Americans full religious liberties? How could the leaders of the Standing Order, many of whom fought for liberty in the war, turn around and restrict religious liberty? Or, at the very least, insist that the established church was not a violation of religious liberty? The desire of the Congregational clergymen to promote Christian virtues, institutions, and leaders in order to strengthen the nation was not just intellectual theory. Nor was it hollow rhetoric by men who saw their privileged status in society slipping away. Their reasons for maintaining the Standing Order were based upon their idea of civil theology and public morality in the American republic. Civil theology for the Standing Order was not an elitist dogma, but rather an assumption that religion and society were connected. Ideas have consequences, and the ideas of the Standing Order made their way into the newspapers, sermons, political meetings, and missionary societies throughout Connecticut.

At the Republican triumph over the Federalists in May of 1818, Episcopalian minister Harry Croswell pleaded with the people of Connecticut to eliminate partisanship.

and division between the religious sects, as such disunity was not in the spirit of the Christian faith. He warned, “Let us not put it in the power of the historian, to accuse us of descending from our high calling, to mingle in those dissentions, which are the offspring of human pride and passion.” It was a futile exhortation, for the power to interpret the past always lies with the historian. And history has shown that although the debate over Connecticut’s religious establishment was not driven solely by spiritual motives, neither was it a merely a squabble over power, privilege, and greed. Instead, both the Standing Order and the minor sects sincerely believed that if their cause were to fail then New England, and by extension the Republic, would jeopardize the future of the Christian faith, society, and government in America.

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26 Harry Croswell, A Sermon, Preached at the Anniversary Election, May 14, 1818 (Hartford: Goodwin and Sons, 1818), 15.
CHAPTER ONE:

WINDS OF CHANGE

To the disappointment of many New England Federalists, the reports of Thomas Jefferson’s death were greatly exaggerated. As the news of the electoral votes of other states trickled in during the summer of 1800, the Connecticut Standing Order could only sulk as the election returns seemed to confirm their fears that Jefferson would become the nation’s next president. Their hope for an alternate outcome was fleetingly renewed in early July when rumors circulated that Jefferson had died suddenly in his home in Monticello. The Federalist papers of Connecticut ran with these rumors. The Connecticut Courant reported that “Mr. Jefferson had died suddenly in his seat in Virginia,” while the Litchfield Monitor reprinted a similar report first posted in the Baltimore American.¹

In the days before the account was finally repudiated many of those within the Standing Order, the alliance of Federalist politicians and Congregational ministers who had long-dominated Connecticut’s political, religious, and social spheres, undoubtedly wondered if a catastrophe had been averted. In the months leading up to the election, Federalists had mocked Jefferson’s alleged immorality and his political sensibilities. In

¹ Connecticut Courant, July 7, 1800, p. 1; Litchfield Monitor, July 8, 1800, p.1. This rumor most likely was initially concocted as part of a desperate Federalist attempt to cause voters to question Jefferson’s health and thus reconsider voting for John Adams.
their view the election of Thomas Jefferson to the presidency would be a national calamity. The Congregational clergymen of the state’s Standing Order feared that a Jefferson presidency would abate the Christian faith throughout the country. Within a week of the initial publication of the rumor the truth became apparent. In the following edition of the *Courant*, the reports of Jefferson’s health were mutely stated: “The accounts of Mr. Jefferson’s death are contradicted.”1 With that, the Standing Order of Connecticut was forced to join Federalists everywhere in resignation to the fact that a seismic political change had come to pass in the young nation.

The ascension of a Republican to the chief executive office was far from the only significant change that swept into the North Atlantic. The Standing Order regarded Republican takeover of the young republic as the culmination of political and social vicissitude that had been taking place for decades. They were concerned about the consequences that social changes, such as western migration, the expansion of male suffrage, and the removal of a church establishment, might bring for the future prospects of both Connecticut and the nation. These changes threatened the conventional way of life for the entire New England region, potentially upsetting the prosperity and social stability throughout the state known as the “land of steady habits” that prided itself upon its loyalty to traditional leaders and institutions.

For the Standing Order, the establishment of the Congregational church as the favored Christian institution of the state was more than a remnant of a bygone era of British colonialism. State-support of religion was considered an indispensable

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component of a virtuous, free people. The election of Jefferson coupled with a multitude of social changes threatened the continuation of the establishment. This chapter will examine the role of Connecticut’s ecclesiastical system in the early nineteenth century, followed by the social movements that threatened that system and the Congregationalists’ response to them. Finally, exploring how the state’s Republicans and religious dissenters responded to the ecclesiastical policies of the Standing Order will provide an alternate perspective of the perception of Connecticut’s church-state relationship in Jeffersonian America.

PART ONE: THE STATUS QUO OF THE ESTABLISHED CHURCH

For the Republicans of Connecticut the election of Jefferson was the cause of great celebration. The Republican papers *American Mercury* and the *Connecticut Gazette* described for their readers the details of the festivities for the new political regime held at New Haven on March 11, 1801. According to the accounts, over a thousand Republicans from throughout the state gathered at a meetinghouse in Wallingford, just outside of the city. Descending upon the meetinghouse after first assembling at a local tavern, they celebrated Jefferson and Burr with the sounds of artillery and bells, speeches, sermons, and music. Among the toasts that evening was one made in celebration, “The Republicans throughout the United States, rejoice, for the Lilliputian ties are broken.”

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The reference to Jonathan Swift’s famous characters was meant to revel in the end of Federalist control of the nation. However, the Federalists continued to dominate within the New England states. In Connecticut, the establishment of the Congregational church served as a reminder that traditional norms remained very much alive. From the collection of parish taxes, to certificate laws for religious dissenters as well as the political prominence of the established clergy, the ecclesiastical status quo remained in Connecticut.

Perhaps the most contentious issue concerning the established church and the Standing Order in public opinion involved the ways in which the state’s ecclesiastical system permitted churches to collect money. In the early 1800s, Connecticut churches, both the established Congregational and dissenting denominations, generated revenue from a variety of means. Selling family pews was a revenue stream practiced mainly by older denominations – such as Congregationalists, Episcopalians, and Presbyterians – that had the luxury of adequate building space and memberships of wealthy families to make the enterprise feasible. Other churches, such as Baptists and Methodists, primarily collected money simply through the voluntary contributions of their members. Some churches of all kinds levied ecclesiastical taxes upon their parishes, while others petitioned the state to conduct a lottery in order to generate revenue.

Ecclesiastical societies issued taxes upon their congregations, took up voluntary collections, held lotteries, or sold pews for two main reasons. First, to construct a new meetinghouse or repair an old one. Second, to pay for the salary of the minister. The record-keeping business of knowing which members had paid their tax, and the amount
owed by each individual, was often done by a town clerk. Often, ministers themselves were keenly interested in such financial details, and kept their own records of financial contributions. For example, Revered Wedworth Wadsworth of Durham kept meticulous track of his tax receipts. His records included a list of members and the amounts they owed, as well as money already collected. He also kept an account of the construction of a new meetinghouse for his congregation.³

Many parishes held lotteries as a means of raising money. In order to hold a lottery a parish first had to petition a legislative committee, state the reason for the lottery, and state the amount of money they planned to raise. In 1805 the members of the church in Ellsworth submitted such a petition in hopes of raising $1,500. Their society was established in 1800, and soon after hired a minister and began construction of a meetinghouse. However, their parish had been weakened due to the significant number of “conscientious dissenters” and “others who have sheltered themselves under the liberality of the law” by filing certificates with dissenting churches which exempted them from the tax. Consequently, the society was unable to both finish the construction of the meetinghouse and keep their minister. They recognized that issuing a parish tax would raise insufficient funds to meet their expenses due to the number of dissenters in the area. Therefore, they found that holding a lottery was preferable to levying a tax. A legislative committee ended up granting their request, for a lottery of $1,000. In all, the committee that year granted a total of $11,000 for lotteries in six towns.⁴

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³ Wadsworth Family Papers 1718-1921, Connecticut State Library.
⁴ Ellsworth Petition, May 1805. Ecclesiastical Affairs Index, IV: 52-56. Connecticut State Library. The association believed that a tax would be “attended with serious difficulties,” and therefore preferred a lottery instead.
Although lotteries were permitted and employed by Congregational churches, not all Standing Order ministers utilized them as legitimate means through which to raise revenue. Lotteries violated the ethical and moral sensibilities of some ministers. For example, Yale president Jeremiah Day acknowledged that although lotteries might ultimately raise more money than taxes, “lotteries produce inequality…with-out encouraging industry.”5 The attainment of wealth without employing thrift or hard work was a cardinal sin against the traditional Protestant work ethic. Therefore, many Congregational ministers preferred to defend the tax system instead even though it was much more of a divisive issue among the people of Connecticut.

Many Congregational churches, and even some dissenting sects, collected taxes because it seemed to be the easiest, quickest, and most ethical way to collect money for either the support of a minister or the construction of a new meetinghouse. Although Connecticut required all citizens to pay an ecclesiastical tax if one were levied in a particular parish, the Standing Order did allow for some religious freedom with regard to compulsion to support Congregationalists in particular. For example, in 1727 the Anglican Church in the town of Stratford petitioned the General Assembly in an effort to seek relief from paying taxes to the Congregationalists. The Assembly released the members of the Anglican Church who were also regular attenders from contributing to the Standing Order, but they were still required to support religion by having their tax money applied to their church. The parish tax was administered to all in the town, but

5 Jeremiah Day, *College Disputes*, Day Family Papers, Series VIII. Yale University Library.
that which was collected from Episcopalians went to the Episcopal minister rather than

The law also allowed individuals to avoid the tax if they proved that they belonged to a dissenting denomination. In 1784 the state legislature passed the Act for Securing Rights of Conscience which eliminated fines against those who attended a dissenting church instead of the established church. In order to qualify for this exemption, and to avoid paying the ecclesiastical tax to the local Congregational parish, dissenters were required to file for a certificate of dissention with the local magistrate. Dissenters were free to pledge their support to a Baptist, Methodist, or Episcopalian church so long as they had filed their certificate of dissent with the local clerk. Seven years later this law was changed so that dissenters had to submit certificates with two civil officers, one of whom was undoubtedly a Congregationalist.\footnote{Christopher Grasso, A Speaking Aristocracy: Transforming Public Discourse in Eighteenth-Century Connecticut (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999), 343.}

The ecclesiastical tax was not the exclusive privilege of the Congregationalists. Beginning in 1729, Anglicans and Baptists had the freedom to issue their own religious tax upon their congregations. By the late 1790s the General Assembly had extended this right to all other dissenting sects. Especially with this latter amendment to the ecclesiastical code the Standing Order viewed the ecclesiastical laws as being fair to all denominations because the laws only stipulated “that every man, of sufficient ability,
shall contribute, in some way, to the institutions of religion, neither modes, nor forms, nor doctrines, are prescribed, nor in any degree affected.”

All denominations had the opportunity to collect taxes like the Congregationalists.

In the early 1800s Congregational clergymen were not oblivious to the fact that the majority of people in the state were wary of, if not openly opposed to, the collection of ecclesiastical taxes and the certificate laws. As more dissenter denominations organized throughout the state the ecclesiastical tax levied by the Congregationalists came under increasing scrutiny. Many Congregational churches, receptive to the complaints, attempted to rely primarily upon alternative sources of revenue. Parishes with sufficient land generated money by renting or leasing their available acreage. Subscriptions and voluntary donations were strongly encouraged, especially through wills. The money given to the denomination by the state from the reimbursement for Connecticut’s military support in the War of 1812 (see chapter 5) assisted many parishes as well. These methods of supplementing the parish tax were also accompanied by pew rentals and local lotteries.

The tax revenue upon which many of the clergy depended did not line their pockets and make them wealthy. Ecclesiastical taxes were not a way to persecute the poor by forcing them to finance greedy charlatans living in opulence. Many clergy relied on the tax in order to receive a modest salary. Perhaps many people could not sympathize with the plight of clergymen because the Congregational clergy had a unique

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8 Federalist Party (Conn.), *To the Freemen of Connecticut...* (New Haven: Nathan Whiting, 1816).
role as public officials. In the early nineteenth-century the municipal government
officials such as clerks, tax collectors, justices of the peace, and inspectors, only invested
a few hours of their time each month in these duties. The clergy, on the other hand, had
to fulfill the daily requirements of their office such as visiting parishioners, preparing and
preaching sermons, and officiating marriages and funerals. For the most part, the
established clergy were the only full-time paid public servants.\textsuperscript{10} And for many of them,
the salary established by their parish was insufficient to make a living. Consequently,
some supplemented their incomes with second jobs which increased their work load and
made many settled ministers reconsider their occupational calling.

Despite the fact that some established clergymen had to supplement their incomes
from the ecclesiastical tax with secondary vocations, still dissenters accused the clergy of
being thieves of public funds. Defending themselves from such accusations,
Congregational clergymen appealed to their involvement with missionary societies and
benevolent charities. They even incorporated the ecclesiastical tax as part of their case
that they were actually more honest than other ministers. The tax, they argued, relieved
the minister from any obligation to raise funds on his own. Because the local minister
did not have to raise his own support, but rather had his support collected through taxes
amounting to a sum agreed upon by the town, he was immune to charges of corruption
because the community, not the minister, determined his salary. Further, relying on the

\textsuperscript{10} Richard Rabinowitz, \textit{The Spiritual Self in Everyday Life: The Transformation of Personal
Religious Experience in Nineteenth-Century New England} (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1989),
71; The power of the local government to hire, fire, and pay ministers had long been exercised throughout
New England. See, Jon Butler, \textit{Awash in a Sea of Faith: Christianizing the American People} (Cambridge,
tax gave ministers more time to spend caring for the needs of their parishioners instead of making pleas for voluntary offerings.\textsuperscript{11}

The idea of a municipality collecting church taxes from everyone in the local community for the support of particular churches certainly appears inconsistent with the principles of American law. However, the ecclesiastical tax must be viewed in the social context of the early republic. John Witte, Jr. has noted that “it takes a bit of imagination” to appreciate the reasons for the ecclesiastical tax system. First, the role of the minister was considerably different in the colonial and early republic periods than it was for later generations of Americans. The local parish was in charge of not only public worship for the community but it also took the lead in offering educational opportunities and charity work as well.\textsuperscript{12} Further, meetinghouses themselves were used for far more than church services. They also functioned as the places for political meetings and conducting town business. As such, the physical space of worship had a multi-purposed role in the community, both sacred and secular, making it a place that served an important communal function even for the irreligious.\textsuperscript{13} Consequently, the Standing Order assumed

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\textsuperscript{13} Gretchen Buggeln, \textit{Temples of Grace: The Material Transformation of Connecticut’s Churches, 1790-1840} (Hanover, CT: University Press of New England, 2003), 6. Buggeln also notes that as New England society strayed further from its Puritan moorings during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries many congregations began to construct churches that looked materially different from other buildings in the town center. Ascetic differences were unnecessary in a society where everything was deemed religious. However, “in a secular world, differences between the sacred and secular need to be seen distinguished.” Buggelin, \textit{Temples of Grace}, 167.
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that all would recognize an obvious need for the public to support these vital institutions that served both spiritual and temporal interests.

PART TWO: SOCIAL CHANGES AND THE STANDING ORDER

With Jefferson’s election and the party’s substantial gains in congress, the Republicans fully controlled the political levers of power in Washington. That reality was far from the only concern facing the Standing Order as the entire region was in the midst of social change as well. The society built upon the reformed-Protestant theology of the Puritans that had been cultivated for generations seemed to be dissipating all around them. Population trends and the expansion of a market economy spurred dramatic social changes to which those in the “land of steady habits” were unaccustomed. Religiously, the influence wielded by Congregational clergymen waned in the face of increased competition from other Protestant sects. The established clergy were further troubled about how a potential loss of state support might affect the church’s ability to encourage a stable, ordered society in Connecticut through the diffusion of Christian morality.

In the midst of the alterations within social, economic, and political communities, the Standing Order sought to maintain social cohesion and ensure continued prosperity. At a time when the established church was seen as a way to preserve traditional communal values during times of uncertainty, these same changes adversely affected the ability of the churches to operate effectively. Standing Order member and Yale president Timothy Dwight insisted that the clergy were only powerful to the degree to which they
were respected by the community.\textsuperscript{14} By the start of the nineteenth century that respect faded as social, political, and religious developments all diminished the perceived importance of an educated, elite clergy in local communities. As a result, established clergymen found it more difficult to exert the level of authority in shaping common mores and values as they had in generations past.

Christopher Clark posits that three simultaneous conditions in the post-Revolutionary period brought significant pressures upon settled regions such as Connecticut: population growth; the shortage, or maldistribution, of land; and the economic crisis that followed the American Revolution.\textsuperscript{15} Inevitably, communities were forced to respond to these conditions that threatened the status quo. The general solutions resulted in expansion, migration, and growth in production.\textsuperscript{16} These developments reshaped communities throughout Connecticut, forcing the established clergy to negotiate its role and influence through this time of uncertainty.

Population growth and subsequent land shortages meant that many adult children had to leave their hometowns and established social networks in order to acquire land. Emigration from the state touched nearly every Connecticut family in some way. Whereas for over a century the norm for Connecticut families was to live in close proximity with one another in tightly-formed communities, by the early 1800s the conditions described by Clark forced many adult children from settled families to leave

\textsuperscript{15} Materially speaking, the colonists paid a very high price for their independence. In contrast to their rapidly growing prosperity in the mid-1700s, between 1775-1790 the level of performance of the US economy fell by forty-six percent.
\textsuperscript{16} Christopher Clark, \textit{Social Change in America: From the Revolution to the Civil War} (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2006), 84, 100, 106.
the state altogether, being replaced by new migrants from other areas of the nation.

Reverend Henry Augustus Rowland was a settled Congregational minister in Windsor. Three of his sons graduated from Yale, yet none sought their fortunes in Connecticut. His eldest son became the pastor of a church in North Carolina, while two other sons and a daughter all settled in Ohio. In his letters to his children Rowland often admonished them for not writing often enough, and that their lack of correspondence greatly worried their mother. The anxiety of the Rowlands for their children was typical among Connecticut families as many experienced a reversal from the migration patterns of earlier generations which kept children in close proximity to their relatives.

Land shortage had been a major issue in Connecticut since 1750 when the General Assembly exhausted the colony’s remaining available land. Legal disputes concerning Connecticut’s assertion to lands also claimed by New York and Pennsylvania made western expansion problematic, and consequently the colony’s growth stalled. In 1786 the new United States Congress legitimized Connecticut’s claim to a Western Reserve west of Pennsylvania. Finally, in 1800, the national government formally acknowledged Connecticut’s claim to a 60 by 120 mile wide section of land west of Pennsylvania in what a couple of years later became the state of Ohio. The opening of what came to be known as the Western Reserve alleviated some, but not all, of the mounting tensions caused by the land shortage. As Federalist George Cabot observed to Timothy Pickering, the people of Connecticut “will of necessity become ungovernable

17 Of these three children, one son became a minister, another a doctor in Delaware and the daughter moved with her husband to Steubenville.
18 Rowland Family Correspondence. Connecticut Historical Society.
when the acquisition of property is difficult.”¹⁹ With the opening of the Western Reserve, Connecticut land speculators began in earnest to promote settlement of the frontier. The state’s sons and daughters enthusiastically responded to the opportunity.²⁰

As young people who had been raised in stable communities moved westward, transients took their place. In the post-Revolutionary period small New England towns quickly grew. For example, at the turn of the century an increase in American manufacturing made the shipping town of New Haven a significantly more vibrant community as migrants poured in to the area looking to satisfy labor demands for commercial merchants. Migration continued to be fluid in New Haven in the second decade of the nineteenth century. When the War of 1812 decimated New England’s shipping industry, New Haven transformed from a shipping center into a manufacturing town. Sailors and dock workers left the area in search of opportunities elsewhere and an influx of manual laborers migrated to the town. This reshaped the community significantly. Between 1807 and 1818 the total number of merchants in New Haven rose forty-five percent and the number of mechanics more than doubled.²¹

The emigration trends in Connecticut affected the established churches of the Standing Order in several ways. First, transient migrants upset conventional social bonds as they joined, and left, communities suddenly, displacing the tight social networks that had traditionally bound communities. For many towns in Connecticut the responses to

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these changes upset the familial and religious bonds that had forged the communities for generations. No longer were villages comprised almost exclusively of stable family networks that also supported the local Congregational church. These changes sparked a great deal of anxiety in the land of steady habits, a region where many of the social and political elite could trace their family lineage back to the charter members of the New England colonies. In a state where the values of tradition and communal stability had been prized for generations the confluence of such abrupt social change was unsettling.

Second, a more transient population, particularly one whose movement was predicated in large part upon economic opportunities, meant that interpersonal relationships were more likely to be fostered more by economic ties than they were by familial or religious associations. In late colonial America, “the life of the relatively small-scale local community was heavily shaped by a religious and civic morality that generally worked to channel and transform private ambition into public concerns.” However, the emerging capitalist philosophy of individual advancement and material prosperity weakened these traditional social bonds, with the need for individual enterprise gaining a greater foothold over the value of traditional community. Consequently, migration patterns contributed to the rise of commercial-based communities as shipping towns expanded with new workers seeking opportunities for trade and fortune.

In one sense, traditional communal ties actually worked to accelerate the change in Connecticut society from community to commercialism, from a localized economy to a larger market economy. The seeds of a commercial economic mentality in America

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were partially sown from the reformed-Protestant communal identity. As William Breitenbach notes, New Englanders shifted the traditional “sense of common purpose in a community into a sense of common allegiance to absolute and universal moral principles.”

The common bond of morality set by the prevalence of Calvinist theology set mutually recognized ethical boundaries for business dealings, giving entrepreneurs the confidence needed to conduct business outside their familiar networks in local communities. Thus, the communal tradition of New England enabled the region to become a strong commercial center. The Puritan mores of absolute truth and unambiguous morality were commandeered by commercialism, at the expense of the local community.

Finally, westward migration created an age discrepancy that skewed the state’s population older, a demographic challenge which also led to heightened anxiety for the established churches in Connecticut. A rise in births coupled with falling infant mortality rates led to a younger population for the nation as a whole. However, New England states had a disproportionate number of their populace over the age of forty. In fact, Connecticut led all states with the highest proportion of persons over age forty-five, with sixteen of every 100 persons in that state being over forty-five. The graying population created dissent and division in churches where ministers wanted to attract young members to their flock but the older members did not wish to relinquish their status.

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24 Ibid, 500-02.
within the church. Revered William Ely, a Yale man from the class of 1813, found this out the hard way while serving as a pastor in Vernon in 1818. Investing a great amount of time with young people, and apparently reaping success from his efforts, he was eventually dismissed due to uneasiness felt by established parishioners due to the influx of younger adults into the church.  

The changing dynamics of Connecticut towns affected the amount of revenue the established church could expect to collect through the institutional means of taxes or lotteries. Increasingly, individuals left the established towns and communities in search of better economic opportunities in the western territories. The sizeable number of western migrants reduced the population size of the village, which in turn meant fewer individuals available to pay their parish tax. Additionally, new migrants who preferred upstart sects directed their money towards those churches instead of the Congregationalists. A particular tax rate was calculated based upon the parish population. As populations decreased in some towns due to westward migration, coupled with growth of dissenter churches favored by new immigrants, parishes throughout Connecticut suddenly found themselves with falling revenue streams. The result of the loss of income was that many established ministers had to either alienate themselves from their communities further by lobbying for new streams of revenue, or had to take up a secondary vocation which allowed them less time for pastoral work.

26 George A. Calhoun, Rev. William Ely, Read Before the Tolland County Congregational Ministers’ Meeting at North Coventry, March 4th, 1862, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University.
Another contributing factor to the waning of the ecclesiastical establishment was that fewer men participated in religious affairs in the early nineteenth century than compared with earlier generations. This development had three major causes. The first was the recurring problem of emigration upsetting the demographic balance in the state. Many more men than women left the region in order to find better fortunes in the American frontier. In an 1812 study, mapmaker John Melish noted that, based upon census records, women above the age of twenty-six outnumbered their male counterparts eleven to one. This demographic was upside down in western territories, where men typically greatly outnumbered women. Consequently, in Connecticut female church memberships outweighed male memberships if for no other reason than there were more women than men. Second, Congregational churches lost male leadership and membership in the early 1800s as men began to form social ties based on politics, social organizations, and economic interests. As a result, their need to use churches in order to form these bonds became less important which in turn reduced the social value of the churches themselves. Finally, men might have shied away from church participation because they were no longer satisfied with the message of the clergy. Ministers continued to preach the merits of frugal living, the strengthening of family, and morality, values that undoubtedly made many affluent, opportunistic men uncomfortable.

As men gravitated towards the new opportunities to participate in the political and economic spheres both at home and in the western frontier, they abandoned the religious

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sphere, creating a vacuum of influence that women eagerly filled.\textsuperscript{29} The exodus of men from Connecticut to the western frontier opened up positions of lay leadership in many parishes, allowing women to take up leadership opportunities in the churches. The religious revivals of the Second Great Awakening were supported by many of the clergy, but the lay leadership and attendance came mostly from women. Richard Shiels points out that although men joined Congregational churches in large numbers for a couple of years during the Second Great Awakening, ultimately male religious participation remained below that of females. All told women made up sixty-nine percent of all revival converts and seventy-two percent of all persons joining church memberships in New England during this period.\textsuperscript{30} Similar to their involvement in the first Great Awakening, in many cases women were responsible for taking care of the logistical needs of the traveling ministers of the revivals. They also were instrumental in raising the necessary funds for the itinerants’ travel and for the training of new clergy to minister to the growing flocks of converts.\textsuperscript{31}

The loss of male influence and participation in churches proved detrimental to maintaining political support for the continuation of an ecclesiastical establishment. Male suffrage expanded at the same time that male concern for churches diminished. The laboring classes of male voters, an overwhelming number of whom attended

\textsuperscript{29} David W. Kling, \textit{A Field of Divine Wonders: The New Divinity and Village Revivals in Northwestern Connecticut, 1792-1822} (University Park: Pennsylvanian State University Press, 1993), 6-8, 231. Kling points out that the emotional appeal in the revivals was another source of attraction to females, along with the opportunities for women to use the revivals as vehicles to exert influence and leadership.


dissenting churches, were more likely to favor both increased democracy and the disestablishment of churches from the state.\textsuperscript{32} Women could not vote, of course, and therefore convincing an expanding eligible voting populace of dissenters and irreligious freemen that an established clergy was important for the prosperity of communities and the well-being of individuals was a difficult task for the Standing Order.

As westward migration and shifting gender patterns in churches affected the Standing Order socially, Connecticut at the same time underwent significant political change. In a state where many political officers came up for reelection twice a year, there existed shockingly little political turnover in Connecticut, one reason for its nickname of the “land of steady habits.” However, starting with the presidency of Thomas Jefferson the state’s political stability began to unravel as long-serving federal office holders in the state were replaced with Republicans. The Standing Order did not hesitate to point out alleged Republican abuses of power with these political appointments. The \textit{Balance and Columbian Repository} observed that federal district judge Pierpont Edwards removed a Federalist as district clerk and had him replaced with Edwards’s own son, Henry. Federalists criticized Edwards’s appointment as an abuse of power both as nepotism and for supposedly removing a competent political officer from his position merely because of his political affiliation.\textsuperscript{33} To the Standing Order, the incident was a prime example of the type of government that the people of Connecticut could expect under Republican leadership.

\textsuperscript{32} Green, \textit{The Second Disestablishment}, 119.
When Governor Jonathan Trumbull, Jr. died in office in 1809, unforeseen and unprecedented political turmoil in the governorship made the precarious position of the state’s traditional political power in an increasingly Republican nation all the more uncertain. Lieutenant Governor Jonathan Treadwell finished out Trumbull’s term and then was reelected the following year. However, in the 1811 spring elections Treadwell was defeated by Roger Griswold, the first time in more than twenty-five years that an incumbent governor lost reelection. Though a Federalist like Treadwell, Griswold enjoyed the support of the state’s Republicans after their own candidate withdrew from the race. As the War of 1812 got underway in October of the following year, Griswold died in office. It was in the midst of the unprecedented turnover in the governorship, with four governors between 1809 and 1812 (with John Cotton Smith replacing Griswold), and a renewed war with Great Britain, that the battles between Republicans and Federalists, Congregationalists and dissenters, took place in the land of steady habits.

The diminished social value of the clergy and the established church was further exasperated by the growing diversity of religious denominations and the fragmentation of the Connecticut clergy in Connecticut. The Congregational churches in Connecticut were far from being theologically or politically monolithic, as a variety of theological and ideological differences existed among the clergy. Congregationalists also fought amongst themselves over the nature and importance of religious revivals. Some ministers

34 The previous time that scenario occurred was in 1786 when, ironically, Griswold’s father, Matthew, was the defeated incumbent.
35 The betrayal of Treadwell by the Federalist Party will be discussed in chapter Four.
welcomed and encouraged revivals while others considered revival leaders as potential usurpers to their own parishes.

The Congregationalist component of Connecticut’s Standing Order differed from that of neighboring Massachusetts in their uniformity of theology. Whereas the Massachusetts Congregationalists became divided over Unitarianism, the Congregational leadership in Connecticut was effective in excluding the theological heterodox from their ranks. This was accomplished in part by the evangelical dominance at Yale and its exclusivity as the college in the state which ensured a consistent supply of orthodox ministers for the state’s pulpits. In contrast, Massachusetts had competing orthodox and liberal ministerial associations and colleges which fragmented the Standing Order in that state. As Robert Imholt observed, “About the only thing most Connecticut clergymen agreed upon was their opposition to the Unitarian and Universalist views” of the Congregationalists in Massachusetts. Consequently, while Unitarians made significant inroads in the Congregational denomination elsewhere in New England, their presence was virtually non-existent in early nineteenth century Connecticut.

Although Connecticut Congregationalism did not face a serious challenge from Unitarians as it did in Massachusetts, there existed divisions within the denomination between ministers who sided with the Standing Order, those who aligned themselves with the dissenters, and those who belonged to the movement known as the New Divinity. The New Divinity movement followed the death of Jonathan Edwards in 1758 with a

group of his students dedicating themselves to carrying on his interpretation of Christian theology in the reformed-Protestant tradition. These Congregational ministers initially called themselves Edwardseans. Critics charged that they instigated an entirely new system of theology and chided them for formulating a “New Divinity.” The Edwardseans, most notably led by Samuel Hopkins and Joseph Bellamy, flipped this term of derision and adopted it as their own moniker. After first attaining notoriety in the Federalist stronghold of Litchfield, New Divinity leaders passed on their Calvinist beliefs by teaching a handful of students at a time, who in turn taught other students who were preparing to enter the ministry. As a result, the New Divinity movement boasted over one hundred members by the start of the nineteenth century. Concentrated in the New England region, many Congregational pulpits in Connecticut were held by New Divinity ministers.38

Theologically, the New Divinity retained Edwards’s Calvinist belief of a wide gulf separating a fallen humanity from an omnipotent God. A basic component of their belief system was that sinners were incapable of doing anything – including praying or reading the Bible – that was acceptable to God; human ability without the grace and blessing of God was of no spiritual value.39 The New Divinity was also committed to propagating the Christian gospel in general, and their Congregational dogma in particular, which emphasized that sinners must offer immediate repentance in order to experience genuine conversion. Although predestination was a significant portion of

Edwards’ theology not all of his students emphasized the topic. Further, New Divinity theologians expressed a concern for social issues that went beyond the spiritual effects upon the individual. Whereas Edwards confined his application of Calvinism to the personal life of the Christian and the promotion of religious revivals, his students applied that theology towards actively building a better American society.

Throughout the late 1700s the New Divinity attracted Yale graduates to their ranks. Although they were educated and trained clerics, the New Divinity clergy were largely unwelcome in Connecticut’s Standing Order as many of them lacked the proper social network connections to be part of the prominent establishment. Though New Divinity Congregationalists were theologically comparable to the clergy of the Standing Order, they were nevertheless eschewed by the prominent established ministers. By and large, New Divinity ministers lacked the aristocratic status, family pedigree and social connections to be recognized as part of the Standing Order. Consequently, the clergy who followed in the footsteps of Hopkins rather than Timothy Dwight ended up as pastors in the small, poor churches of western New England, thereby marginalizing their potential for significant influence in the civic polity or religious ecclesiology of the state.

Other splinter groups within the Congregational umbrella weakened the authority of the established clergy, as did the growth of the “minor sects,” most notably the

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42 Ibid, 9-11, 42, 57, 185.
Baptists and Methodists. Strict, or Separatist, Congregationalists separated from the mainline Congregationalists during the “New Light” controversy of the Great Awakening. They opposed the idea of one denomination being formally connected with the civil authority, fearing that such a relationship compromised the integrity of the Christian faith. Anglicans (Episcopalian) did have a presence in many communities, but they largely supported the Standing Order. The rapid development of the upstart Protestant churches was a phenomenon throughout America in the early republic. Before the War of Independence there were fewer than ten thousand Baptists in the British Americans colonies. By 1800, their numbers had swelled to over 170,000, making them the single largest denomination at the turn of the century. More telling, during the Revolution, Methodists in America had approximately fifty congregations and the Baptists about four hundred, while the Congregationalists maintained 750. By 1820, Congregational churches had grown to over one thousand, but the Methodists and Baptists each had more than 2,700 congregations. Thus, although the Congregational churches continued to grow during the early nineteenth century they did so at a pace that failed to keep up with general population growth, and especially lagged behind the dissenter churches.

An increase in the number of dissenting churches in many Connecticut towns significantly altered the role and importance of the Congregational church in local communities. Into the late 1700s Congregational clergymen held the dominant religious

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voice and leadership role in the community as theirs was the only church in most villages or towns. As the number of dissenter churches increased by the second decade of the nineteenth century Congregationalists lost their monopoly on shaping public opinion. In New Haven, sixty-eight percent of all taxpayers belonged to a Congregational church in 1807. By 1818, that number had fallen to fifty-seven percent, signifying a reduction of support for the Congregationalists.45 By the eve of disestablishment the minor sects were no longer a small minority in the state as outside of a few exceptions there was at least one dissenting congregation in every Connecticut town. Further, by 1818 the total number of dissenter churches, including the Episcopalians, was greater than the Congregational churches.46 Dissenters took note of their growing numbers and how uneasy they believed it had made the Standing Order. “An Old Methodist” noted that the Congregationalists “know the Methodists are increasing in spite of all their former policy towards them,…they despair of destroying these Canaanites, out of the holy land of steady habits.”47

The heterogeneous religious nature of communities, especially older communities, turned religion from a common bond that united people into a source of conflict and disunity.48 If religion fractured rather than strengthened a community then it only made sense for people to find new common interests on which to build social ties

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46 Purcell, Connecticut in Transition, 65; Green, The Second Disestablishment, 123. Up until 1817 the Episcopalians had generally supported the Standing Order. Their transition to the Republican Party will be discussed in chapters four and five.
47 Columbian Register, January 21, 1817, p.4.
and shared values. It also made sense for them to reevaluate the need for a single church establishment if Congregationalism was out of favor.

Ultimately, the threat posed by the dissenter churches towards the Congregational leadership was much more than a loss of social prestige or political honor. The dissenters threatened the traditional bond between the individual and the community, and the community and God. The covenantal relationship that had unified New England communities since the first British colonists settled the land became unraveled by the minor sects. The Congregationalists may have feared losing their position of privilege in the Standing Order, but they especially worried about the consequences for society if the foundational aspect of the covenant were removed. If the bonds of community were motivated by values such as profit or self-interest then the morality and virtue of the American people might be compromised. Congregationalists raised such issues in a changing social environment created in part by the challenge of membership growth among upstart denominations.

In New England the old Puritan Calvinist ethos of communities grounded upon covenantal relationships between people and their communities, and in turn the community and God, collapsed under the weight of the results of emigration and the growing numbers of those joining dissenter churches. These developments weakened the theology of a shared, covenantal relationship between individuals and the town as the source of that covenant, the Calvinistic theology of the Congregationalists. The established clergy feared the consequences for the state if the social compact evaporated. To the Congregational ministers the idea of a social compact of a community was not
simply an old-fashioned model for a community, but rather was a time-tested fundamental component for a stable society. As minister Samuel Williams of Mansfield stated, “But we are in covenant not more with God than with one another; and the duties of our covenant, like the two tables of the law which enjoins them, are inseparable.”

The growing popularity of democratic political ideology coupled with increased religious competition offered by other sects deteriorated the appeal of the established clergy’s theology. Puritanism, grounded upon Calvinist theology, sparked the religious revivals of the first Great Awakening and helped foster an American spirit of independence and dissent that ultimately manifested in a rebellion against Great Britain. That same ideology also stimulated a broader, more radical spirit of dissent against traditional sources of local authority. Increasingly, people in New England abandoned their strict allegiance to the Calvinist traditions of the colonial era that stressed the importance of God-ordained leaders for the prosperity and stability of a community.

Two major social factors that developed during the mid-eighteenth century contributed to this theological shift. First, attitudes of egalitarianism and equality permeated post-Revolutionary thought in America, encouraging inclinations towards anti-intellectualism and anti-clericalism. As these perspectives gained popularity more Americans came to view spiritual belief as both a personal matter and as a subject that did not require assistance from an educated clergy. As people turned for guidance to both reason, powered by Enlightenment philosophy, and their own personal experiences, including spiritual experiences, they felt less of a need for a trained clergy supported by

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public taxes. Their own personal experiences and understanding were enough to know God. Consequently, a state-church came to be seen as more of a social burden than a necessity. Additionally, persons of lower social classes began to call into question the legitimacy of a state-sponsored church because they saw the demise of the Standing Order as an opportunity to have a greater level of participation in the affairs of the state.

Second, the democratic ideals of personal liberty and the opportunities of individualism ran counter to the Calvinist belief that the sovereignty of God controlled the affairs of humanity. Predestination and reliance upon God were unpopular beliefs in a society that stressed personal liberty. The lure of individualism, self-achievement, and personal participation in shaping one’s environment all weakened the Calvinist theology to which the established clergy adhered. Other Protestant ministers, including some New Divinity Congregationalists, presented a theology in which the ability to attain salvation was, at least in some part, conditioned upon individual actions. The lack of faith in the reformed-Protestant theology of the established clergy reinforced popular doubt as to whether or not a church establishment was necessary for the prosperity of the state, especially if the beliefs of the established church were incongruent with those of the populace at large.

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51 John Jeffries analysis of the town of Canterbury during the Great Awakening provides an excellent insight into the causes and nature of religious separatism. He also describes the Connecticut establishment’s attempt to stop the revivals, as the Great Awakening was loosening the Standing Order’s grip on the state. John W. Jeffries, “The Separation in the Canterbury Congregational Church: Religion, Family, and Politics in a Connecticut Town,” *The New England Quarterly*, 52, no.4 (1979).
52 Clark, *Social Change in America*, 120.
By the third decade of the nineteenth century the prestige and influence of the clergy as public figures greatly contracted in both Connecticut and throughout the United States regardless of their denominational affiliation. The end of the ecclesiastical establishment had little bearing on their devalued status as the title of moral and intellectual leaders shifted from them to the political leaders by the start of the nineteenth century, eventually changing yet again to the nation’s professors and educators by the 1830s. The clergy’s reduced importance was inevitable as the public’s religiosity became increasingly privatized and the necessity of an educated clergy to maintain congregations dwindled. Ultimately, the end of religious establishments in Connecticut and throughout New England was not a cause of an impotent clergy unwilling to connect doctrine with a changing culture. Rather, it was one effect of a society that had abandoned them as arbiters of truth, social norms, and morality.

PART THREE: THE ESTABLISHED CHURCH’S RESPONSE

The Standing Order posited that the boisterous Republican celebration for President Jefferson had an ulterior purpose. They surmised that it was the staging ground of a sinister conspiracy by Republicans to usurp political power within Connecticut. Writing in the Monitor, a Standing Order supporter claimed that the festivity held by local Republican leaders was merely a ruse. The clandestine motive of the gathering was for the Republican leaders to plot the overthrow of the Standing Order by winning control of the state offices at the following election, to “run out Gov.

Trumbull and Gov. Treadwell from their seats.” For the Federalists, such a goal was worthy of grave concern. As the author of the article stated, to the Standing Order what was at stake was much more than political power. It was the future of New England society. The Republicans could not be allowed to gain control of Connecticut as “All our civil, moral, and religious blessings are at stake. Let us not yield them up without a struggle.” The Standing Order followed the writer’s advice, working actively to win the hearts and minds of the citizens both within the state and beyond for the preservation of their establishment. Their ability to persevere in a changing society stemmed from their support for programs that propagated their ideology, polity, and ecclesiology. Specifically, the established clergy’s support for missionary societies, revivals, and reform movements helped the Standing Order persist in an increasingly Republican age.

Not all Yale men who trained for the ministry sought to settle down within the comfortable confines of Connecticut. Men like Elias Cornelius traveled to the frontier to become missionaries to Indians. Cornelius went south, evangelizing the Choctaw and Cherokee tribes. From this vantage point, the tumultuous politics of Connecticut were unworthy of comment. In his letters home during the height of the establishment conflict in the state, Cornelius simply kept his thoughts to the details of travel, observations of the people he had encountered, and inquiries concerning family members. Like Cornelius, many other Yale men answered the call of missionary work. Many became frontier ministers to the settlers of the “waste places” of Ohio, Vermont, and the Connecticut Western Reserve.

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54 Published in the Monitor, April 1, 1801. Article dated March 16, 1801.
Emphasizing evangelism and missions was not strictly the dominion of the upstart minor sects like the Baptists or Methodists. Connecticut’s Congregationalists actively supported and participated in missionary endeavors as well as charitable organizations both in America and foreign lands. Congregationalists earnestly endeavored to disseminate their theology and ecclesiology in the West. At the start of the century the 1801 Plan of Union between the Congregationalists and Presbyterians not only united those two denominations organizationally, but it enabled them to work together and join resources to evangelize in the western territories. They established numerous missionary societies, bible tract societies, and published evangelical magazines.

The Standing Order recognized the need to expand their influence to those in the west. The linchpin of Congregational missionary efforts was the Connecticut Missionary Society (CMS). Founded in 1798 under the authorization of the state legislature, the objective of the CMS was to expand Congregationalism and supply denominational religious materials to the western frontier, particularly Vermont, Connecticut’s Western Reserve, Ohio, and Indiana. Federalist Jonathan Treadwell, a politician of strong religious conviction, was instrumental in founding the CMS and served as its president for almost a quarter century. The organization raised funds to provide settled ministers to rural areas as well as to distribute denominational liturgy. They realized that the expanding frontier, especially that of New Connecticut in the Western Reserve, was ripe for a religious harvest.

With the support of prominent Federalists, the state legislature authorized government money for the CMS. For example, in 1801 the General Assembly authorized
a three year window whereby churches could direct a portion of their tax collections towards Western missionary societies. As a public institution, the CMS received state funds. In the year before disestablishment, the CMS remained very active in spending taxpayer funds to spread Congregationalist doctrine. In 1817, the organization spent over $6,000 for supporting clergy and distributing denominational literature in the western lands, such as Ohio, Tennessee, Indiana, and Kentucky. The society produced over 5,400 books and pamphlets for distribution to these areas. As a result, those who disagreed with the beliefs of Congregationalism were nonetheless compelled to support its expansion to the Western territories through their taxes. The CMS remained a public organization even after it became independent from the General Association of the Congregational churches.

Although some historians have viewed the expansion of social control by the social elite as a primary objective of the CMS, this was not the case. In fact, part of the motivation by the Standing Order to create the CMS rose from petitions by those who had settled in the frontier regions. Western migrants from New England, used to the role of Congregationalism in their hometowns, were frustrated with the lack of a settled minister in their areas. They also clamored for ecclesiastical institutions, and some even longed for the existence of an established church like they were familiar with back east.


During his tour of the Western Reserve in 1812, John Schermerhorn of the CMS reported that “Those from New England, have carried with them…a love for the institutions, of their native States. We find them…cherishing the same love of order, civil and religious, and expressing the same anxiety for the improvement of society…” The CMS tried to meet the needs of these New England transplants and in the process their efforts would theoretically expand Congregationalism and institute social stability in the west.

Some scholars continue to perpetuate the misconception that the Congregational denomination declined because it tried in vain to hold on to its control of New England rather than imitating the Baptists and Methodists in launching evangelical campaigns in westward territories. In reality, the support of Congregationalists in missions shows that the Congregationalists, Yale men like Cornelius, did not spend the early part of the nineteenth century content to let the Baptists and Methodists reach the expanding American frontier with their gospels. They were a part of a contingent of established clergymen whose goal it was to spread their theology, ideology, and ecclesiology to unsettled areas. In an 1814 report, the Connecticut Missionary Society found that Presbyterian ministers far outnumbered their Baptist and Methodist counterparts in

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60 A good example of advocates of this myth is found in Roger Finke and Rodney Stark, The Churching of America, 1776 – 2005: Winners and Losers in Our Religious Economy (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2006). Although they correctly state that Congregationalism declined in this period, the reason was not for a lack of evangelical effort.
Ohio. The established clergy were every bit as active in missionary work on the western frontier as were the upstart sects.

The missionary societies were concerned with the eternal salvation and temporal well-being of slaves and Indians as well as the western frontiersmen. Congregationalists, both established and dissenting, condemned the "peculiar institution" as a social evil that ran counter to both the laws of God and the United States. Various missionary organizations published several journals articles condemning slavery as a sin and slave traders as men unworthy of receiving fellowship in the church. The Connecticut Society for the Promotion of Freedom and the Relief of Persons Unlawfully Holden in Bondage was organized in 1790 by Congregational ministers of various political convictions. Although not all were part of the Standing Order, they were unified in their efforts to end the practice of slavery in Connecticut. The fact that slavery still existed in the state was a source of embarrassment to men, especially Timothy Dwight, who believed in the moral superiority of New England.

Slavery was considered especially dangerous as such a vile practice was a stain of immorality upon America, and would undoubtedly bring God’s vengeance upon the nation. To the Congregational ministers, the practice revealed the inferiority of the South and corrupted the moral supremacy of New England. Others worried that because

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61 Mills, “A Correct View,” 153. Their report noted ten settled Presbyterian ministers with an additional 17 that had regular access to a minister. Conversely, for the whole region the Methodists had one circuit rider and two ministers, while the Baptists only had circuit riders.

62 James D. Essig, “Connecticut Ministers and Slavery, 1790-1795,” Journal of American Studies 15, no.1 (1981): 27-30. While Massachusetts had eliminated slavery by 1790, Connecticut had only been able to muster a plan of general emancipation, whereby slaves born after March 1, 1784 were freed upon turning twenty-five.

63 Ibid, 32.
slavery was a “national” sin, the “reparation” for that sin would be national as well, meaning that even Connecticut might not be spared divine retribution. Consequently, the missionary societies took it upon themselves to stay the hand of God upon America by seeking for slaves both spiritual emancipation from sin and physical emancipation from slavery.  

Like most northerners at the time, many adherents of the Standing Order opposed slavery but remained uncomfortable with granting blacks the same political rights and social standing as whites. Prominent Standing Order politician David Daggett consistently opposed education for blacks. Several Congregational missionary societies raised funds for African colonization efforts. While the Standing Order condemned the Republicans for being the party of southern slaveholders they also criticized the Republicans in Connecticut for encouraging free blacks to become politically active.

Despite their racial prejudices, the established church openly denounced the institution of slavery and encouraged evangelism to the slaves. On this issue, Connecticut’s Congregational clergymen were much more progressive compared to the worldview of their theological patriarch, Jonathan Edwards. Edwards himself had owned a slave, and he wrote treatises defending the practice. Conversely, virtually all of the Edwardseans, especially Samuel Hopkins, and including Edwards’s son, Jonathan  

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64 Connecticut Evangelical Magazine and Religious Intelligencer (referred to hereafter as the CEM), Aug. 1810, p. 209; CEM, Nov. 1812, 429; CEM, December 1812, 476.
65 The Religious Intelligencer…, June 27, 1818.
Edwards, Jr., were staunch abolitionists. The commitment to both social reform and religious revivals was an extension of Edwards’s beliefs, and was promoted throughout New England by the students of the New Divinity.  

The Congregationalists also actively sent missionaries to tend to the eternal salvation of Native Americans. Of course, in the mindset of many nineteenth century Americans, evangelism to the Indian carried an additional benefit besides spiritual conversion, namely the ability to “civilize” Indian societies, to use the nineteenth century vernacular for imposing European culture upon other people groups. As one Standing Order adherent stated: “…to preach the gospel among [Indians] is the great mean to civilize them.”  

Ultimately, the efforts of the CMS unwittingly eased the transition for Connecticut’s established clergy towards dependence on voluntary contributions alone for revenue when the establishment ended in 1818. Through the CMS, the Standing Order tried to transplant their methods of forming communities from the top-down, with political, social, and religious institutions creating stable communities and a virtuous citizenry. Despite their efforts at raising funds to construct meetinghouses and provide full-time settled ministers in frontier areas, the CMS eventually adopted a voluntary association model of frontier evangelism much like that of the Baptists or Methodists.  

Johann Neem has argued that the ideal Congregational model of having a full-time settled minister wholly supported through taxation was impractical in the western territories.  

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69 Connecticut Courant, September 8, 1800.
The CMS eventually was forced to turn to a voluntary association archetype of missions because it proved more effective than replicating the structure of traditional New England parishes. When the Congregationalists lost their privileged position in Connecticut after 1818, the established church managed to quickly adopt using voluntary associations as a way to found churches and gain positions of moral and spiritual authority because they had already used the formula in the CMS. Because that design proved successful in the West the Standing Order was willing to try it in the East as well.71

The Congregational missionary efforts did not need to extend to the far reaches of the American frontier in order to be effective. Although theirs was the established church, plenty of areas within Connecticut still lacked regular access to a Congregational church or clergyman. The Domestic Missionary Society pushed to strengthen the denomination in these parts of the state as well. In an 1816 report the Society concluded that seventeen parishes in the state had no regular minister due to insufficient funds. Thirteen of the parishes had organized churches; they only lacked clergymen. Most of them had meeting-houses constructed.72

The need for the Congregationalists to appeal for missionary funds for use within their own state was indicative of the reality that the denomination was not nearly as strong or influential as it had been previously. The Domestic Missionary Society pleaded with the churches that, “A regard to self-preservation, were there no other motives, demands a universal co-operation of the churches, to stop the extending influence of this

71 Ibid, 493.
religious declension, and to strengthen the things that remain.”\(^7^3\) As described earlier, the growth of the denomination woefully lagged behind the growth of the dissenting churches, even within Connecticut. The Congregational clergy recognized that their only recourse was to increase the monetary support given to the Congregational churches, either through voluntary contributions as suggested by the Domestic Missionary Society, or through the continued support by the General Assembly.

The Congregationalists were just as concerned with saving souls as they were with protecting their privileged status as evidenced by the spiritual awakenings in cities like Hartford and the revivals promoted by Yale president Timothy Dwight.\(^7^4\) Yale was a fountain of spiritual activity in the early 1800s and many of the Yale men were affected by the appeal and success of the revivals. The students on campus participated in the revivals as congregants and as aids to the ministers leading the meetings. Samuel Hooker Cowles, a Yale freshman in 1817, became a Christian during a revival in 1820. As one observer remarked, immediately after his conversion Cowles’s “mind was relieved; and, walking out [of the church], his soul was filled with surprising joy.”\(^7^5\) Cowles was one of many students swept up in the revivals that came to be known as the Second Great Awakening, revivals which, as evidenced by the activity at Yale, were greatly supported by many of Congregational ministers of the Standing Order.

Proponents of the revivals included Timothy Dwight and one of his most famous students, Lyman Beecher. Perhaps the most important figure in the string of revivals in

\(^{73}\) Ibid, 7.
\(^{74}\) Appleby, *Inheriting the Revolution*, 201, 204.
Connecticut was Asahel Nettleton. Entering Yale in 1805, Nettleton participated in the campus revivals of 1807-08. Of these revivals, Nettleton’s great enthusiasm caused him to violate a social norm of the campus by associating with underclassmen. He eagerly discussed with the younger students their spiritual condition and offered them spiritual advice and counseling. As noble as the gesture may have been, the willingness of an upperclassmen to openly associate with underclassmen was a socially deviant act.76

Yale men such as Nettleton went on to lead revivals in Connecticut and throughout New England. Reverend Jeremiah Hallock, who studied under Dwight at Northampton in the late 1700s, was active in revival services in 1812, 1813, and 1815. Writing to a son in Ohio, Hallock boasted that a recent revival had won seventy converts during the “powerful awakening” on the campus. His described the revivals as “many religious meetings such as lectures, conferences, and concerts…which have been full and serious.”77

The phrase “full and serious” aptly characterized the style of the Congregational revivals. Nettleton’s style of leading revivals greatly contrasted with those led by ministers further south, particularly Charles Finney. He rejected the use of the “anxious seat,” never asked anyone to publicly make a profession of conversion during the revival, and preferred to keep the service and the sermon surrounded with an air of solemnity. These traits served as the Congregational model for the New England revivals during the Second Great Awakening and ran diametrically opposite of the methods employed by

76 Tyler Bennet, Memoir of the Life and Character of Rev. Asahel Nettleton (Hartford: Robins and Smith, 1844), 33. Yale Divinity Library, Yale University.
Finney, a dichotomy that perfectly suited Nettleton and other Congregational ministers who followed him.78 Led by ministers like Nettleton, the Congregationalists of Connecticut were just as open to revivals and encouraged conversions as much as upstart sects. Although the established clergy actively proselytized during the Second Great Awakening, their methods remained more traditional and conservative than those of ministers along the western edges of New York and in the frontiers of Ohio and Kentucky.

The religious revivals of the Second Great Awakening promoted by many Congregationalists in some ways worked to undermine the established church. The conventional wisdom among the Standing Order was that the teachings of the established churches produced moral, orderly behavior in society. These temporal benefits of religion were undercut by the revivals because they promoted a completely different aspect of religion, namely the renewal of Christian devotion at a personal level. This focus on individual piety to the teachings of Christ sometimes meant that converts actually stood against traditional social norms. Not that converts suddenly cherished anarchy and disdained social order; Protestant leaders of all denominations valued self-discipline and sobriety. Rather, many of the new Christians found themselves at odds with family and friends who had not experienced a similar religious experience.79

Of course, revivals were not the exclusive domain of the established clergy, as they were also popular among dissenting churches, especially Baptists and Methodists.

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While the Congregationalists increased their membership during the revivals, they did so at a much smaller rate than dissenter evangelical churches. By creating more Christians who became dissenters than those who joined Congregational churches, the revivals fostered a growing dissatisfaction with tax support of a privileged denomination as well as the idea of a privileged church itself. While the revivals won souls for Christ, they lost hearts and minds for supporting the conventional ways of the Standing Order.

Although in many cases the spiritual effects of the revivals were temporary and church memberships eventually returned to previous levels, the end result of the Second Great Awakening in Connecticut was that the revivals spurred a greater concern for both evangelism abroad and social causes at home. The host of missionary societies and reform movements that were created in the 1820s and 30s were born out of the revivals of the Second Great Awakening. In Connecticut, these philanthropic organizations did not necessarily follow the revivals, but in some cases predated or emerged alongside of them.

The first volunteer societies to develop in colonial America were mutual benefit societies (such as Freemasons). Soon after, humanitarian and missionary societies were established throughout New England. These benevolence societies began in earnest following the American Revolution. Independence from Great Britain meant that the communities within the new American states found self-reliance necessary as communities could no longer rely on support from the Crown for their security or

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The first years of the nineteenth century witnessed significant growth of charity and volunteer societies in America, especially in New England. Conrad Wright has documented the rapid growth of reform movements in the early national period. For example, from 1800 through 1809, there were nine humanitarian charities and forty-two religious volunteer societies in all of New England. By 1819, those numbers had vaulted to thirty-nine humanitarian groups and 890 mutual-benefit groups and benevolent societies overall. In Connecticut specifically societies were organized for the education of free blacks, care for the deaf, and almshouses for the poor.

The early nineteenth century was a period of tremendous growth and change for religious institutions as new charity societies came onto the social scene quickly and often were ecumenical. The Connecticut Missionary Society was one of the region’s first institutions geared towards organized evangelicalism. Bible societies became abundant in the early republic, with many established in New England. In 1814, the United States had forty Bible societies dedicated to producing and distributing Bibles. Just two years later that figure grew to 108. The prolific growth of volunteer societies, Sunday Schools, and reform movements required ecumenical efforts from a multitude of denominations.

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84 Wright, *The Transformation of Charity*, 52, 56.
The Congregationalists of the Standing Order did not abstain from participating in reform societies. Rather, they actively contributed to reform movements as another component, along with missions and evangelism efforts, of the Standing Order’s efforts to engage and transform American culture. William Ely, another Yale man active in temperance reform movements, frequently accepted invitations to speak at temperance meetings, admonishing his listeners to abhor the sin of alcohol consumption. Rather than simply finding new methods to connive power, the clergy participated in starting charity organizations. After establishment ended, they quickly partnered with other denominations in creating societies that worked towards social action.

Even as Republicans and their dissenter allies grew in numbers and power in the nineteenth century, the zeal of the established clergy for reform and revivals remained. The established clergy were far from reactionaries to social change and resistant in engaging the culture. According to David Kling, “During the early nineteenth century, Congregational clergy transformed from self-regulating, settled office into an audience-oriented, mobile profession.” The clergy of the Standing Order embraced reform movements, as well as revivals and missions, well before the end of the ecclesiastical establishment in Connecticut because they understood that churches and missions were not the only means through which the morality of society could be strengthened. They did not entrench in a desperate attempt to hold their power in Connecticut.

In 1816 the General Association of Connecticut Churches was awash in optimism about their future in Connecticut. In this report, one of the most pressing concerns of the

86 Calhoun, Reverend William Ely.
87 Kling, A Field of Divine Wonders, 12.
clergy was their battle against the delivery of mail on Sundays. Otherwise, they agreed that their recent fortunes, “so distinctive for extensive revivals of religion, exempt from disorder, has probably never been witnessed in this country.”88 Their perspective of the state of religion in Connecticut was far from ecumenical as those who belonged dissenting churches believed that the religious establishment hindered public worship and evangelism. Their grievances struck at the foundations of the ecclesiastical system of the Standing Order.

PART FOUR: THE DISSENTER PERSPECTIVE

Although the Republicans in Connecticut were a distinct minority at the start of the nineteenth century, Thomas Jefferson’s election to the presidency in 1800 greatly encouraged them about their political prospects. Jefferson’s administration appointed Republicans such as Pierpont Edwards and Abraham Bishop to federal posts in the state, much to the frustration of the Standing Order. In protest of the state’s Federalist-controlled Fourth of July celebrations, the Republicans held patriotic festivals on the anniversary of Jefferson’s election. Republicans pushed for a new state Constitution as early as 1801, and they steadily gained legislative representatives in districts throughout the state in subsequent elections. Religious dissenters, a significant portion of the party’s base, lobbied for the disestablishment of religion. From their perspective the established churches and their clergy did not benefit the political, economic, or spiritual growth of Connecticut. In fact, the establishment was intolerant towards dissenters, especially with

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regard to the certificate laws. Further, favoring one denomination over the others harmed education.

Religious and political opponents of the Standing Order certainly did not agree that the policies and privileges of the established church benefitted society. They focused their ire against the Standing Order on the ecclesiastical tax, the CMS, and Yale College. Dissenters regarded the parish tax as a prime example of Standing Order intolerance. They perceived the ecclesiastical tax system of the Standing Order as an affront to tolerance, equality, and the true spirit of the Christian faith. A Republican broadside printed in New Haven urged freemen to vote for their party so that the Standing Order might be overthrown, thereby ushering in religious equality. The broadside also urged dissenters to vote Republican because the Standing Order had “made taxation extremely unequal – have been intolerant to all but one religious persuasion – have…insulted and persecuted [dissenters].”

Dissenters who did not wish to pay their ecclesiastical tax to the Congregational church were allowed to have their obligations transferred to another denomination if they could show that they were members of another denomination in the parish limits. This required filing a certificate stating their denominational affiliation. The certificate itself was a simple enough document. For example, in 1813 a man by the name of James Prentice wrote on a quarter-sheet of paper a statement declaring that he was “by profession a Baptist” and “from this time hereafter shall refuse paying taxes for the

89 Federalist Party, To the Freemen of Connecticut.
support of the [Presbyterian] Pastor.”

Prentice gave this certificate to a town clerk who verified whether or not the individual was indeed a member of the church written on the certificate. Thus, while religious freedom for dissenters expanded in the early republic period, they remained subservient to the control of the Standing Order. This was especially true of the irreligious, who had no recourse but to pay their tax to the Congregational church.

Above all their other perceived injustices, dissenters hated the certificate laws. Although in most cases acquiring a certificate was not terribly difficult, the indignity of it came in having to go through the process at all. Dissenters argued that the certificate requirement violated their religious freedom because every person in the state was presupposed to belong to the Standing Order; without a certificate one was assumed to be a Congregationalist. Pointing to the revisions in the law, the Congregationalists asserted their mantra that ecclesiastical laws were fair because dissenters were not required to pay the ecclesiastical tax to established churches. However, their arguments overlooked the vital stipulation that in order to receive the exemption the dissenter was obligated to file a certificate. The stigma and inconvenience of proving to the local clerk that one belonged to a dissenting church was an insufferable hardship upon members of the minor sects. A certificate holder was socially and politically inferior to those

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91 Before the institution of the more liberalized certificate law the process could be more demanding and more difficult for dissenters. For example, parishes that required the dissenter to have the signature of his church’s minister on the certificate made things problematic if the local Methodist or Baptist minister was an itinerant and not readily available. See Green, *The Second Disestablishment*, 120.
affiliated with the Standing Order. Those who desired to be disassociated from all religious societies had no alternative at all as support for religion in some form was a mandate.

So great was their hostility towards the certificates that some dissenters refused to pay the parish tax and also refused to file a certificate based on the principle that the law violated their freedom of conscience. In 1816 the local Congregational church in the town of Southington, after years of lax enforcement of the certificates (certificate laws were inconsistently enforced throughout Connecticut), began to mandate taxation on dissenters who had not filed for them. Although legally guilty, these dissenters were upset that they had to formally declare what everyone else in the town knew to be true, namely that they were not Congregationalists. For many in Connecticut the Southington incident appear to be another example of Standing Order intolerance and suppression of the freedom of worship. These social and economic hardships upon the minor sects of Connecticut appeared to them to be a willful suppression of religious freedom.

Throughout the first two decades of the nineteenth century the state’s Baptists routinely petitioned the state legislature to rescind the certificate laws. In their 1803 appeal to the General Assembly, they lobbied for a relief from filing the ecclesiastical certificates with the local clerk. The Baptists argued that as long as they had to register their dissenting status with the local magistrates they were not really free to worship as they pleased. Turning the arguments of the Standing Order on its head, Baptists

countered that since the Standing Order believed that religion “ought to be supported by
the energy of law,” the Congregationalists should be the ones to file certificates. Under
this proposed system it would “be unlawful to tax any man for religious uses who does
not certify that he wishes to be taxed therefor.” If the religious establishment believed in
the value of both state support of religion and the certificates then they should be the ones
to practice such a system.95

The 1803 Baptist petition also argued that the ecclesiastical establishment was
invalid because the system violated contract laws. Their grievance was that taxes that
supported the Congregational clergy “were forcibly collected, from men who never
heard, nor agreed to hear, them preach, nor contracted to give them a penny…” This,
they claimed, violated contract law. They argued, “We cannot see what right or title one
man has to the goods or estate of another, (unless by contract) to whom the claimant
never rendered any service…”96 Because no written agreement existed between the
parish society and each individual, the Baptists contended that the law was unfair.

Opponents of the Standing Order declared that the ecclesiastical laws were an
affront to the American ideals of equality and justice as well as a violation of the federal
laws. Whereas members of the minor sects were so out of a “personal contract” with
their local church, the Standing Order claimed Congregational members by the force of
law as all persons were deemed Congregationalists unless they possessed a certificate of
dissention. According to Baptist minister Asa Wilcox, the ecclesiastical laws were

95 Baptist Convention, Baptist Broadside to the General Assembly, (Hartford, 1803). In a
testimony to their persistence, the Associations of Danbury, Stonington, and Shaftesbury Baptists continued
to submit petitions to the General Assembly each year until 1818.
96 Ibid.
unequal to all persons, and therefore, unjust.\textsuperscript{97} For justice and freedom to prevail in America the dissenters insisted that the citizens of the state would have to ratify a constitution that gave no respect to one particular expression of Christianity over another.

Although in the minority, some dissenting churches did levy and collect parish taxes like the Congregationalists. However, most dissenting churches formally renounced the ecclesiastical tax system and affirmed their dedication to raising funds strictly through voluntary contributions. In 1803 the First Baptist Society in Hartford wrote into their ecclesiastical constitution that no churches in their society would take advantage of laws granting them permission to levy taxes in the Congregationalist style. The only way in which the Society was allowed to use the law to collect money was in cases in which the church entered into a voluntary written agreement with individuals for a particular sum of money to be paid to the church. Voluntary contracts were permissible ways to collect money; the ecclesiastical laws smacked too much of coercion for most Baptists to participate.\textsuperscript{98}

The ecclesiastical tax and certificate laws were just two grievances made against the Standing Order for violations of religious rights. The government support of the Congregational Missionary Society was another thorn in the side of the Republicans and dissenters alike. The advocates of the CMS saw their efforts as promoting Christianity and the Congregationalist denomination to the expanding frontier. Opponents viewed the CMS as a way for the Standing Order to expand its control and politics beyond New

\textsuperscript{97} Wilcox, \textit{A Plea for the Baptist Petition}, 3.
\textsuperscript{98} Baptist Society of Hartford, \textit{Constitutional Articles}, (Hartford, 1803).
England, all with taxpayer support.\textsuperscript{99} Although Congregationalists did rely in part upon private philanthropy to finance their mission and charitable societies, critics of the Standing Order saw hidden conspiracies in the state-supported missionary societies.

Republicans regarded the CMS as a ploy to entrench Federalism in the western territories. It was an easy charge to levy due to the strong association between Congregationalism and Federalism. So too was the accusation that the societies were little more than a front for profiteering by the Congregational leaders and a means to exert their influence and control into other territories.\textsuperscript{100} To them, the funds given to send Congregational ministers and liturgical material to churches in the western lands was designed set up a “kingdom of this world” along the frontier because the Congregationalists in Connecticut could not fill their existing memberships due to defections to dissenter sects.\textsuperscript{101}

More importantly, religious persons opposed to the CMS were concerned with the damage the state-supported organization did to the reputation of the Christian faith. An 1817 article in the Hartford \textit{Times} attacked the CMS for its efforts to evangelize in remote places at the expense of damaging the credibility of Christianity in the state. The author cried, “Yes, some of the money acquired by wresting from the unfortunate farmer and mechanic…is put into the pocket of a foreign missionary to assist in pulling down the Juggernaut of the Hindoo [sic] – Violations of the benevolent religion of JESUS at home

\textsuperscript{100} Imholt, “Timothy Dwight: Federalist Pope,” 403.
\textsuperscript{101} Abraham Bishop, \textit{Oration, In Honor of the Election of President Jefferson, and the Peaceable Acquisition of Louisiana, Delivered at the National Festival in Hartford, May 11, 1804} (Hartford [?]: Sidney’s Press, 1804), 23.
is atoned [sic] for by sending his word to a distant heathen.”¹⁰² Those who issued such attacks undoubtedly recognized the injustice in using state money to support a sect to which they did not belong, while the missionary efforts of their own religious persuasion had to make due solely with voluntary contributions. To opponents of the Standing Order, the efforts of the missionary societies to promote reformed-Protestant theology and Federalist politics in the western territories offset any positive contributions they made towards the promotion of religious conversion.

The influence the Congregationalists held over education in the state also made many outside of the Standing Order uncomfortable. Although there were no religious tests or oaths for political office, in the early national period there remained in Connecticut a test for religious orthodoxy for teachers in the public schools. For almost the entire eighteenth century the ecclesiastical societies supervise the care and management of schools in most Connecticut towns. Although the state severed direct ties between public schools and religious organizations in 1798, a general school policy of teaching religious education remained as did conservative control of the schools. Even subjects that were not necessarily religious still had the taint of Standing Order influence as textbooks by Jedidiah Morse, Timothy Dwight, and Noah Webster were used in primary schools throughout the state.¹⁰³ Thus, many dissenters viewed the public schools

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¹⁰³ The Appropriation Act of 1798, whereby money from the sale of the Western Reserve was to be used to support public education, served as the impetus for taking control of the schools out of the hands of the Congregationalists. Instead of school oversight conducted by the established clergy, the new law put schools under the charge of a “school society” committee of prominent local citizens. James R. Beasley, “Emerging Republicanism and the Standing Order: The Appropriation Act Controversy in Connecticut,
as another prime reason why the ecclesiastical establishment should vanish. To them, only disestablishment could give public education independence from the religious and political values of the Standing Order.

Dissenters were especially concerned with the Congregationalist-controlled higher education system. The source of their frustration was Yale College, the only college in the state. Ministers of all sects promoted the need for an educated clergy. Abel Flint preached that ministers should be “men of learning,” and that the greater their knowledge in general, the more qualified they were for the ministry. Consequently, religious organizations were at the forefront of building institutions of higher education. Of the 182 colleges founded before the Civil War, Presbyterians were responsible for forty-nine, Methodists thirty-four, Baptists twenty-five, and the Congregationalists twenty-one. However, only the Congregationalists had a secondary school to accommodate such training. The premium placed on education meant that schools such as Yale were vital for their role in training future clergymen.

Controlled by Congregational ministers and supported by the state, Yale was viewed as one of the main reasons the Standing Order continued to exert influence in Connecticut. Yale College held tremendous influence over the Congregational pulpits

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106 The Yale Corporation did relax its membership requirements so that non-clergy could join its membership. Nevertheless, those laymen who joined the corporation had deep ties to the Standing Order.
throughout Connecticut, as most clergy were Yale men. By 1804, among the educated clergy there were fewer than twelve Harvard graduates in Connecticut Congregational pulpits; the rest were educated at Yale.\textsuperscript{107}

Additionally, the Litchfield Law School was a Federalist stronghold for training lawyers. Established in 1784, the school held the distinction of being the first regular law school in the United States. Four hundred and seventy-four men attended the school from its founding until 1812, with many of them eventually going on to careers of distinction. Over one hundred Yale graduates continued their study of law at the Litchfield academy.\textsuperscript{108} For many Republicans, the Litchfield school was almost as great a scourge of Connecticut education as Yale due to its focus on Federalist ideology.

Dissenters resented the fact that Yale was an established institution that received money from the government which was then used to train ministers whose theology they did not share. Baptist minister Asa Wilcox regarded Yale as an example of Congregational intolerance because the tax money of all individuals was used by the state to promote the religious teachings of a specific denomination.\textsuperscript{109} In 1792, the General Assembly authorized a grant to Yale for the construction of a new building as well as the hiring of a new professor. A condition of the grant was that half of the school’s income would be given to the state. However, four years later Timothy Dwight successfully

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\footnotesuperscript{108} Steiner, \textit{The History of Education in Connecticut}, 283. Among the school’s most notable students was future Vice President John C. Calhoun. Steiner tallied that among the graduates of the Litchfield school, there were sixteen U.S. senators, two justices of the US Supreme Court, ten states governors, fifty members of congress, and forty state supreme court justices.

\footnotesuperscript{109} Wilcox, \textit{A Plea for the Baptist Petition}, 14.
petitioned the legislature to relieve Yale of this financial obligation entirely.\textsuperscript{110} This move benefited Yale greatly and allowed for the school’s ambitious campus building projects at the turn of the century, but it was very unpopular among those who saw the state support of Yale as an unethical abuse of power by the Standing Order.

The efforts of the established clergy to both spread the gospel and improve society through religious institutions did not endear them to many religious dissenters and Congregationalists outside of the Standing Order. During the earliest years of the American republic Yale man and Congregational minister David McClure lamented to his friend, Rev. Samuel MacClintock, that the established clergy were too involved with the political leadership, and were too eager to make that connection known. What upset people like McClure was the tradition of the established clergy to gather in Hartford during the biannual state elections and receive places of honor. On election days the clergy marched with the politicians in prominent parades down the main streets of the capitol. Even more upsetting to McClure was the banquet the clergy received that was furnished with public funds. He fumed that on election days, “There was a numerous collection of the Clergy. An elegant dinner is provided at the expense of the State and they dine in three tables in a room by themselves.”\textsuperscript{111} David Austin, a New Divinity disciple, also lambasted this tradition of the established clergy, with their processions

\textsuperscript{110} Kelley, \textit{Yale}, 110, 127.
\textsuperscript{111} Rev. David McClure to Rev. Samuel MacClintock, May 11, 1792. General Collection, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript LibraryYale University. McClure also offered a sharp criticism of Yale, as well as the inclination of the voters to continue to reelect the same officers, sulking, “The people of this state are not much given to change.” The recipient, Mcclintock, was himself a Yale man, receiving his Doctor of Divinity in 1791. He was at the battle of Bunker Hill, and is the clergyman portrayed in Trumbull’s painting of the battle; Richard Purcell estimated the number of clergy at the celebration dinner to be about one hundred. Purcell, \textit{Connecticut in Transition}, 165-66.
down by the state capital and their post-election banquet.\footnote{112} Perhaps, some of these criticisms of a meal for the clergy at taxpayer expense would have been muted had dissenting ministers been invited to partake in the feast as well.

The state’s Republicans believed that the ecclesiastical establishment and the relationship between Federalists and Congregationalists were responsible for why Connecticut famously led the nation in emigration. Dissenters argued that the intolerant political and religious policies of the Standing Order persuaded those who did not share their perspectives to leave the state in favor of a better social situation. “REPUBLICANS constitute a political minority. This arises…more from the emigrations, which the intolerance of this State has driven to climates more favorable to civil and religious liberty.”\footnote{113} For their part, Federalists had no qualms about a declining state population if the majority of emigrants were Republicans. Harry Croswell, publisher of the Federalist newspaper \textit{The Wasp}, observed that “Connecticut is peculiarly fortunate in getting rid of here turbulent and mischievous citizens… The state of New-York is always ready to afford an asylum to such stragglers.”\footnote{114}

Dissenters also complained that the established church placed the other religious societies in the state at a distinct competitive disadvantage. Late in 1818 “A Reader” wrote in the Republican-leaning \textit{Columbian Register} that the power of the Standing

\footnote{112} Imholt, “Timothy Dwight: Federalist Pope,”394.
Order had made it difficult for other denominations to recruit new members and finance new meetinghouses.\textsuperscript{115} There were other slights in the state laws felt by some of the dissenter sects. For example, itinerant Methodist ministers were unable to perform marriages in Connecticut because the state law required ministers to have settled parishes in order to officiate weddings. Methodists complained that the Congregationalists boasted that they would not “acknowledge your preachers to be ministers of the Gospel…”\textsuperscript{116} Such laws clearly favored more traditional, established denominations such as the Congregationalists, Presbyterians, and the Episcopalians.\textsuperscript{117} This was a typical sentiment shared by Republicans, who judged the Federalists and their Congregational allies as self-righteous, condescending, and tyrannical.\textsuperscript{118}

CONCLUSION

Thomas Jefferson’s defeat of John Adams in the presidential election of 1800 was indicative of a larger social and political shift in the young American republic. In terms of migration, the land of steady habits was anything but. With younger people emigrating from the state and an increase in transient citizens, the traditional methods of revenue collection for the Congregationalists became obsolete and the influence of the clergy diminished. As political suffrage expanded for men the churches lost an important

\textsuperscript{115} Columbian Register, December 29, 1818, p. 2. See also Philip Hamburger, \textit{Separation of Church and State} (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002), 145.
\textsuperscript{116} Columbian Register, January 21, 1817.
\textsuperscript{117} Green, \textit{The Second Disestablishment}, 124. Throughout the first decade of the nineteenth century the Methodists petitioned the state assembly to change the laws to allow them the right to authorize marriages, to no avail.
\textsuperscript{118} For example, see editorials in \textit{American Mercury}, November 3, 1818, p. 2. and \textit{The Times}, August 11, 1818, p. 2.
latent function as a resource to build communal ties. The growing popularity of dissenting churches and the unprecedented quick succession of governors disturbed the stability of both sides of the Standing Order.

Upstart denominations such as the Baptists and Methodists upset the values of the established clergy socially more so than theologically. The evangelical, emotional spirit of the revivals of the Second Great Awakening, especially in the dissenting churches, placed the subjectivity of emotions and individualism over the sobriety and authority of the trained minister. Consequently, the importance of traditional sources of authority, clergy, fathers, even God, eroded in the current of the supremacy of self-interest as the guide to prosperity. Personal decisions became the central authority in shaping public institutions.\footnote{Appleby, Inheriting the Revolution, 174, 255.}

Rather than withdrawing or entrenching, the Standing Order engaged the changing culture in order to demonstrate the benefits of their ideology. The Federalist and Congregational ideal of institutions that promoted virtue and religious principles among the people was paramount in their justification for continuing the ecclesiastical establishment. The established churches created missionary societies, reform movements, and were active in revivals, activities that are generally only associated with the dissenting churches in this period. This connected with the heart of the debate over religious establishment in Connecticut which was whether the people shaped the institutions or the institutions shaped the people.
Despite Jefferson’s victory and the infamous Republican celebration at New Haven, within Connecticut, Standing Order was far from finished. Nearly another two decades passed before the state’s Republicans were able to celebrate a political victory closer to home – one within their own state. Maintaining the ecclesiastical establishment in the midst of the nationwide social changes required skillful leadership from within the Standing Order. In the early years of the nineteenth century the coalition had just that. Under the guidance of Timothy Dwight, David Daggett, and Zephaniah Swift, the Standing Order was able to influence the “Yale men” of Connecticut in the religious, political, and judicial spheres. During this season of turbulent social, political, and economic change in Connecticut these leaders of the Standing Order fought for the continuation of the ecclesiastical system based upon their ideology that they believed would yield for Americans the greatest prosperity, stability, and happiness.
CHAPTER TWO:

THE PILLARS OF THE STANDING ORDER

From the perspective of the Standing Order, their battle for a virtuous republic supported by a church establishment suffered a severe blow when Thomas Jefferson ascended to the presidency. With the federal government now in the hands of their archrivals, New England Federalists took it upon themselves to preserve the stability and prosperity of their communities from social and political upheaval caused by such things as emigration, the growth of the minor sects, and the intrusion of Republican support. The perceived threats to their vision for the United States were not strictly local, however, as many New England Federalists and Congregationalists also fretted over the consequences a separation of church and state created for the citizens in France.

The French Revolution was of great interest to many contemporary Americans regardless of political affiliation. They viewed it partially as a litmus test for the United States. If the French republic succeeded then it bade well for the prospects for the American experiment. American response to the French Revolution varied both by region and by political and religious affiliation. Nationally, many pro-French Jeffersonian democrats, religious dissenters, and Southerners (who were more Anglophobic than they were Francophiles) sympathized with the revolutionaries. In contrast, New England conservatives were largely Francophobic.
What concerned many Anglophiles on both sides of the Atlantic was the extreme violence of the Revolution during the period known as the Reign of Terror. Federalists and Whigs alike attributed this excessive bloodshed to the philosophical leaders of the Revolution, especially Robespierre and Voltaire. The term “Jacobin” became a synonym for those who continued to defend the French Revolution, and “jacobinism” came to represent radical political ideology that threatened the conventional social order. It also carried the connotation of atheism.¹

In the midst of this conflict against the Republican/Jacobin threat, key persons within Connecticut’s Standing Order developed and communicated an elaborate defense of traditional New England culture, including the ecclesiastical establishment. Three prominent leaders of the Standing Order were Yale president Timothy Dwight, politician David Daggett, and state Supreme Court judge Zephaniah Swift. They believed that for the American experiment to be successful and avoid the bloodshed of the French Revolution, it was imperative for the citizens of the nation to subscribe to the Connecticut model of a virtuous republic.

Their commitment to the Standing Order as both a defense against jacobinism and a recipe for future prosperity involved a defense of the state’s religious establishment. They supported the ecclesiastical system even though Dwight was the only one among them who was a devout, orthodox Christian. Nevertheless, all three men held the position that the American republic was best served with the government supporting Christianity for the good of society. These influential men shared an ideology that

centered on the idea that Christianity was a good and necessary component of society. For all three, the established church was important to the growth and success of Connecticut as well as the political stability of the region. That the Standing Order and the religious establishment in Connecticut lasted as long as it did was due in large part to the ideological strength and the influence of the offices possessed by these three individuals. These religious and political leaders who rose to prominence in the state in the early 1800s were paramount in preserving and promoting the Standing Order to the people of Connecticut. Their professional offices coupled with their standing in the community made them powerful voices for the conservative establishment.

PART ONE: TIMOTHY DWIGHT, THE BEACON AT NEW HAVEN

Of all the New England theologians, clergymen, and academics, Timothy Dwight stood alone as Connecticut’s most important and influential cleric in defending the Standing Order and the state-church relationship.² Throughout his ministerial career Dwight used the opportunities available to him to advance his social and political positions. His greatest contributions to the defense of Connecticut’s ecclesiastical system came during his tenure as president of Yale. As head of the most influential religious institution in New England, Dwight taught his ideology to many future prominent clergymen, lawyers, and politicians. Therefore, his conceptions of civil theology and political ideology are essential for examining the basis of the church establishment arguments of the Standing Order.

The grandson of Jonathan Edwards, Timothy Dwight was born into a family with a considerable social pedigree. His Puritan heritage instilled him with a commitment to tradition and authority. Nevertheless, he was more than willing to carve a legacy of independence and display an individualist impulse. The conservative character which he exhibited as an adult was absent from Dwight during the Revolution as he rebelled against the Loyalist affiliation of his parents. Showing a similar spirit of independence as his Great Awakening ancestor, Dwight chose a different loyalty, enlisting as a military chaplain in the Continental Army during the Revolution. After the war Dwight established an academic academy in the town of Northampton and then briefly entered politics, serving for a year in the Connecticut state legislature. In 1783, he joined the ranks of the clergy, taking a position as the pastor of the Congregational Church in Greenfield. During his twelve years there Dwight built another academic institution that some believed was on track to rival Yale as the state’s dominant school. In a bold move that revealed some of his progressive spirit, Dwight accepted women into the academy, making the Greenfield school one of the first institutions of higher education in the nation to accept female students. In 1795, Dwight left Greenfield to succeed the deceased Ezra Stiles as the president of Yale College. Dwight served Yale in this capacity until his death from cancer in 1817.

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4 Bernard C. Steiner, *The History of Education in Connecticut* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1893), 135-36. The Greenfield school was more than a preparatory school, as Dwight designed the curriculum to run parallel with Yale. In all, over one thousand students passed through Dwight’s academy in the decade before he left for Yale.
Although a descendent of the famed Great Awakening preacher, Dwight was not content to live in the shadows of Jonathan Edwards. Dwight took to literary works in order to promote the virtues of American society and combat what he saw as a rise in ungodliness and immorality in the nation. Long before becoming the president of Yale, Timothy Dwight was an accomplished author, having published poetry such as The Conquest of Canaan and The Triumph of Infidelity. His literary efforts celebrated and promoted the virtuous and benevolent qualities of America and its people. Even though his works fell out of favor in subsequent generations among literary critics and the general public alike, they did reach a wide readership and enjoyed some popularity in the early 1800s. Dwight’s nationalist pride spurred him to attempt to pen distinctly American great literary works. By disseminating popular poetry that contained his message of the need to reestablish virtue and morality, Dwight believed that his writings performed a necessary task for the preservation of the republic.

Had Dwight’s ideology been primarily motivated by a desire to amass power and prestige, he could have just as easily joined the Republicans instead of the Federalists. By the turn of the nineteenth-century the family tree of Jonathan Edwards had some notable political divides. Dwight’s brother, Theodore, was a leading Federalist in the state and the editor of Connecticut’s major Federalist newspaper, the Connecticut Courant. His uncle, Pierpont Edwards, found success as a prominent Republican and was head of the state’s Toleration Party. His first cousin, Aaron Burr, was the Republican Vice President. Thus, had Dwight sided with the Republicans he would have

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had just as much authority and clout within that party as he did the Federalists due to the reputation of his family tree and the strength of his own talents. He did not need the Standing Order in order to be successful, powerful, or influential. His successful literary accomplishments and famous family name secured that for him regardless of his political affiliation.

From his positions of authority and celebrity, Dwight cultivated a Calvinist theology, a stance on contemporary politics, a position on religious revivals, and a vision for the future of Yale that were neither firmly conservative nor progressive. The dichotomy between tradition and modernity proved to be a careful balancing act for Dwight as he developed and disseminated his distinct theology, social theory, and political ideology throughout New England. As other members of his family demonstrated, Dwight did not need the Standing Order in order to achieve political or social fortune. Consequently, his allegiance to it stemmed from ideological reasons more than personal ones. He affirmed the political superiority of the social elite because he genuinely believed that those of a higher social class were more capable of governing than those from middling or poor classes. While the input of the people was a vital and necessary component of a republic, the direct rule of the people threatened national freedom and prosperity than did possible corruption among the leaders of the government. This standpoint was the antithesis to that of the Jeffersonians, who believed that ultimately it was the government that threatened the liberty of the citizenry.  

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Timothy Dwight has long been mischaracterized as a reactionary, an ultra-conservative who did not appreciate the winds of social change sweeping through the new nation. Older historians created a caricature of Dwight as a staunch traditionalist cleric paranoid of all things progressive.\textsuperscript{7} They described Dwight as an “aristocrat” who possessed “neither understanding of nor sympathy for the simplified and often primitive Protestantism of the frontier.”\textsuperscript{8} Many of Dwight’s contemporary enemies would have agreed with this characterization.

So great was Timothy Dwight’s influence as president of Yale that one of his adversaries derided him as the “Federalist Pope” of Connecticut. Dwight’s enemies feared that Yale eventually would be able to control state policy as prominent state officials served on the board of the Yale Corporation. They claimed that his ultimate goal was to infuse his Calvinism within the educational system throughout both the state and the nation.\textsuperscript{9} Additionally, Republicans viewed the Dwight brothers as the religious and political cogs who worked in concert to help prop up the Standing Order. Defeat them, and the establishment might collapse.\textsuperscript{10}

Indeed, through his role as president of Yale, Dwight held a significant amount of authority and influence in promoting both Calvinist theology and his social theory among the Congregationalists and for helping to secure the Standing Order in the state. At the

\textsuperscript{7} For a thorough historiography of this interpretation of Dwight, see Imholt, “Timothy Dwight: Federalist Pope,” 387.


time, Yale was the most prominent school in the nation for training Congregational pastors. It also served as a feeder school for New Divinity students. The young men who studied under Dwight at Yale College in the first decades of the nineteenth century began each new fall term surrounded by reminders that they were in the midst of transition. Change was afoot on the campus during these years as Dwight labored to transform Yale from a school that primarily prepared students for eventual careers as ministers and lawyers to one that was also renowned as a leading scientific institution. Between 1798 and 1804 the college aggressively purchased land, erected new buildings, and renovated or expanded old ones. In 1813, the Yale medical school opened, providing opportunities to train students for a specific profession rather than simply offering a general liberal arts education. Dwight also entertained designs of creating a separate divinity school for students preparing for the ministry, a vision that came to fruition under his successor, Jeremiah Day.

An alternate characterization of Dwight’s tenure at Yale was that under his leadership the spiritual culture of the college was reclaimed. This interpretation is not entirely accurate, either. In that analysis, Dwight rescued the student of body of Yale from the deplorable spiritual conditions created under the leadership of its previous president, Ezra Stiles. Under Stiles the college had eroded as a Christian institution and morality and religious zeal among the students was lax. Under Dwight’s leadership the

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12 Yale provided a liberal-arts education for students. Graduates were still expected to apprentice in their chosen profession. As for turning Yale into a scientific school, Dwight secured funds to hire a professor in chemistry and natural history. His selection, Benjamin Silliman, was sent to London to study those subjects as well as to purchase books for Yale’s library.
college regained its footing as an institution devoted to training men in Christian character and moral convictions along with teaching them academically. As a result, chapel attendance soared and the general spiritual health of the students greatly improved. This historical interpretation has been sufficiently challenged and debunked by Edmund Morgan and others who have demonstrated that religious zeal ebbed and flowed among the college’s students, and the students eventually complained as much about Dwight as they did about Stiles. Further, Dwight’s commitment to challenging the students to develop and grow their spiritual disciplines and theological knowledge was really no different than what Stiles had instructed.14 Whether or not Dwight was a more devout Christian than Stiles is beside the point. What is important is that Dwight was deeply concerned with the spirituality of not only his students, but of the people of Connecticut. His burden for his state and nation manifested itself in a much different way than how Stiles approached and dealt with political and religious turmoil.

Whatever similarities they might have shared, Ezra Stiles and Timothy Dwight were bitter rivals. Stiles and Dwight differed greatly in their contributions to New England theology and their commitment to evangelism, either on the campus on in the community. Stiles certainly challenged his students’ beliefs and Yale did experience some waves of spiritual awakening during his tenure. Nevertheless, his contributions to the growth of the school were essentially unremarkable, whereas Dwight’s were perceived as being significant for the spirituality of the region and the reputation of the college.

More noticeably, they held divergent views on the French Revolution and its reverberations upon the shores of America. Stiles did not fear the French Revolution or the political and social constructs upon which it was based. Dwight was of an entirely different disposition on the matter. He believed that the reason for the decline in religion in America was due in large part to the French philosophers and the French Revolution. The atheistic underpinnings of their philosophical ideas worked to undermine not only Christianity, but society itself. Thus, Dwight believed that infidelity was not an abstract concept to be studied from afar. It was his duty to stamp out the infidel ideas of the French philosophers that may have spread among the student body.\textsuperscript{15} Dwight understood infidelity to be akin to an infection; if left untreated it would surely spread among the student body and corrupt their moral health. Like any other infection infidelity had to be eradicated at the first sign of its existence.\textsuperscript{16} Consequently, open discourse on the positive merits of the Revolution among the student body would not be welcomed at Yale during Dwight’s tenure.

Like most other participants in the Standing Order, Dwight saw the violent excesses of the French Revolution as the drastic consequences of atheism upon a nation. In \textit{The Triumph of Infidelity}, a work that sought to revive a perceived lack of religious orthodoxy in the nation, Dwight blamed the patriarchs of the French Revolution, a movement openly supported by many prominent Republicans, with a rise in vice and the eventual destruction of civil society. For Standing Order adherents like Dwight, the root cause of this derision was the open rejection of Christianity by the government. The

\textsuperscript{15} Kelley, \textit{Yale: A History}, 122.
\textsuperscript{16} Gabriel, \textit{Religion and Learning at Yale}, 69.
turmoil in France proved to Dwight that a government hostile to Christianity was one
destined for despotism and chaos.

The catalyst for the scourge of moral infidelity in France was Voltaire, against
whom Dwight attacked in his discourses and poetry. Of Voltaire, the *Triumph* states
“The gospel’s truths he saw were airy dreams,/the shades of nonsense, and the whims of
whims.”17 Dwight considered the anti-Christian writings of Voltaire as a main culprit of
the ills of French society. Although Voltaire died before the profusion of the Revolution
had unfolded, Dwight believed that his disciples, the “illumine,” had spread his
destructive philosophy throughout France unleashing “a voyage of rapine and blood”
through the oppressive government it established.18 Like the frogs that plagued
Pharaoh’s kingdom in the book of Exodus, the legions of Voltaire’s disciples wrought
havoc and destitute upon France. Should the swarm reach the shores of America, the
nation would find itself in the same perilous circumstance.19 The Standing Order was
therefore necessary to spare Connecticut from such a fate, and the example of
Connecticut’s prosperity would hopefully encourage the rest of the nation to follow suit.

Dwight’s intolerance of heterodox beliefs on campus was not limited to
jacobinism. For Dwight, bad ideas of all types were far from harmless. The ideas of men
compelled them to action, for either good or ill, depending on the logical result of the
idea. Wrong ideas – such as those espoused by the radicals of the French Revolution –

17 Timothy Dwight, “The Triumph of Infidelity,” in *The Major Poems of Timothy Dwight, 1752-
1817* (Gainesville, FL: Scholars’ Facsimiles & Reprints, 1969), 344.
18 Timothy Dwight, *A Discourse, in Two Parts Delivered August 20, 1812, on the National Fast,
in the Chapel of Yale College* (Boston: Cummings and Hilliard, 1813), 22, 4.
had the capacity to be ruinous for the political and social system in America. Conversely, “correct” ideas stood to improve society. This was especially true of Protestant theology. This conviction in the power of ideas is why Dwight could not tolerate radical or “infidel” ideas on the Yale campus. It was not simply a fear of being challenged, or an inability to tolerate those who happened to disagree with his beliefs. The stakes were far greater than pride or conformity. The stability of society and the political strength of the republic were threatened based upon the ideas of the people. Therefore improper ideas had to be expelled while good ideas were to be promoted.

When it came to religious life, Dwight certainly took the spiritual development of his students seriously. He instructed seniors in a course on theology and frequently spoke to the student body at chapel. Religious instruction, learning about Christianity, was not the same as developing devotion for the Divine. To spur the spiritual growth of his students, Dwight’s Yale implemented rules against students missing designated times for prayer and had consequences for failure to attend chapel at the college. Of course, Dwight also encouraged his students to lead and participate in the religious revivals that had been sweeping across New England.

Dwight endorsed the revivals of the Second Great Awakening, a movement that undoubtedly contributed to the growth in chapel attendance at Yale during his tenure.

Dwight developed a theology and a political ideology rooted in the reformed-Protestant tradition that had a pronounced imprint throughout the region through the revivals. He

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21 Yale College, *At the Annual Session of the President and Fellows of Yale College*, September 12, 1802 (New Haven, 1802?), 4-5.
strongly encouraged religious revivals and chapel attendance among the students. The revivals at Yale under Dwight, although not completely unique, contributed to the spiritual fire of the Second Great Awakening in New England. Dwight encouraged students to start revivals themselves at Yale and also to expand their religious fervor to the surrounding areas.

Dwight’s embrace of the revivals was all the more surprising in light of his ambivalent relationship with the New Divinity. Many of the revivalists in early nineteenth century Connecticut sought to fan the flames of revival by demonstrating their connection to Jonathan Edwards and the revivals of the first Great Awakening. As the self-proclaimed heirs to Edwards’ legacy, the New Divinity was in better position to claim the revivals for itself than was Dwight. Nevertheless, the Yale president fully embraced the influx of revivalism. These revivals encouraged at Yale were not of the intense emotional variety seen at Cane Ridge and other western fronts. The revivals sanctioned by Dwight emphasized introspection, counseling from the clergy, and an appeal to social action.\textsuperscript{22} Thus, although revivals were largely driven by the laity, the clergy still played an important function for converts in the wake of their initial conversion.

Dwight taught his students that the affluence and stability of the New England region depended upon the beliefs and traditions held by the leaders of the Standing Order. Their cultural framework would be a model for the rest of the nation to follow and the students themselves were to encourage this model when they left New Haven to pursue

their careers after graduation. In their coursework the Yale faculty asked students to wrestle with the changes that confronted them in the era of the new American republic. For example, during the 1806-07 academic year President Dwight pressed the senior class to take up such issues as, “Would a more general diffusion of learning throughout New England promote the prosperity and happiness of the people?,” along with the question that a decade later shook the foundations of the Connecticut ecclesiastical establishment, “Ought religion be supported by law?” This exercise between the president and the seniors was a tradition that predated Dwight and continued under his successor Jeremiah Day who, beginning in 1817, posed social questions that reflected the times such as, “Ought the U.S.A. establish a national university?” “Ought immigration of foreigners into this community be encouraged?” Most famous among Dwight’s students was Lyman Beecher, who went on to emulate Dwight’s ability to preserve the essential doctrinal tenants of Congregationalism while demonstrating their compatibility with modern society.

The amount of influence Dwight had among the ministers of Connecticut was somewhat tempered by the reality that by the early nineteenth century fewer and fewer men who entered Yale actually trained for the clergy. For example, between 1808 and 1815 less than a fifth of graduates entered the ministry, while almost a third became lawyers. Those numbers stood in stark contrast with those a half-century earlier, when

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23 Berk, Calvinism versus Democracy, 90.
24 “Notes taken from Observances Made by Dr. Dwight in the Senior’s Recitation Room, Yale College, 1806-1807, Dwight Family Papers, Series II, Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University Library; “College Disputes,” Day Family Papers, Series VIII, Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University Library.
thirty-three percent of students became settled ministers upon graduation.\textsuperscript{25} With fewer Yale men entering pulpits each year, Dwight’s theological and philosophical influence upon the ministers of Connecticut invariably eroded, though Yale’s influence over the ranks of lawyers grew. Many of these future litigators, having studied in the bastion of Congregationalism and the Standing Order, would undoubtedly graduate from Yale as supporters of the status quo. These “Yale men,” Dwight’s opponents argued, used their positions in the legal system to protect Yale’s interests in the state government.\textsuperscript{26}

Through his poetry, his ministry, and his office at Yale, Dwight passionately fought against all that he believed threatened the progress of Christianity or the stability of the republic. The minister at Dwight’s funeral, Calvin Chapin, only alluded to Dwight’s crusade against all things Jacobin but he very clearly reminded the mourners about the deceased’s fight against infidelity. Chapin remarked that Dwight attacked infidelity “like the sun shining in his strength, diffusing light into the regions of darkness.”\textsuperscript{27}

Timothy Dwight chose to support the Standing Order and the ecclesiastical establishment in large part because they fit within the general outworking of his own theological convictions. Through his careers as a minister and university president he was able to impart his theology to others. His theological influence and his contributions to the intellectual defense of the religious establishment were all the more significant.

\textsuperscript{25} Kelley, \textit{Yale: A History}, 123.
\textsuperscript{26} Imholt, “Timothy Dwight: Federalist Pope,” 392.
\textsuperscript{27} Calvin Chapin, \textit{A Sermon, Delivered, 14\textsuperscript{th} January, 1817, at the Funeral of the Rev. Timothy Dwight…} (New Haven: 1817), 9.

For a brief time the New Divinity theologians had a compatriot in Timothy Dwight. Dwight seemingly would have fit right in with the New Divinity. Not only was he descended from Jonathan Edwards but he even studied New Divinity theology under his uncle, Edwards’ son, Jonathan Edwards, Jr. Nevertheless, Dwight gradually developed a Calvinist-based theology that was distinct from, and in some ways contradictory to, that of the New Divinity. Dwight considered his rejection of the New Divinity as the refutation of the God of Samuel Hopkins and Joseph Bellamy, not as the rejection of the God of his grandfather. 28 Like the New Divinity, Dwight championed making Christianity relatable to contemporary society, but he was also dedicated to preserving traditional society in a way that they were not. Dwight’s theology and his association with some of the New Divinity members apparently created confusion concerning whether or not he actually was a member of the movement. Dwight put the matter to rest by empathetically stating in an 1805 letter, “I am not a Hopkinsonian… Their systems I know, but do not believe.” 29

Nevertheless, Dwight’s theology so closely resembled that of the New Divinity that both contemporaries and modern historians have often made little distinction between the two in the scheme of Edwardsean theology. Historian George Park Fisher has argued that Edwardsean theology reached its pinnacle in New England with Dwight’s

29 Timothy Dwight to Rev. Pryland, March 16, 1805. Dwight Family Papers, Series I. Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University Library.
election to the presidency of Yale. With Dwight’s ascension to that post, “the old Calvinism, as something distinct from the Edwardsean divinity, disappears from view.”\(^{30}\) Dwight may not have been a bonafide member of the New Divinity, but his presidency of Yale certainly did nothing to hinder the movement in Connecticut.

Dwight’s Calvinism was moderate – too liberal for the hyper-Calvinism of the New Divinity, and too conservative for the younger New Divinity ministers in New England, who opted to preach a more uplifting, comforting view of the relationship between God and humanity. Dwight was never as committed to preserving the strict Calvinist theology of his Puritan heritage as was his famous grandfather. Whereas Jonathan Edwards tried to embrace modernity and changing social structures without abandoning the doctrines of his forbearers, Dwight was unafraid of reframing doctrine in order to defend his faith and ideologies in a changing American society. Even in his more conservative theology on the issues of original sin and the depravity of humanity Dwight was not necessarily a proud Edwardian. It was this theological “middle ground” that gave Dwight notoriety in the development of New England Calvinist theology, and his position as president of Yale gave him the pulpit to propagate his systematic theology and political theology to future generations of Connecticut clergy.

Although he held a strong theological passion, some aspects of his theology were malleable in order to serve more practical ends. The most fundamental example of his ability to reframe doctrine in order to relate to a more democratic culture is his

understanding of divine sovereignty. Jonathan Edwards had regarded the sovereignty of God as the bedrock of Christian faith: God is in the heavens, he does as he pleases, and his will is unchallenged. In light of a more individualistic culture Dwight softened this hard-line Calvinist position by allowing for the free will of individuals. God was still sovereign, but because he is perfectly omniscient and omnipotent, it is unnecessary for him to intervene directly in human affairs because he knows the ultimate outcome. With this theological constraint Dwight attempted to strike a balance between the fact of the complete sovereignty of God with the reality of the popular American belief in free will and individualism. In this way, God could keep his sovereignty while the people of America could still keep theirs in making their individual actions and choices.31

Dwight’s theological beliefs and arguments were authentic; he never compromised doctrine simply to curry favor with the public. For example, he admitted “embarrassment” and “reluctance” over his position on these issues, confessing that he would eliminate those doctrines if he could logically do so.32 Such admissions reveal in Dwight a leaning towards liberalism that he never was able to embrace due to his commitment to his theological convictions. Nevertheless, he did establish doctrines that appealed to the ideological senses of contemporary society. His five-volume tome Theology explained his understanding of God while still appealing to Enlightenment principles of reason and common sense.33 Above all, Dwight system of theology was both apologetic and practical. He was zealous for preserving evangelical beliefs and for

32 Sweeney, Nathaniel Taylor, 87.
33 Caskey, Chariot of Fire, 37.
promoting an active, public faith among Christians. Whereas Jonathan Edwards tried to preserve Puritanism in a developing modern age, Timothy Dwight’s “middle ground” theological convictions showed his openness to adapt to a changing culture.

Like many of the Standing Order clergy, Dwight was fearful of the political parties that had formed in the early republic period. In his Discourse, Dwight stated that in his attack against political parties he did not mean to hold one party in more disrepute than the other; it is the existence of parties that is the issue, which is why the Standing Order had brought so much stability and peace to Connecticut. Parties and partisan politics robbed people of their morality and their devotion to God. Such consequences made the continuation of the Standing Order and the state-church relationship all the more necessary in Connecticut.

Although he claimed that the “spirit of party” of both sides compromised the strength of America, Dwight certainly believed that the Republicans more culpable than Federalists. The moral deficiencies of the Republican leaders led to intellectual and political faults that compromised the prosperity of the nation. Dwight articulated this idea in his attack on the government’s decision to go to war with Great Britain in 1812. The war magnified the poor leadership of the Republican Party as America was ill-prepared militarily to declare war on another nation, and any potential gains from the war would not outweigh the losses of life and property. That the Republicans would be so eager to partake in it was to Dwight a testimony of the ineptitude of their moral character and the tenuous future of the American republic. Additionally, Dwight surmised that war

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34 Dwight, A Discourse, 46.
with Great Britain would necessitate a U.S.-France alliance, a possibility that reinforced the belief that the secular philosophies and political ideologies of the French might be taking root in the United States.\textsuperscript{35}

Dwight looked back to the earliest days of the American experiment in his crusade for the defense of the Standing Order and the ecclesiastical establishment. He saw the attempts at ecclesiastical disestablishment taking place among the other states as well as in the federal government as detrimental to the liberty of the people. His persistent argument that the government should support religious institutions did not mean that Timothy Dwight advocated a state, or a nation, built on a theocracy; he was a firm advocate of the republican form of government. For Dwight, Christianity girded and enhanced the freedoms supported by a republic. In essence, a government with a truly free citizenry could not exist without Christian principles at its foundation.\textsuperscript{36} Therefore, if religion was vital to the prosperity of the nation then it stood to reason that it should at least be acknowledged by the government. Dwight lamented the fact that the Constitution was drafted and ratified without any mention of the existence of God.\textsuperscript{37}

The aristocratic nature of the Federalists fit well with Dwight’s idea of a republic. He believed in both the individual freedoms of a free republic as well as the rigid structure of a hierarchical society. Dwight advocated a “top-down” system of government, where the civic leaders possessed a great deal of power and limited popular democracy. This stemmed from his belief that both the political leaders and the clergy

\textsuperscript{35} Dwight, \textit{A Discourse}, 50.  
\textsuperscript{36} Snyder, “Foundations of Liberty,” 382.  
\textsuperscript{37} Dwight, \textit{A Discourse}, 46.
played vital roles in developing the morality and benevolence of the people. Virtuous people were important to a secure society because they promoted social improvement by being devoted to God, caring for each other, maintaining social institutions, and supporting just and moral civic leaders. In this way leaders had a paternal relationship with the people. The community was like a child who needed to be taught virtue by his parents.  

Government officials needed to be virtuous in order to be good representatives of the people. The first and highest responsibility of leaders was to instill virtue in the people, and the government support of religious institutions would serve that end. The relationship between officials and the people then became reciprocal as the virtuous people, in turn, elected virtuous leaders to run the government. Dwight’s vision of a godly republic rested on the notion that civic leaders and ordinary citizens needed to strive to be virtuous and to act with disinterested benevolence.

Dwight’s last major poem, *Greenfield Hill*, extolled the greatness of the United States, particularly Connecticut, compared with the nations of Europe. America, the poem reads, is unparalleled in its freedoms and demonstrations of benevolence. The clergy served as the main facilitators of these attributes, and they used their office to spread truth, virtue, and piety in their parishes. The literary works of Dwight emphasized his conviction that atheism led to the destruction of freedom and liberty and the exultation of infidelity. If atheism gained a foothold in America it would lead to the

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38 Snyder, “Foundations of Liberty,” 394.
destruction of the republic. Therefore the orthodox Congregational clergy were vital because they preserved American virtues and fought against those ideas which were perceived to be disastrous for the nation. The logical conclusion for Dwight and other conservatives was that the state should support Christian churches because of their significant contributions to the strength of the community and nation.

To Dwight and the Standing Order clergy, a people who possessed individual freedoms must be a responsible people or else their society would quickly fall into anarchy. This “rational liberty” as Alan Snyder termed it, “included a respect for established authority since only a stable government could guarantee liberty.” Thus, Dwight did not see liberty as being subordinate to authority, but rather that the exercise of liberty would remain responsible for the good of the social and political order. Dwight tried to show his students that religion should be supported by the government because it was beneficial both to society as a whole as well as individual persons. Through his discussion with his students the consensus was that “Religion is of service to every government…If religion promotes the happiness of a state, it promotes the happiness of individuals. No free government has ever existed without religion. But one attempt was even made and that was in France.”

That people were moral and virtuous was important to Dwight for the success of the American republic. He believed that charitable societies, missionary groups, and schools would help build a moral society. Morality, according to Dwight, was but a “branch” of the Christian faith. The people of a moral society enjoyed a greater sense of

42 Observances Made by Dr. Dwight in the Senior’s Recitation Room.
peace, prosperity, and individual liberties than those who attempted to live without a moral code sustained by religion. Because the government funded schools, road construction, and the military all for the promotion of the public welfare, so too the state should support religion because of the benefits that Christian institutions brought to the prosperity and stability of Connecticut society. State-support of Christian institutions was, in Dwight’s view, imperative for the development of the general community as well as for the growth of religious institutions. Religion “was indispensable to the welfare of a free country,” because free nations needed to be grounded by a strict moral code.43

Dwight’s articulation of disinterested benevolence was an important philosophical salvo in the arsenal of Standing Order’s argument for their existence. Ultimately for Dwight, disinterested benevolence became a synonym for individuals to be willingly productive and charitable for the betterment of society. Doing good works and modeling good behavior were keys in the quest for a type of self-interest that merged the interests of the individual with those of the larger community. This formula encouraged families to lead sober, productive lives. This spirit of “disinterested benevolence” sparked in Connecticut a series of religious revivals, the creation of charitable societies, and the formation of several evangelical organizations.44 Dwight’s disinterested benevolence encouraged social and political stability, conformity, and the participation of individuals in the betterment of their towns, schools, and churches.45 In order to benefit both society

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45 Berk, Calvinism versus Democracy, 110.
and the government, disinterested benevolence needed the assistance of both. Strong religious and social institutions would ensure both a virtuous community and government.

Dwight’s idea of Christian virtue informed his support for institutions that improved the community. Like his grandfather, Dwight believed that what made an act virtuous was not the act itself, but the motivation behind it. The chief manifestation of God’s glory was in his benevolence towards creation. Consequently, all acts motivated by benevolence towards others were truly virtuous. This conception of virtue, for the individual to seek what is good towards God, others, and oneself, helped to create a more moral society. A virtuous people needed their morals reinforced through religious and educational institutions in order to be effective. This connection ensured the happiness of the community.

It is important to recognize that Dwight’s vision for the support of religious organizations was not simply to maintain traditional society. The institutions themselves may have been traditional, but Dwight considered religion and education to be active agents in developing more virtuous people and a more noble and strong government. Dwight preached that if the governments of New England continued to be founded upon Christianity and if they elected Christian politicians, then America had a chance to keep its status as a “chosen nation” before God and continue to receive divine blessings. Believing that even dissenters would recognize the importance of religious establishment

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48 Harris, “Revelation and the American Republic,” 458.
once America fully embraced Christianity, Dwight in effect “gambled the future of the established church on America’s willingness to revitalize itself on the basis of its past.”49 Like other Standing Order supporters, Dwight worried about the future of Christianity in America if churches were left to support themselves without government assistance. He warned his students, “If we do not sow, we shall not reap…If we have no ministers, we shall have no religion.”50

Oliver Wolcott became the first non-Federalist to be elected governor of Connecticut a few months after Dwight died in January 1817. The new state constitution which removed the religious establishment came into law almost two years later. Being astute of the political and social changes around him, Dwight recognized before his death that change was afoot in the region. Unlike his students such as Lyman Beecher or Nathanial Taylor, Dwight would not have to conceptualize Congregational ecclesiology to engage a society no longer formally grounded on its principles. Dwight’s efforts for the continuation of the Standing Order ended in failure, but the battle was not fought in vain. Up from the ashes of the established church rose the Phoenix of reform movements, voluntary associations, and moral societies. These organizations took upon themselves the mantle for bringing about social change and persuading people to lead sober lives, filled with the “steady habits” of conventional society.

50 *Observances Made by Dr. Dwight in the Senior’s Recitation Room*. 
Whereas Timothy Dwight was important to the Standing Order for his influence upon the New England theologians in the early republic, the most important politician to the establishment was David Daggett. A loyal Federalist, he was adamant that the structure of government in Connecticut fostered a stable and prosperous society that should be emulated by the rest of the nation. A desire to maintain power or prestige for himself and his allies were not primary concerns.

David Daggett was born into a family that had long been a part of Connecticut’s social elite. His family had been a well-known and prominent force in the region since the arrival of the first permanent British colonists to the region. He was a fifth-generation direct descendant of John Daggett, one of the original Pilgrims who first settled New England under the leadership of John Winthrop. A native to Massachusetts, Daggett spurned attending Harvard in favor of neighboring Yale. He attended the college during the American Revolution. Upon graduation, he turned down an offer to become a tutor at Yale, preparing instead for a career in law. Over the course of his career he held almost every political office in the state, except for governor. After serving six years as a member of the state’s General Assembly, he was elected to the Council of Assistants (the Upper House) in 1797. From this position Daggett was able to capture significant influence over political policy in two ways. First, because the state’s Council was comprised of only twelve men, tremendous legislative power was available to a handful of individuals. Second, once an individual became a part of the Standing Order, it was

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highly improbable for that person to lose a reelection bid ever again. That tradition, coupled with his prominent family heritage, Daggett’s place among Connecticut’s political elite was secured with his first political appointment.

In 1817, when the state underwent a seismic political shift with the Republican/Toleration candidate Oliver Wolcott elected to the governorship, Daggett was serving his state as a U.S. senator. He held this position until 1819, only months after Connecticut had created and ratified a new state constitution. The Standing Order refused to crumble quickly after the Toleration-Republican takeover of the state in 1817-18, as evidenced by Daggett’s repeated elections to various state-level posts, including being made Chief Justice of the state’s Supreme Court in 1832. For forty five years David Daggett espoused the political ideology of the Standing Order through his appointment to nearly every political office in the state. As the Reverend Samuel W.S. Dutton remarked at Daggett’s funeral service, during the early republic “no man in the State had so much political influence, an influence amounting so nearly to a political controul [sic] of the State, as he.”

Daggett’s religious allegiances and convictions were not as clear as one might expect given his social and political conservatism. His father, Thomas, was a proponent of the evangelical revivals of the Great Awakening in the mid-1700s, including those that were led by the Separatist sects, even though they threatened the conservative forces in the colony. Thomas Daggett made sure that his children attended church services, and David kept that habit up throughout his life as a member of Congregational ecclesiastical

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52 Ibid, 11.
societies. The state-supported Congregational sect was the obvious choice for those belonging to the Standing Order, although being raised with a Separatist “New Light” theology, Daggett retained a wariness of trusting established ministers.

Daggett’s anticlerical sentiments led him to join a group of approximately twelve prominent politicians and lawyers known as the Stelligeri. These “star bearers” first met in 1783, and their primary priority was to loosen the control of the Yale Corporation away from the exclusivity of the established clergy. Almost a decade later, after publishing letters condemning the structure of the Corporation and applying pressure on Yale through the legislature, Daggett and the Stelligeri persuaded Ezra Stiles to relent and allow eight members of the Council of Assistants into the Corporation. Although the Congregational clergy retained control of the school, the Stelligeri had accomplished their goal of positing lay leadership on the Corporation.

Despite his heterodox religious views, Daggett remained devoted to weekly worship attendance and supported the influence of religion on public life. Personally, Daggett did not lead a particularly devout religious life until he was an elderly man. As such, his commitment to the continuation of the ecclesiastical establishment did not spring from a sense of religious duty. Nor did it stem from a desire to hold on to personal or political prestige. His family name and skill as both an orator and lawyer meant that the Congregational establishment was irrelevant to his occupation as a politician. His productive and illustrious career after the fall of the Standing Order suggests that an

ecclesiastical establishment was completely unnecessary for his career or social standing. David Daggett was a proponent of the state-supported religion because his core ideology included religion as a mechanism to promote the best interests of individuals and their communities.

Like many irreligious or nominally religious members of the Standing Order, David Daggett supported the established church in part because he believed that Christianity was important for teaching morality, public virtues, social harmony, and stable community. Daggett avoided sharing his personal spiritual convictions in his letters and speeches, but he was very candid about sharing his beliefs on the benefits of religion to civil society. He expressed that the Congregational churches were important for maintaining the social and political system that brought prosperity and stability to the land of steady habits. The role of the established clergy was to assist people to the “attainment of virtue and holiness.” As Daggett understood it, general happiness, as well as the “good order and preservation of civil government, essentially depend upon piety, religion and morality.”

Christianity was vital not just for the salvation of souls but it also had an important purpose for the state. In light of this essential civil service of producing happiness and stability in both the social and political spheres, Daggett reasoned that all parishes had the authority to compel their members to contribute monetarily to religious institutions. Although he agreed with this law, Daggett did not insist that monetary

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support for Christian churches should be the domain of the Congregationalists exclusively. Rather, like many others within the Standing Order he insisted that all citizens should be required to contribute monetarily to the legally-recognized denomination of their choosing. Because the law authorized individuals to contribute to any denomination so long as dissenters filled out a certificate with the local magistrate, Daggett felt perfectly comfortable writing that in Connecticut “no preference is given to any particular denomination.” 56 Should the Standing Order be brought down the ecclesiastical establishment would tumble with it. Consequently, such a scenario would spell disaster for the prosperity of the state.

Government-supported organizations also helped to ensure that those in political office were virtuous and wise, because a virtuous citizenry would be predisposed to elect virtuous leaders. This reciprocal relationship had been “handed down from one generation to another,” with the government supporting social institutions and the beneficiaries of those institutions “rewarding their able and faithful magistrates with their unshaken confidence.” 57 Daggett shared the view of many other Americans of his day in his belief that the representatives at all levels of government should have the utmost morality and virtue in order to best serve in the interests of the communities they represented. For instance, officials who demonstrated traits of discernment and virtue would be more inclined to protect the interests of the innocent rather than those who only

56 Ibid, 26, 28.
57 David Daggett, Steady Habits Vindicated (Hartford: Hudson & Goodwin, 1805), 5.
possessed power. A leader who possessed virtue necessarily exhibited the traits of justice, truth, and wisdom.\textsuperscript{58}

To Daggett, the benefits of state-supported social institutions, especially religion, were so clear that only those who despised religion would ever plot to remove Christianity from Connecticut’s polity. A new Jeffersonian version of government that eliminated ecclesiastical establishments would destroy the “steady habits” in the state and cripple the virtue and prosperity of its citizens.\textsuperscript{59} Therefore, like most Federalists, he believed that only a virtuous people could elect virtuous politicians. A “vicious citizen” could not be a “virtuous ruler.”

Daggett fended off perceived threats to social and political prosperity in part by promoting traditional institutions. He was well aware of the growing threat to the Standing Order presented by the Republicans in Connecticut shortly after Thomas Jefferson’s election to the presidency in 1800. In true Federalist fashion Daggett lamented the “party spirit” that had taken over state and federal politics in the early republic, blaming the formation of political parties as the sources of discord and instability in the nation. The party spirit was the “bane of free governments.”\textsuperscript{60} Ignoring the sense of party among his own political allies, Daggett attacked the Republicans for fueling a spirit of party loyalty in Connecticut. For Daggett, the Republican Party was not a threat so much for the political ideology of its members, but for what the party represented to him, politically, socially and religiously. Republicans had abandoned the

\textsuperscript{58} David Daggett, \textit{An Eulogium Commemorative of the Exalted Virtues of His Excellency Roger Griswold} (New Haven: Walter & Steele, 1812), 14, 15. Daggett uses this description in the context of describing the character of the late Federalist governor of Connecticut, Roger Griswold.

\textsuperscript{59} David Daggett, \textit{Count the Cost} (Hartford: Hudson & Goodwin, 1804), 21.

\textsuperscript{60} Daggett, \textit{An Eulogium}, 11.
principles of virtue and honor in their quest to destroy the traditional bonds of community and polity. This quest included undermining the confidence the people had in the Standing Order, as well as to attack “the manners, habits, and religion of the great body of federalists.” The Republicans were a mortal threat to the institutions which promoted the conservative system.\textsuperscript{61}

Daggett attacked Republican schemes to abolish the state support for the Congregationalists and to draft a new state constitution. Such goals terrified Daggett, who believed that the Republican plan would ruin society, tearing down “all the barriers which Christianity has created against vice.” Associating the issue with the defense of virtue, he argued that the Republicans “wished to see a Republic without religion; and should they be gratified, the consequence will specifically be, a miserable race of men without virtue.”\textsuperscript{62} Those who wished to overturn the Standing Order “do it partly from a well-grounded persuasion that the directest way to overturn the government is to corrupt the hearts and the manners of the people.”\textsuperscript{63} Such arguments reinforced a civic virtue that valued the stability of traditional society over the changes promised by the Republican opposition.

Daggett feared that Republican control of the nation would ultimately lead to the instability witnessed in the French Revolution. Like most conservatives of the time, Daggett blamed the violence and turmoil in France in part on the overt atheism of that nation’s leaders and philosophers. The events in France had proven to them that anarchy

\textsuperscript{61} Daggett, \textit{Facts are Stubborn Things}, 3.
\textsuperscript{62} Daggett, \textit{Count the Cost}, 5.
\textsuperscript{63} Daggett, \textit{Steady Habits Vindicated}, 9.
was a byproduct of irreligion. Daggett saw in the Republican Party, with the pro-France sentiments among many of its members, a transfer of the French Revolution onto the land of steady habits. He feared that the radical Jacobin societies in France during the early stages of the Revolution had made their way to the United States, particularly Connecticut, under “the imposing name of Republican societies.” The party spirit of the Republicans, inspired by the Jacobin clubs, would ultimately undermine freedom and religion.  

Daggett also criticized the Republican proponents of the French Revolution for their alleged unwavering allegiance to all things French at the expense of the profitable lessons and ideology learned from antiquity and tradition. Daggett proclaimed that the Republicans “believed that Socrates, and Plato and Seneca – Bacon, Newton and Locke, and all who lived and died prior to the commencement of the French Revolution, were either fools or slaves. That in no country but France is there science or virtue.” Thus, Daggett saw in the supporters of the Revolution people who not only admired untested ideas that might prove disastrous, but who did so at the expense of rejecting and demonizing those ideas that had built good societies for thousands of years.

Further, Daggett led the charge that Republicans forged alliances with dissenter religious groups solely for political gain. The Republicans indulged the minor sects in order to achieve their own political agenda. In essence, they were vessels to bring about irreligion in society, all under the guise of “tolerance.” That in the early 1800s the state

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64 Daggett, *Facts are Stubborn Things*, 9, 22.
66 Daggett, *Facts are Stubborn Things*, 20.
Federalists themselves often pandered to the Congregationalists depending on the support needed for a particular election was immaterial to Daggett; his concern was that the Republicans played the same game with the minor sects. As he saw it, the Episcopalians were the chief pawns in the Republican game to control the state. Although outside of the established church, Episcopalians generally were conservative enough to side with the Standing Order in many elections. Part of the Republican strategy in the state involved persuading the Episcopalian voting bloc towards their side. Aware of this strategy, Daggett charged the Republicans with steering the Episcopalians towards making requests to the state legislature that were so unreasonable that they would have no chance of receiving approval. Consequently, the Federalist politicians would appear to be discriminating against the Episcopalians, and the Republicans would be perceived as advocates for religious liberty.

Finally, Daggett charged the Republicans with launching slanderous attacks against the Congregational clergy. Before the formation of political parties, there existed “harmony between the people and the clergy.” In the time since, the clergy came under fire from Republican newspapers as “objects of scorn and hatred” and “bigots” who opposed liberty. This attack of the clergy according to Daggett was completely unwarranted. They were far from charlatans or wealthy aristocrats. Rather, they promoted virtue, purity, and piety, all for a marginal salary. Daggett surmised that this was the real basis of the attacks. The clergy threatened the “Jacobin” Republicans, not because they usurped liberty and social harmony but because they defended it.67

Additionally, the “Party people” attacked state-supported Yale for no other reason than to attempt to undermine another Federalist-supported institution, especially one that had ties to the promotion of Congregationalism in the state.68

Daggett’s wariness of the Republican Party, disdain for the French Revolution, and support of the established church converged in his crusade against several Republican-leaning justices of the peace in 1804. In this instance Daggett used his political power and position to weed out dissenters of the Standing Order from political office. In 1804, Daggett argued before the General Assembly that certain justices of the peace throughout the state should forfeit their office because they distributed a pamphlet that publicly supported the creation of a state constitution. The desire for a constitution was a central plank of the Republican platform in Connecticut. These local magistrates were brought before the Assembly for “holding and teaching” the “usurpation” of the need for a new constitution. The defendants claimed that although they believed in the necessity for a state constitution, they never used their office to advocate it. Daggett insisted that the magistrates should lose their commissions because they propagated such “vices” while holding positions of government authority.

Daggett argued that because the justices appealed to “the people” of Connecticut instead of the state legislature they had attempted to create a political atmosphere similar to the one in France. As that nation had shown, at times “the people” have been inclined towards self-destruction by being seduced by “the ambitious and profligate,” undoubtedly in this context, an allusion to the Republicans. Although Daggett believed that the people

68 Ibid, 20, 6.
of Connecticut had the appropriate measure of virtue to resist such seduction, he feared
the result of “misguided zeal.” Here Daggett connects that potential outcome with the
need for the people to continue to support religious institutions. The churches served as
the vanguards for a stable social and political climate. That the justices of the peace
desired a constitution that would eliminate the state support of religion was further proof
that they sought to undermine the very government for which they worked.

With regard to the government support of religion, David Daggett was indeed
much like his father. Thomas Daggett defended the revivals of the Great Awakening
against potential damage to his reputation and career, even though he did not have a
personal stake in them. Similarly, David Daggett defended the state’s ecclesiastical
establishment even in the face of a Jeffersonian tidal wave in the state’s politics that
could have potentially damaged his career and legacy even though he was not a devout
Christian. He did so out of the conviction that the fragile American experiment needed
the virtue, discipline, and morality that he believed Christianity could provide. If
Christianity benefitted the state, then it only made sense for the state to support Christian
institutions. Daggett defended and promoted this belief through his political speeches
and influence as a prominent politician. Daggett not only lived through the Republican
takeover of Connecticut politics but he even rejoined the political system, becoming
Chief Justice of the state’s Supreme Court in 1826. He died in 1851 at the age of eighty-
seven.

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PART THREE: ZEPHANIAH SWIFT, JUDICIAL POWER

David Daggett had a political ally in Zephaniah Swift. Like Daggett, Zephaniah Swift’s distinguished political career enabled him to defend the Standing Order and the Congregational establishment in Connecticut. Swift graduated from Yale in 1778. In 1793 he represented Connecticut as a congressman in the House of Representatives. A few years later he served as a secretary to federal Supreme Court Chief Justice and fellow Connecticut native Oliver Ellsworth. Swift became a state Superior Court judge in 1801, advanced to the state Supreme Court in 1808 and was appointed Chief Justice of that court in 1815, a position he held until 1819, when a Republican majority voted him out of office. As a staunch Federalist, Swift was also a sponsor and member of the Hartford Convention in 1814.

Zephaniah Swift was perhaps the most interesting political figure in the Standing Order in the early nineteenth century because of his ambivalent relationship with it. Swift was an atypical member of the Standing Order, as he was both a deist and an anti-cleric. Like Daggett he was a member of the Stelligeri. He even began his political career with Republican support propelling his election to the General Assembly. Instability in the early years of the nation, such as Shays’ Rebellion and the Whiskey Rebellion, coupled with the violence of the French Revolution caused Swift to reconsider

70 The unitary structure of Connecticut’s government prior to the 1818 constitution kept the legislatures and executives of the General Assembly in charge of the judicial branch. The state Supreme Court was created in 1784, and was comprised of the governor, lieutenant governor, and the Upper House of the Assembly. An 1806 act removed these members and made nine Superior Court justices the Supreme Court of the state. Although they were not elected officeholders, the Supreme Court justices were still ultimately subordinate to the General Assembly. Although the act passed in 1806, is was not until 1808 that the first Superior Court justices convened for the Supreme Court. An excellent treatment of the development of the Connecticut Supreme Court is Michael Besso, “‘An Act…For Constituting, and Regulating Courts’ and the Development of the Connecticut Supreme Court: A Bicentennial Recognition.” Connecticut Supreme Court History, 1, (2006).
his conviction that the government should not support religious institutions. He came to argue that the “steady habits” as promoted by the Standing Order benefitted a stable, harmonious society. Like most deists, Swift believed that Christianity, in particular the teachings of Christ, represented virtue and religion in their purest forms. Therefore, church establishments should exist because the state needed the morality and virtue promoted by the churches in order to maintain social cohesion.\footnote{Gerardi, “Zephaniah Swift and Connecticut’s Standing Order,” 247-249; William F. Willingham, “Grass Root Politics in Windham, Connecticut during the Jeffersonian Era.” \textit{Journal of the Early Republic}, 1, no. 2 (1981): 131.}

As judge, Zephaniah Swift contributed greatly to the U.S. legal system by both his literary works and his interpretation of law. His \textit{A System of the Laws of the State of Connecticut} was a seminal work in the developing systematic treatises of laws in the nation.\footnote{Morton Horwitz has described Swift as the “first American treatise writer.” Morton J. Horwitz, \textit{The Transformation of American Law, 1780-1860} (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1977), 178.} Swift believed in the authority of the judicial branch in interpreting the meaning of the law and the importance of an independent judiciary.\footnote{Ibid, 25.} For example, in 1815 the defendant in a murder case in which Swift was the presiding judge was granted a retrial by the General Assembly, over Swift’s objections. The jurist admonished the legislature for allegedly undermining his authority as judge. He opined that the legislature should never lessen the influence of the judiciary, and that it was vital for the judicial branch to be truly independent.\footnote{Zephaniah Swift, \textit{A Vindication of the Calling of the Special Superior Court...With Observations on the Constitutional Power of the Legislature to Interfere with the Judiciary in the Administration of Justice} (Windham, Conn.: J. Byrne, 1816), 43-46. The case, the retrial of Peter Lung, and Swift’s response to it may have been a contributing factor to the creation of an independent judiciary in Connecticut. It was also suggested that Swift’s public denunciation of the General Assembly swayed some Federalists to instead support the Toleration Party. See Besso, “‘An Act...For Constituting,’” 69.} Swift’s lengthy defense of his judicial authority in the face of legislative challenges to it demonstrated that he would not uncritically follow the will of
the Assembly or blindly serve party interests in order to keep his position. He believed that the judiciary should be independent of the other branches of government, even if that opinion ran counter to that of his fellow Federalists.

As evidenced in his effort to create an independent judiciary, Swift’s judicial philosophy was far from traditional. Breaking from conventional judicial practice, Swift assigned less weight to legal precedent in his court decisions than was commonly practiced at the time. He insisted that judges had the right to shape the law to fit the circumstances of individual cases. Therefore he had no legal conviction to support the laws established by the Standing Order based on tradition or established cases. As he understood the rights of the judiciary, he had the ability to ignore precedent depending on the situation. Therefore his support for the Standing Order from a judicial perspective was based in ideology and not simply in legal precedent. Thus, Swift’s career as a judge displayed a progressive spirit first by seeking to empower the judicial branch with authority independent of the Assembly, as well as by giving judges freedom to make ruling without being bound to past interpretations of the law. Swift’s support of the Federalist Party and his unwillingness to dissolve the ecclesiastical establishment had little to do with any aversion to change or a commitment to traditionalism. Rather, he maintained that the principles of Federalism and institutions such as churches would protect the young United States from suffering the same fate as the French republic.

Regarding his own country, the prospects of the new United States government under the Constitution excited Swift, while at the same time created worry that a potential

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“Jacobin spirit” among the people, like that of France, might undermine the entire political experiment. Writing to Joseph Isham in late 1794, Swift remarked that the United States had begun to flourish under the Constitution, and that the new government “continues to gain strength.” Nevertheless, Swift confided to Isham that he worried how it could be that in such a thriving democracy the government could be “so vilified in certain parts of the Union.” He praised the fact that the Whiskey rebellion had been put down by the militia, demonstrating that law and order could be enforced by the new government. However, Swift’s letter contained a degree of concern over whether Jacobinism would soon spread through the militias as it had among the French insurrectionists. Should that happen, Swift feared, the prospect of the people to attain prosperity would be in peril. Therefore, “every good citizen” should praise the militia and condemn the rebellion because rebellions were detrimental to the future security and prosperity of the nation. If the nation were to thrive as Swift hoped it would take a virtuous citizenry to minimize the number and strength of rebellions against the government.\(^76\)

Swift witnessed firsthand the effects of the social and political turmoil of the French Revolution. Working as secretary to Supreme Court Chief Justice Oliver Ellsworth, Swift was in Paris in 1800 just as the experiment of the Revolution had come to a close. In his letter to John Fitch of Windham dated the spring of that year, Swift expressed concern over the political situation in France. He speculated that the problem of the French Revolution was that the government it produced was incapable of actually

\(^76\) Zephaniah Swift to Joseph Isham, Jr., December 2, 1794. Connecticut State Library.
ensuring security and happiness for its citizens. He was surprised that the French people “cursed their new Republic,” and mused that they would prefer a monarchy “to their current state of misery.” While some U.S. politicians praised the Revolution from across the Atlantic, Swift saw from his stay in Paris the amount of contempt the French people had for their new, “enlightened” republic. This experience in France exacerbated his fears that a similar breakdown in government might occur in America. It also confirmed his belief that a republic whose laws and society were founded on reason and enlightenment alone could not long survive. A republic needed citizens who were capable of recognizing and participating in good governance. Like Daggett, Swift become a proponent of supporting institutions that served the purpose of instilling within people the ideals of liberty and virtue.

In typical Standing Order fashion, Swift believed that the key to the survival, growth, and prosperity of a republic depended upon the virtue of its political leaders. If the French people had a more virtuous government, then they would be more prosperous and content. For Swift, threats to liberty were more likely to be caused by the people than the elected representatives. Democracies that bent to the will of the people at all times “abound with disorder and confusion,” because people are by nature focused upon their own self-interest. As such, the people of a direct democracy will invariably “commit the most astonishing acts of cruelty and oppression” with the end result being

77 Zephaniah Swift to John Finch of Windham, CT, May 26, 1800. Connecticut State Library.
78 Of course, this republic collapsed later that year with the rise to power of Napoleon Bonaparte.
79 Swift to John Finch.
the creation of a despotic government.\textsuperscript{80} The French Revolution served as Swift’s case study for this theory, with the supposed will of the people leading to chaos, bloodshed, and the rise to power of an unelected government. In order to preserve the rights and freedoms of the people, Swift surmised that the people must be willing to submit to the authority of good leaders. In order for this to work, the people would have to elect good leaders, which they would only do if they themselves were good people. The best way to ensure this was to make sure that the state strongly supported institutions which promoted morality and liberty, such as family, schools, the military, and churches.

In light of his ideological convictions of the benefits of virtuous institutions, Swift’s defense of the ecclesiastical establishment should be understood through the lens of social welfare rather than any sort of religious zealotry. Although not a religious person himself, Zephaniah Swift supported religious establishment because he believed that the church-state union would encourage a more virtuous citizenry, thereby strengthening democracy and preventing the excesses of the French Revolution from repeating in America. Echoing the Federalist classical republican ideology, the point of religion was to “make men good citizens.”\textsuperscript{81} If religion strengthened society, then it was good policy for the government to support religion. The established church therefore could be a tool for improving and strengthening society.\textsuperscript{82} Thus, Swift’s support of a state church had less to do with promoting one Protestant denomination over another, and

\textsuperscript{81} Ibid, 141.
more to do with making sure the government supported institutions that benefited the good of the social order.

The government assistance of religious institutions was not a particularly comfortable position for Swift to support. In the last decade of the eighteenth century he authored a series of letters in the *Windham Herald* under the pseudonym “Correspondent” which opined upon a variety of topics, including Christianity and ecclesiastical societies. Some of these letters were so hostile in their tone towards the Congregational clergy that Swift had to clarify his beliefs about ministers and the ecclesiastical establishment as not to appear to be a Jacobin himself. He insisted that the clergy were very valuable and important to society as long as they were “confined within their proper sphere.” Ministers had the freedom to propagate their commands for society so long as they did not invade the “sphere” of the politicians.\(^{83}\) Therefore, the government could support ministers, but ministers should not invade the political sphere.

Swift believed that the laws of the nation were based upon general laws instilled in people by God. This position, which was more specific than grounding the basis of the law in “natural” laws, brought him into loose agreement with the religious forces in Connecticut while still remaining faithful to his theology grounded in Deism. To Swift, laws based upon God’s laws made sense because God had also instilled all of humanity with the capacity for moral reason. As people intrinsically knew the difference between

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\(^{83}\) Swift, *The Correspondent*, 52.
right and wrong, society should be governed on laws and principles based on those basic laws given by God.\textsuperscript{84}

Although ambivalent towards the clergy, especially early in his political career, Swift believed that a government infused with Christian principles was far superior to one that was influenced by another religion or no religion at all. In his preface to his \textit{Digest on the Laws of Evidence}, Swift admired the superiority of the American system of government compared to those of other nations, the difference due to “the excellent institutions of the Civil Law, and the barbarous precepts of the Koran.”\textsuperscript{85} A political establishment based upon Christianity was preferable to a government founded upon the principles of a religion such as Islam. Therefore, another benefit of state support for Christianity was that it lessened the possibility for another religious presence to take hold and corrupt the government.

Like most judges at the time, Swift had little concern with using the law to defend Christianity. As Sarah Gordon has pointed out, it was a common legal understanding in the early republic that a difference existed between religious beliefs and actions against religion. Personal religious beliefs were indeed protected under the Constitution as freedom of conscience. However, “the open vilification of religion…was an “abuse” of the right of religious liberty.” Consequently, concerning religion the courts commonly made distinctions between belief and action. Private beliefs were a form of liberty that edified the republic. Words and actions that were hostile to Christianity were by nature

\textsuperscript{84} Swift, \textit{A System of the Laws}, 6-7.
\textsuperscript{85} Zephaniah Swift, \textit{A Digest of the Law of Evidence, in Civil and Criminal Cases And a Treatise on Bills of Exchange, and Promisory Notes} (Hartford: Oliver D. Cooke, 1810), i.
licentious and caustic to the cause of religious liberty. Many judges found their justification for protecting public Christianity against those hostile to it through British understanding of religious law.

Swift never sought to invalidate the ecclesiastical tax laws because he considered that the certificate laws meant that all religions in Connecticut were treated equally. All persons were free to practice public worship, and all persons were required to pay the ecclesiastical tax to the sect of their preference. This insistence on the need to support the church through taxation stemmed from the belief that the state should support efforts that contributed to the public good, such as road construction, schools, and the military. For example, a man may choose not to join a militia in a time of war, but he would still be required to support the war effort through taxation or possibly the use of his property. Through this prism, there was no dichotomy between religious freedom and the ecclesiastical tax as all persons needed to support institutions that society deemed beneficial. Hypothetically, all religions, including Judaism and Islam, held the freedom to worship but all persons must contribute to a state-sanctioned religious institution, which would be the Congregational church unless a certificate was filed for the support of another Protestant sect.

Swift’s ideology of Connecticut’s polity towards religion was a very Republican understanding of the issue in that it was based upon a concept of democracy whereby individual citizens, rather than elected officials, determined in large part the outcome.

Whereas Dwight and Daggett argued that ecclesiastical establishments promoted the traditional order of society, Swift claimed that ultimately it was the people themselves who determined the existence of the state church. He reasoned that since the citizens of each parish voted on their minister as well as determine the amount of his salary, the community determined their own clergy; the law did not do it for them.

Ecclesiastical laws were justified on the premise that they were public, not private contracts. Unlike private contracts, a public contract between the state and the individual requires that individuals be subject to laws to which they did not necessarily agree. A citizen who disapproved of the War of 1812 still had to pay taxes which supported Connecticut’s militia engaged in the campaign. The state had the power to levy taxes to institutions, such as schools, libraries, and armies, which supported the public good. Because the Christian faith provided this benefit of morality the state legislature had the right to promote religion in order to ensure the public good. The General Assembly also held the authority to provide additional financial relief to churches if the tax support was insufficient. In many cases, this assistance, for both Congregational and dissenter churches, came about through the granting of lotteries for fundraising.

In this approach to the religious establishment, Swift readily acknowledged that the Congregationalists had no entitlement to remain as the established church. He made it clear that established ministers must understand that dissenters had the right to avoid paying taxes to Congregational parishes, and as a result the standing church may

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88 Ibid, 141-42.  
ultimately suffer or collapse entirely in favor of other denominations. If every member of a parish filed a certificate, that would be their prerogative, and in such a scenario the local ecclesiastical society “undergoes a total transformation, and a new one rises out of the ruins of the old, discharged to pay the salary of the minister.” Again, this was a very Republican approach to the issue of the ecclesiastical establishment. Democracy decided the strength and existence of the settled church. If enough people in a community were dissatisfied with the Congregational church, their recourse would not be to petition the state legislature to discontinue laws that promoted the public good, but rather they should demonstrate their dissatisfaction by filing a certificate in order to withdraw from the established church.

Taken to its logical conclusion, Christianity as a whole might one day become subjugated in favor of a religious establishment of a competing faith. Under Swift’s system, the state supported Christianity because the Christian faith was the one most practiced by the people of Connecticut. It was conceivable that perhaps if a majority population practiced a different religion, then the state would be compelled to support those religious institutions over Christian ones. While theoretically possible, Swift’s hostility towards other religions, specifically Islam, leads one to believe that he did not seriously entertain such possibilities. This democratic understanding of church establishment allowed Swift to combine his Republican ideology and his deism with his conviction that Christianity was vital for upholding the nation.

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91 Ibid, 141-42.
92 Ibid, 146.
Standing Order to logically claim the religious system in place was not intolerant of other religions because it was decided upon by the local communities.

Swift understood religious freedom as a private matter. Therefore, he could claim without any sense of deceit that in Connecticut all religions were treated equally, despite the fact that Congregationalism was clearly the favored denomination. For men like Swift, religious liberty had everything to do with the private beliefs of the individual, not the institutional relationship between the church and state. Since religion served to benefit the state, it was a foregone conclusion that the state should support religious institutions. Further, the state did not ban other Protestant sects from freely worshipping as they chose. Therefore, to Swift, because the other denominations were free to worship as they pleased, no religious persecution existed in Connecticut; the favored status of Congregationalism was irrelevant because it did not interfere with the worship of other sects. As such, the personal, “private judgment in matters of religion is completely recognized.”

The state may tell individuals that their tax money would benefit a particular denomination, but it would not tell an individual how or what to worship in private.

The importance of the right of individuals to private faith was evidenced in Swift’s understanding of the swearing of oaths in a courtroom. Swift downplayed the meaning of witnesses in a courtroom swearing a religious oath to tell the truth. In his *Digest of the Laws of Evidence*, he argued that one’s opinions of God were a private matter, and therefore no one should be forced to say whether or not they believed in God.

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when taking an oath in a courtroom. Courtroom oaths simply served as an affirmation to
tell the truth in front of the court, not to determine one’s conviction in the presence of the
Almighty. As a case in point, Swift used the Quakers as examples of persons who could
tell the truth in a court of law, but be free from taking a religious oath to confirm the
truthfulness of their testimony. Thus, in the courtroom Swift did not hold to any
standard of ecclesiastical hierarchy when it came to the credibility and character of
individuals.

After the creation of the new state constitution in 1818, Swift lamented to
Ebenezer Huntington that Republican ascension had minimized the political power of the
Federalists. The new Republican government showed favoritism to its supporters, much
as the Federalists had done when they controlled the government, by forcing Federalists
out of government appointments. Now that the shoe was on the other foot, Swift
criticized the “spirit of Party” that had taken over not only Connecticut, but the nation at
large. Like Daggett, Swift saw the divisiveness caused by political parties as a problem
of the Republicans exclusively. The “party spirit” had created a political atmosphere
whereby officials were not elected based on their perceived virtue, or standing in the
community, but based upon their loyalty to the party. Political favoritism was
detrimental to the health of the government because it meant potentially replacing a
qualified public servant with someone whose only credentials were party affiliation.
Swift’s letter to Huntington critiqued the political favoritism Swift saw in the judicial
branch, specifically a case where a Federalist was removed from a judicial post in favor

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of a son of a Republican judge. It also notes that through the Republican political victories “we begin to feel a little of the effects of toleration.” Again, this was especially true of the courts, where he believed that judges showed favoritism in court cases towards those affiliated themselves with the minor sects, making them more likely to be supportive of Republican policies and politicians.

CONCLUSION

In and of itself, the political ideology of Dwight, Daggett, and Swift was unexceptional for New England men of upper-class stature. Their significance to the study of the ecclesiastical establishment in Connecticut is their beliefs viewed from a larger perspective. Looking through a broader context, their importance to the continuation of the Standing Order’s defense of the Congregational establishment is three-fold. First, they derived their support for the state church from a variety of ideological sources, not just theological dogma or an attempt to use the church to prop up their own social positions. Dwight believed that the religious establishment was beneficial for the growth of the kingdom of God in Connecticut, but Daggett and Swift had other reasons for their support, reasons that were congruent with Dwight’s ideology. All three believed that all citizens should monetarily contribute to institutions which promoted the good of the community. In their opinion, meetinghouses and clergymen were just as important for strengthening society as schools or the military. Religious institutions instilled virtue into citizens, who in turn elected representatives who were

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96 Zephaniah Swift to Ebenezer Huntington, January 18, 1819. Connecticut Historical Society.
97 Ibid.
equally virtuous. A citizenry and government that valued the good of the republic over personal interests would create a prosperous nation.

Second, these proponents of the Standing Order did not consider their fears of Jeffersonian Republicanism to be political hysteria. They believed that the complete absence of a Standing Order in favor of a populist democracy would plunge America into ruin. Their proof for this conviction came from their bitter enemy, the French. Churches served as ideological armories, arming citizens against poisonous “Jacobian” doctrines. Consequently, they should receive government support because they protected the stability and integrity of the government.

Finally, Timothy Dwight, David Daggett, and Zephaniah Swift are vital to the study of the Standing Order because they each held prominent positions of power and influence. As a popular poet and president of Yale, Dwight spread his ideology to the masses through literature and taught it to a generation of ministers and lawyers. David Daggett held high-level political offices which gave him the forum and ability to promote his ideology and protect the state ecclesiastical system. Zephaniah Swift’s role as the state’s chief judge made any attempt at fighting the Standing Order through the legal system futile. For Daggett and Swift, their anticlerical sympathies did not prevent them from holding a commitment to the ecclesiastical establishment. As skeptics of Congregational authority, their position on the state support of religion was not about power; they could have realized greater power with a weakened clergy. Rather, their conviction rested up what they believed to be the best path for the prosperity of America. For these men, their vision of the republic was torn asunder by the Republicans. After
disestablishment, as the state continued to thrive, and churches along with it, they were able to take comfort in knowing that their efforts to build a stable society was not in vain. The local communities, the state, and the nation held together, church establishment or not.

For these leaders, and other Standing Order proponents like them, their support for the conventional social and political structures were not solely a response to the supposed threat of jacobinism. They based their political ideology in support of a church establishment upon long-standing and widely-held understandings in the English world of ideas such as liberty, virtue, and freedom. The construct of these ideas in many instances came before, and went beyond, the writings of Edmund Burke and the throes of the French Revolution. In short, the Standing Order’s commitment to the ecclesiastical establishment and the preferential treatment for the Congregationalists was born out of two ideas: First, the conviction that America was indeed a Christian nation. They shared a belief with many other Americans that Christianity permeated the social and political fabric of the nation. Second, their definition of virtue, republicanism, and benevolence, especially in the context of the new American republic, informed their advocacy of the role of religion in building a prosperous nation. It is to these ideas and how they shaped the Standing Order’s view of government support for ecclesiastical institutions that the discussion now turns.
CHAPTER THREE:

LIBERTY AND VIRTUE

With men like Timothy Dwight, David Daggett, and Zephaniah Swift at the vanguard of Connecticut politics, the effects of Thomas Jefferson’s presidential victory in 1800 were muted for the state’s Republicans and religious dissenters. In 1802, the Baptist church in the Connecticut town of Danbury, frustrated with the static ecclesiastical system, sent a letter to Jefferson asking the president for his thoughts on the proper relationship between church and state in the young republic. Although Jefferson held heterodox personal religious convictions compared with those of most Christians in Connecticut, he received the political support of many dissenters because of his commitment to religious freedom. In his famous response to the Danbury Baptists, Jefferson used the opportunity to elaborate on his theories of religious liberty, affirming his position that church establishments had no place in a free republic. In the letter, Jefferson’s argument for a “wall of separation between Church & State”\(^1\) referred not to a separation between religion and government, but rather between particular religious organizations and government. Substituting the word “church” for “religion” was a subtle but important distinction as his choice of words made clear to the Connecticut

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dissenters that the “wall” separated the federal government and ecclesiastical institutions, not religion in general.¹

Framing the argument around “church” instead of more generally “religion” revealed the importance of religion in early nineteenth century America. Many Americans agreed with the Danbury Baptists in being adamantly opposed to having either a state church or for the government to support specific denominations, as was the case in Connecticut. At the same time most Americans also strongly believed that Christianity should play a significant role in society and that it should also inform the decisions of the political class. Consequently, Jefferson’s letter was careful to please the Baptists by striking at the heart of their grievance, the establishment of the Congregational Church, without offending them by attacking or marginalizing Christianity and its perceived value to the nation.

Despite his attempts to placate the religious opinions of the Danbury Baptists, and subsequently those of many of their fellow countrymen, Thomas Jefferson’s response also revealed in part his tremendous distaste for the clergy and organized religion. Jefferson believed that the established clergy constantly attempted to subvert liberty and

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undermine the principles of a free republic.\(^2\) The letter afforded him a welcome opportunity to attack the established Congregationalists of Connecticut, his political and ideological foes. The anti-clerical tone of the Danbury letter shows why, in some measures, the Standing Order’s distrust of Jefferson was not completely unfounded.

In light of Jefferson’s feelings towards organized religion it is not all that remarkable that Connecticut’s established clergy believed that Jefferson and his supporters threatened to destroy not just their ecclesiastical system, but the influence and prominence of all clergymen regardless of denomination. This chapter will examine the Standing Order’s defense of the establishment in light of the prominence of religion in American society and the relationship between church and state in the early United States, including the contemporary understanding of the First Amendment. Further, their conceptions of virtue, liberty, and republicanism were important in forging their position on the role of religion and the government. Their ideology informed their belief that the state support of religion, and religion’s support of the state, was necessary to build virtue and morality among the American people and the national government.

**PART ONE: CHURCH AND STATE IN AMERICA**

Jefferson’s balancing act in the Danbury letter was necessary because many Americans from all walks of life considered theirs to be a Christian nation. Although never even approaching a theocracy, American society was influenced in part by the reformed-Protestant tradition. Patricia Bonomi has estimated that for the Revolutionary

generation the Puritan Calvinist tradition was the moral and religious background of at least seventy-five percent of Americans. Additionally, church attendance, if not formal membership, remained strong during this period, never falling below fifty-nine percent by a conservative estimate. The proliferation of evangelical Protestantism in the early republic also contributed to this idea that the nation was “Christian.” Despite the seemingly expanding religious diversification during the early republic most new sects were variations of Protestant Christianity. In fact, despite a proliferation of upstart sects such as the Baptists, Lutherans, and Methodists, the common evangelical nature of the vast majority of churches meant that it was in this period that “evangelically oriented Christians gained their greatest cultural hegemony… For a brief time it had seemed that four largely evangelical denominations—Separate Baptists, Methodists, Presbyterians, and Congregationalists—might gain an enduring monopoly on American Christianity.”

Americans believed that their nation was founded upon Christianity and that their faith was supported by law. John Fea notes, if “the United States was not ‘founded on the Christian religion,’ then someone forgot to tell the American people.” Examples of Christianity in the government abounded in the world of early nineteenth century

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5 John Fea, *Was America Founded as a Christian Nation?: A Historical Introduction* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2011), 4. Whereas historians such as Ellis Sandoz would most likely answer the title question in the affirmative, Fea’s work offers a very balanced approach to the topic. Of particular note to this study is Fea’s examination of the divide between the beliefs and the political goals of the Founders and those of Americans at large.
America. Whereas states like Connecticut, Massachusetts, and New Hampshire had formal legal provisions for Congregationalism specifically, other states declared Christianity the legal religion of the land in their constitutions.\(^6\) Several states maintained religious tests for political office as well as tax support for Christian institutions, and laws against blasphemy remained on the books in twelve of the original thirteen states. Christians from a multitude of denominations petitioned for chaplains in Congress, supported national fast days, and campaigned against mail delivery on Sundays. In Washington, church services met every Sunday in Supreme Court chambers, the War Department, and other executive buildings. Even the majority of public schools in the early nineteenth century were steeped in the values of Protestantism.\(^7\) Therefore, the formal church establishment of Connecticut was not such a radical institution considering what many Americans accepted from their government concerning the support of religion.

Americans in the early nineteenth century also believed that the nation’s Founders were just as religious and committed to evangelical Christianity as most of them, that they “believed in a God who controlled the world, intervened in the affairs of humankind,

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\(^6\) For example, Maryland’s constitution stated that “all persons, professing the Christian religion, are equally entitled to protection in their religious liberty.” South Carolina went a step further, declaring “The Christian Protestant religion shall be…the established religion of this State.” Documents found in *The Founding Fathers and the Debate over Religion in Revolutionary America*, eds. Matthew L. Harris and Thomas S. Kidd (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 43, 48.

and, at times, even answered prayer.”

Politicians at both the local and federal levels emphasized to their constituents that America was a nation of God. Even if most Founders did not subscribe to traditional Christian doctrine, many of them did believe that religion was important for the good of the nation. American elites such as George Washington, John Marshall, and Patrick Henry “were hardly religious zealots. They believed, as was the general consensus for centuries past, that religion was necessary for the maintenance of morality and an essential underpinning of civil society.”

Consequently, they were unafraid to lend support to Christian institutions. With many political leaders expressing a basic component of religious faith coupled with calls and support for days of prayer and fasting, it is not difficult to see why Americans in the early republic believed their leaders shared their religious convictions.

The tendency of American lawyers and jurists to incorporate English common law into the fabric of American law perpetuated the popular belief that the nation was inherently Christian as well as the idea that the government should both support and be influenced by Christianity. Philip Blumberg points out that in the new United States “the political revolution was not matched by a legal revolution… For the American lawyers and judges of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, Blackstone’s Commentaries were universally accepted as the definitive statement of the English

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While the legal system of Great Britain guarded Christian faith (in the form of the Church of England), such protection was not explicitly a part of the laws of the United States. In freedom of speech cases such as libel, slander, or blasphemy, jurists often turned to the restrictive policies of British common-law.

Nevertheless, American jurists punished those who subverted Christian principles or attacked Christianity. The English practice of criminalizing blasphemy and divisive religious speech was carried on by Americans, despite protections in the First Amendment of the Constitution. In 1824, Thomas Jefferson lamented that too often judges throughout the nation based many of their decisions, especially the enforcement of blasphemy cases, on the idea that Christianity was a part of the common law. In the early republic leading legal scholars in both Great Britain and America, including Joseph Story and Connecticut Supreme Court jurist Zephaniah Swift believed that blasphemy was a common-law crime. Charges and convictions of blasphemy were based in part on an anticipation of a possible upsetting of the social harmony within a community. Thus, the defenders of the ecclesiastical establishment in Connecticut viewed their close church and state relationship simply as an extension of formalized legal practices of affirming Christianity as an underlying basis of the law that were already implemented throughout the nation.

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The Standing Order agreed with the popular opinion that ultimately people had no real compulsion to obey temporal authority or man-made laws. Therefore, a republican government depended on religion to compel individuals to live, act, and treat each other in a civil manner. Stephen Stebbins’s 1811 election sermon before the General Assembly was bold in its declaration that Christianity should be the foundation of the republican government. His sermon focused upon the theme that “The Lord Reigneth.” The government should be obedient to the laws of God. He preached that civil leaders were more wise to the welfare of society and effective in constructing laws if they possessed a “lively sense” of their accountability to God. In fact, so prevalent was this opinion that it made its way into an accepted basis for judges in interpreting the law, even though nowhere in legal statutes of the nation was it given such a mandate. Because of this relationship between Christianity and the understanding of the law, many believed that it was necessary to make sure that a greater authority supported magistrates and laws, namely the Christian faith.

Not even the First Amendment was seen as a stumbling block to the government support of religion. In a way that is difficult to appreciate today, many Americans in the early 1800s viewed the Constitution as a document that limited the power of the federal government to interfere with state laws. As implied in the Danbury letter, although Thomas Jefferson may have sympathized with the plight of the Connecticut dissenters he did not believe that the First Amendment was the vehicle through which religious

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equality at the state level could be achieved.\textsuperscript{15} The overwhelming understanding of the First Amendment in the early republic, for politicians of either political party, was in the context of federalism. The federal government had no authority to infringe on states’ rights with regard to promoting matters of religion.\textsuperscript{16} In fact, during the Constitutional Convention the issue was raised whether or not states would have protection to continue to support religion even after the adoption of the First Amendment, where it was decided that the language of the amendment applied to the federal government only.\textsuperscript{17} Consequently, states possessed the power to promote Christianity in the manner they saw fit. As already noted, some states had religious tests for office while others had church establishments built into the language of their constitutions. Further, the Constitution did not mandate that the federal government could not lend any support to Christian institutions in general, just that it could not single out a particular denomination for special privilege. Therefore, despite the personal wishes of Jefferson, he and other


\textsuperscript{17} Peter Sylvester of New York and Benjamin Huntington of Connecticut both expressed apprehension that the language of the Amendment might ultimately hurt religion. James Madison suggested that including the word “national” in front of “religion” as to clarify the point that states would be left to their own devices on the matter. Although Madison’s suggestion was not adopted, the committee concurred with his interpretation. The Debates and Proceedings in the Congress of the United States, March 3, 1789-March 3, 1791, in \textit{The Founding Fathers: The Founding Fathers and the Debate over Religion in Revolutionary America: A History in Documents}, eds. Matthew L. Harris and Thomas S. Kidd (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 97-100.
national Republicans in the early nineteenth century were inclined to side with the Standing Order rather than Connecticut’s religious dissenters on the federalist interpretation of the First Amendment.

It was through this federalist lens of the autonomy of the state government that the Standing Order legally justified their ecclesiastical establishment as a legal right despite freedom of religion clause in the First Amendment. The First Amendment only restricted the power of Congress to make religious laws; presumably states were free to do as they pleased. Further, it was also argued that establishing religious freedom included the freedom for state governments to mandate provisions for Christian organizations. Therefore, Federalists affirmed that the First Amendment made it permissible for state legislatures to either enact or not enact ecclesiastical laws like those that were in effect in New England.  

The Standing Order even attempted to use the language of the First Amendment to claim that efforts at disestablishment actually violated their Constitutional rights. For decades those within Connecticut’s Standing Order used the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution to shield themselves from disestablishment and to politically justify the ecclesiastical establishment. In 1818 “Offended Justice” wrote in the Connecticut Journal that any law that prevented the Congregationalists from taxing their own memberships was unconstitutional because the First Amendment stated that the government shall pass no law “prohibiting the free exercise” of religion. The author

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claimed that forcing the Congregationalists to adopt the ecclesiastical methods of the dissenting sects would do exactly that: prohibiting Congregationalists from their preferred practice of taxing their members.\textsuperscript{19} The Constitution protected the Congregationalists’ ability to receive local tax support for their congregations and simultaneously provided the minor sects with liberty to preach and worship in the manner they preferred. To the defenders of the established church the standing laws made for a perfect union of religious liberty and tolerance, and any change would only serve to upset this harmonious balance.\textsuperscript{20}

Many political leaders even went so far as to concede that some sort of connection between Christianity and the government would be beneficial for the republic. Although the nation should embrace religious tolerance, an ecclesiastical establishment was necessary in the eyes of many Federalists as without it the motives of both elected officials and their supporters might become corrupted. John Witte notes that “the notion that a state and society could remain neutral and purged of any religion was, for [John] Adams, a philosophical fiction. Absent a commonly adopted set of values and beliefs, politicians would invariably hold out their private convictions as public ones.”\textsuperscript{21} One commonly understood and recognized religion would form the values and ethical boundaries that the rest of society should orbit. Therefore for the opponents of the

Standing Order to seek an end to the ecclesiastical establishment was an exercise in futility because the influence of religion upon government was not only necessary, but inevitable.

Connecticut elite Benjamin Trumbull preached that the mere possibility of a separation between church and state was a farce because laws were not morally neutral. He argued that the actions of the government and those in positions of authority either helped or hindered religion; there was no neutral position for those holding the levers of power. Similarly, Christianity could not be an indifferent force upon government and politicians. As an agent of good Christianity had an “incalculable influence” on strengthening the freedoms, liberties, and prosperity of a good government.\(^{22}\) Therefore, the government should embrace, rather than distance itself from, a connection with Christianity.

Interpretations of the First Amendment were far from the only sociopolitical issue that the Standing Order was forced to deal with in their defense of the established church. In their affinity for the notion of liberty while simultaneously defending the ecclesiastical establishment, those within the Standing Order found themselves confounded by an ideological contradiction similar to that which slaveholders faced during the Revolution. Slaveholders had to reconcile their politics and rhetoric of fighting for freedom and independence from Great Britain with the reality that their society was sustained by the forced bondage of others. In the same vein, the Standing Order had to reconcile their Revolutionary-era rhetoric of liberty and freedom with their conviction that one church

should be given a privileged status in the state, and that all taxpayers should be compelled to support select Protestant institutions. Each respective group had to justify their authoritarian policies in light of their unwavering support of liberty. In Connecticut, Republicans did not hesitate to point out the seeming hypocritical stance of the Standing Order claiming religious freedom in a state with a religious establishment. Mocking a “friend to all sects” who had written about the abundance of religious liberty in Connecticut in a Federalist paper, “Equal Rights” opined in the Register that declaring Connecticut to be a bastion of religious liberty shows “either his entire ignorance on the subject or his bigotry and prejudice… We are ourselves filled to satiety with this [defense of religious liberty], and have almost become the laughing stock of the world.”

The Standing Order countered that the religious dissenters had sided with a political party that alleged to represent freedom but in fact was led by slaveholders. Connecticut Federalist Theodore Dwight lambasted the Republicans for their hypocrisy of calling Federalists aristocrats while they defended slavery, declaring that freedom for all was best represented in New England.

The answer to their respective justifications for holding seemingly mutually-exclusive positions lies in the American conception of “freedom” in the early republic. As Francois Furstenberg has pointed out, the early nineteenth century idea of freedom was intertwined with that of autonomy. The American Revolution had “joined liberal,

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23 *Columbian Register*, March 18, 1817, p.2.
republican, and religious traditions to define freedom as autonomy, …that is, individuals’ ability to act in secular time and shape their circumstances.”

The Standing Order also had to resolve the dichotomy of their defense of religious establishment with their loathing of the Anglican establishment in England. After all, it was the demands of the Church of England that persuaded the Puritan founders of New England to seek out new places where they could freely practice their spiritual beliefs. During the American Revolution the Standing Order derided England for its establishment of the Anglican Church, yet by the early republic period they disavowed any similarities between Anglicanism and their own ecclesiastical establishments. One significant difference between the two systems was the fact that in England a loyalty oath to the Church of England was a test for political office. In Connecticut no such religious test for office existed. Further, although the Congregationalists received the majority of support from the state, they were not the sole beneficiaries of state support; other denominations received similar opportunities. By the late 1700s no denomination was persecuted by the state with regard to public worship or rights of conscience. The Standing Order therefore concluded that these differences meant that their system was completely compatible with religious freedom and had nothing in common with the “tyrannical” establishment of England. Theirs was a government that supported Christianity, not one that forced one particular creed or liturgy upon all the citizens.

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Some ministers preached that Christianity (in its Protestant form) fostered political and social liberty. At Andover Seminary, Samuel Hooker Cowles declared to the students that “Christianity, in its nature, is fitted to produce liberty.” In fact, Christianity was a key ingredient in creating a liberty-loving society. Cowles continued, “The love of freedom is indeed innate in man, but something more is necessary to qualify him to be free. This Christianity produces, and in this sense is the parent of freedom.”

This view was not unique to the Connecticut clergy, but was also held by many Americans in general, especially those who favored the Federalist Party.

Just as the government could potentially become despotic, Federalists conceded that it was possible for a state church to exceed its bounds and become tyrannical over other religious institutions. This did not mean that faith was harmful to American society. The separation between church and state, and the religious liberty that accompanied it, simply meant that the government should not interfere with the freedom of religious groups to public worship. It most certainly did not mean that religion had no place in politics or society. Prominent Federalists such as John Adams believed that religious liberty could coexist with a church establishment as long as the government did not persecute or ostracize those who practiced a dissenting religion. The Federalist preacher Samuel Taggart conceded that an irreligious nation could at the same time experience political freedom. Religion was beneficial as long as it did not impose itself too strongly, turning the nation into a theocracy. Like the government, if religion was

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kept in a proper balance with individual freedom of conscience it would serve as a
tremendous benefit to society.\textsuperscript{29}

\textbf{PART TWO: VIRTUE AND REPUBLICANISM IN THE EARLY REPUBLIC}

Despite the fact that most Americans believed that their nation was Christian, that the First Amendment did not impede state church establishments, and that the legal system seemed to support Christianity, the Standing Order was forced to face both sides of a dilemma in their support of a church establishment. In the era of Jeffersonian America, they had to reconcile the problem of \textit{establishment} in an age of democracy and freedom. At the same time, through the ideological perspective of the larger Atlantic world they were also trying to solve the problem of \textit{freedom} in an age of establishment, as many European governments existed with a state church. The ideas of freedom and establishment were interconnected: religious establishment had to be defended in a democratic age while simultaneously incorporating a mode of religious freedom in a European age where such a liberty generally did not exist.

The new federal American government radically broke from the European model by foregoing a church establishment. The success of the American experiment was still very much in doubt in the early republic period. For many Federalists, abandoning the social and political stability that churches provided seemed to be an unnecessary risk for a nation in the beginning of an untried republican system of government. Minister

Nathan Perkins acknowledged that a separation between church and state, unparalleled in most Western governments, was a bold experiment and might indeed result in the collapse of religious devotion. Only time would render the verdict on the future of Christianity in America. The Standing Order feared the possible consequences of the American social and political fabric being woven without government support for religion as part of the material.

The Standing Order was adamant in their conviction that the American experiment of representative democracy depended upon the virtue of its citizens and government. Their justification began with their understanding and application of the ideas of virtue and republicanism. Connotations of virtue abounded, and multiple variations of the term were not necessarily mutually exclusive. How one thought of virtue could determine in part one’s political affiliation as its definition became an especially contested term among the nation’s political factions. The various meanings of virtue are important to understand in order to appreciate how the Standing Order justified the ecclesiastical establishment in an increasingly democratic age.

In the context of both the Revolutionary era and the early republic, virtue was intertwined with the idea of liberty. Virtue meant both the requirement to expel corruption and the need for individuals to seek their independence from tyranny and to prosperity. Without the requisite virtue to defend and promote freedom, a citizenry would find itself the victims of tyranny and slavery. In essence, virtue worked to resist corruption and oppression, actions which would result in freedom for the people. Ideas

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of freedom and slavery also became connected with the republican concept of virtue. It is with this intellectual framework that the ideological architects of the American Revolution were able to claim that their position with England was one of a slave as continuing to accept their oppression by Parliament meant that they were in the position of slaves. Resisting their “captivity,” fighting for their independence, even at the cost of their lives, was the virtuous course of action. 31 This understanding of virtue was reemployed in the prelude to the War of 1812, when congressional War Hawks bellowed that if the nation allowed the British to continue their trade policies and impressments practices upon American merchants without any resistance than they had become “slaves.” 32

In addition to the connection with liberty and slavery, many Americans also understood virtue to mean their moral superiority and their passion for bestowing generosity upon their fellow countrymen. American faith in these virtues was also important during the war for independence. Many Americans believed that these character traits would ultimately give them the advantage against the British and Hessian soldiers. 33 As Americans credited those traits for their victory, so they believed that they were also necessary for forging a new government based in liberty and the rule of the people.

31 The political language of slavery was employed by both Northerners and Southerners during the Revolutionary era. However, it was in the American South that the connotations of political slavery “glowed especially brightly among a people who owned slaves.” William J. Cooper, Jr., Liberty and Slavery: Southern Politics to 1860 (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1983), 30-31.
For many New Englanders, especially Congregationalists, their impression of virtue was also shaped by their Puritan heritage. The republican connotations of virtue as working for the social good were amplified by the Puritan notion that a benevolent lifestyle was an affirmation of genuine Christianity. Sociologist Robert Bellah observed that the early New England colonists “were certain that if we should decline in piety and public virtue, we would meet the inexorable fate of the nations which are but dust in the hands of God.”34 Although in the Calvinist dogma deeds alone could not bring an individual to eternal salvation, good works could serve as proof that a person was indeed one of God’s elect.

Conversely, the actions and lifestyle of those who were deemed reprobates, or who were bankrupt or dependent, demonstrated that they were outside of God’s salvation. Thus, social and economic prosperity was a sign of virtue and salvation while degradation was the product of sin and a sign of separation from God.35 A person who acted in a virtuous manner could have assurance of their eternal security as well as the confidence of others that they were in good standing with the divine. Consequently, the Calvinism of the Connecticut Congregationalists lent itself well to the idea that people working diligently for the good of the community was an act of virtue.

It was this faith in the ability to foster a society in which people acted with disinterested benevolence for greater social good that was part of the prominent understanding of virtue. While later in the antebellum period the word took on the

34 Quoted in Murray, *Religious Liberty in America*, 51.
connotation of purity and innocence, in the early national period it was still largely associated with the idea of individuals behaving disinterestedly for the benefit of society. That is, the ability of people to care for one another and their society without personal ambition or selfish motivation behind the action. This was based upon the Scottish Common Sense philosophy, from which Jonathan Edwards and other New Lights of the Great Awakening, as well as political leaders of the American Revolution, derived their moral philosophies. It was a spirit of public service that “transcended the passions” and promoted freedom and social well-being.\(^{36}\) Virtue incorporated morality, resisting corruption, and benevolent disinterest, but its meaning went further still. It was not only a synonym for disinterested benevolence, but it also implied the ability of people to overcome their circumstances and be active agents in shaping the course of history.\(^{37}\)

In his influential theological treatise, *Theology, Explained and Defended*, Timothy Dwight observed that while benevolence must be disinterested, it did not mean that the one performing the kind act could not take satisfaction in it, stating that benevolence is “The love of doing good, or a disposition to produce happiness.”\(^{38}\) One of Dwight’s students recorded the president’s thoughts on the subject of virtuous and benevolent acts during an 1807 discussion on the question, “Is there any disinterested benevolence?”

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38 Timothy Dwight, *Theology, Explained and Defended* (London: Thomas Tegg and Son, 1817), 429.
Dwight instructed the students that there was a distinction between uninterested and disinterested benevolence. Uninterested benevolence was a fallacy, as “Whenever anything on which our own happiness or misery is involved…it is impossible that we should feel unconcerned.” Using a Revolutionary analogy, Dwight explained to the students “A Patriot, who yields up his fortune or life for his country, is disinterested, but not unconcerned.” An editorial in the *Connecticut Herald* supported Dwight’s teaching, stating that “Virtue or the love of doing good is but another name for happiness.” Thus, disinterested benevolence involved doing good without self-interest as a motivating factor, while still allowing personal satisfaction for acts of compassion.

Defenders of Connecticut’s religious establishment embraced an idea of American virtue in this sense. Standing Order minister Chauncey Lee concluded that seeking the welfare of all people – disinterested benevolence – was the “only genuine patriotism” in America. In 1809, an editorial in the *Litchfield Gazette* labeled support for the republic to be a benevolent act. One letter to the *Courant* in 1816 marveled at the “active benevolence” of Christians in the area. In that same year the General Convention of the state legislature recognized an increase in privately-established religious and social institutions as a testimony to the benevolent nature of the people. Perhaps the greatest application of the Edwardsean idea of disinterested benevolence was in the strong support given to the Congregational missionary societies. Congregationalists in Connecticut

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39 Notes taken from *Observances Made by Dr. Dwight in the Senior’s Recitation Room, Yale College, 1806-1807*, Dwight Family Papers, Series II, Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University Library.


were instrumental in establishing these societies as their theology of disinterested benevolence coupled with their optimistic millennial eschatology fueled their zeal for the expansion of their brand of Calvinism. Further, throughout the early nineteenth century the General Association of Congregational Churches in Connecticut affirmed an increased interest in public benevolence. Even some religious dissenters agreed that disinterested benevolence was a valuable asset to the Connecticut system. They disagreed, however, on whether or not the “steady habits” of the Standing Order were essential in order to maintain benevolence in society.

Some leaders of the Revolutionary generation, influenced by Enlightenment rationalism, had faith in the potential of humans to better themselves and the world around them on their own efforts, without the need for divine support. Consequently, by the second decade of the nineteenth century the prominent American definition of virtue became something else entirely. Republican-promoted beliefs in progress, personal independence, and natural rights framed the idea of virtue squarely into ethical terms. During and after the Revolution, republican thought in America was centered upon the concept that humans were perfectly capable to “dominate history, tame the chaotic, centrifugal force of fortune, and bend circumstances to their will.” As a result, virtue “no longer derived from the structured forms of government but from the inner convictions of


man. This new attitude toward virtue required nonpolitical institutions for its cultivation.”

Following the Revolution, architects of the new nation’s government fought between a republic based upon the ideals of liberalism and one grounded upon classical republicanism. Political discourse in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries revolved largely around the ideas of religion and republicanism. “Republican” and “republicanism” were terms used ambiguously in early America. Despite variations in meaning the ideas were important in the political discourse of the time. In a classical sense, republicanism referred to a system that checked the powers of the government, but also restricted the possibility of unfettered popular democracy. It also placed the good of the community over that of the individual, emphasizing respect for the law and patriotic sacrifice. In its more liberal understanding, one that was more applicable to those in the emerging Republican Party in the early United States, the term carried the ideas of liberty and virtue, but also the importance of the freedom of the individual. Both of these meanings were employed in the public discourse of the early 1800s.

When it came to the importance of civic virtue and classical republicanism, Connecticut’s Standing Order was in ideological agreement with many of the nation’s Founders. The architects of the American republic were not completely Lockean liberals,

46 Joyce O. Appleby, *Liberalism and Republicanism in the Historical Imagination* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992), 322. Appleby provides an excellent historiographical essay on how republicanism has been studied by historians. Another such essay is offered by Mark Noll in *America’s God*.
but rather many of them expressed a concern for civic-mindedness. The virtue of classical republicanism – that of a disinterested, unselfish concern for the public welfare – was prevalent among many American elites in the late eighteenth century. Political leaders “understood that a liberal polity, like virtually any other, required a ‘virtuous’ citizenry if it were to endure… Both Federalists and Anti-Federalists concerned themselves with the problem of fostering a sentiment of allegiance from which a disposition to undertake civic duties would emerge.” The Standing Order of the New England states shared these same concerns.

The liberal perspective of virtue was embraced most notably by Thomas Jefferson, who mocked the classical republican ideal that citizens had fewer rights as individuals than they did as a community. Republicans who shared this perspective, particularly Southerners, focused upon the primacy of the inherent rights of individuals as well as the individual’s right to act out of motivation of his own self-interest. People would respect and love their country more if the government respected their individual rights. Accomplishing this goal meant limiting the government to the point where individuals possessed the freedom to act in their own interests.

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Nevertheless, in its Jeffersonian context liberalism did contain a component of a disinterested civic virtue. In Jefferson’s vision, a nation comprised of farmers would sustain a free and independent government because the people would not be reliant upon others for their survival or livelihood, and as a result they would be ultimately incorruptible. Thus, even the independent farmer made good decisions for the public polity precisely because his independence meant that he was impartial in making decisions that affected the community or the government. His independent status minimized any selfish ambition that might hurt the community.

The classical republicanism ideology of Federalists and those within the Standing Order held that citizens in a republic had a duty to seek the public good above their own personal desires. Individuals were supposed to be citizens first, with their primary duty to that of the greater community. In this sense, the person who only focused on self-interests was an “incomplete” person; one’s full potential as an individual could only be realized by behaving as a citizen. In turn, citizens gave identity to their republic by working for the good of the community, engaging in activities such as participating in assemblies, holding politicians accountable, and defending good leaders. All citizens must be political in nature if they are truly virtuous people. By placing the good of the society over their own ambitions, participation in civic affairs requires citizens to take

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into account the good of others, the community, and the state. Consequently, following after individual interests primarily was seen as being incompatible with the preservation of a free and just society.52

The Standing Order ministers often espoused the classical republican idea that individuals had obligations to their communities; duty to the community superseded individual desires. To this end it was imperative for one to be economically and socially productive, “that he may not be burdensome to the rest of the community.” In addition to looking after the welfare of the public good, individuals should obey the biblical command to “love mercy and to do justly,” which would facilitate a desire to care for the social good. Whoever neglected his obligations to support the government or his community was forced to answer for it “to their neighbor, to his country, and to his family,” but most especially, he was held accountable to God for this sin of omission. To be a truly religious person, therefore, meant to live with humility, show benevolence and compassion towards the poor, and demonstrate respect and humanity to all persons.53

Some historians such as Gordon Wood have popularized the thesis that the propagation of conservative ideas of virtue and the morality promoted in the revivals of the Second Great Awakening were exercises in social control. This thesis holds that the moralizing artisans, merchants, and elites – those who had the largest stake in the

economy and the need for reliable workers – promoted virtue and morality in order to control the lower classes and ensure prosperity for themselves.\textsuperscript{54}

However, such a thesis ignores the ideological impact of the Congregational clergy and their Calvinist worldview. In the reformed-Protestant mindset, morality, virtue and benevolence were the foundations of republican government and Christianity was the source of this fountain of fostering a good civil society in a world in which humanity was by nature selfish and sinful. Within this context, the Standing Order was a proponent of social control, just in a far different manner than some historians contend. If, as the Calvinist theology contended, people were, by their very nature sinful and disobedient then it was the duty of a virtuous republican government to bring order to society. This was done through promoting virtue and morality, especially in a religious context, in the citizenry and the political class.\textsuperscript{55} Consequently, many clergy had few reservations about preaching such values in political sermons and special services, even if such participation made them vulnerable to charges of being dupes for the Federalist Party.\textsuperscript{56} In their view government needed to actively promote Christian virtues and not simply claim authority based on a nebulous conception of “natural rights.”

\textsuperscript{54} Wood, The Rising Glory of America, 15. See also Wood, Empire of Liberty, 602. Wood offers no citations in his claim that Timothy Dwight used revivals to control social disorder. For a refutation of this position, see Conrad Edick Wright, The Transformation of Charity in Postrevolutionary New England (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1992), esp. pgs. 207-08, which rejects the social control thesis from the point of view of the growth of volunteer and charity societies. Wright sees the social aspect of the charity societies as “altruism,” not social control. Neither does he swing the pendulum too far the other way, claiming that neither were the charity societies all about evangelical teachings.

\textsuperscript{55} Carl Edward Skeen, 1816: America Rising (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2003), 189.

Within the classical republican context the possibility existed for virtue and liberty to contradict each other. The former focused on the good of the whole, while the latter focused on the rights of the individual. Revolutionary heroes such as Benjamin Rush often made a distinction between virtue and liberty with the result being that the ideas were sometimes contradictory. For the good of their nation, in some instances people needed to place virtue (promoting the public good) ahead of their personal liberties (their individual freedoms and interests).\(^{57}\)

In post-Revolutionary America, liberalism as promoted by Jeffersonian-Republicans had begun to swallow up the classical republican ideals. The liberal ideology that developed in the early United States ran counter to the classical ideas of republicanism.\(^{58}\) Whereas the classical model exalted temperance, sobriety, and loyalty to the community over the self, liberalism valued progress, self-interest, and independence from traditional sources of authority as a means toward building a strong republic. It also celebrated individuality, self-improvement, and privacy.\(^{59}\) In the young United States the connotations of virtue and republicanism veered further and further away from the moorings of traditional classical republicanism and towards the Republican vision of a republic based on liberal ideology.\(^{60}\)

The difference between the Federalist and the Republican conceptions of virtue were of no small matter in the early national period. Virtue was not merely an important


\(^{58}\) As Donald Swift has noted, many freemen began to doubt the classical republican virtues when it seemingly failed the nation during the years of the Articles of Confederation. Swift, *Religion and the American Experience*, 24.

\(^{59}\) Dotts, *The Political Education of Democratus*, 165.

component for the stability of a republic, but “it was said to be the glue of republics.” Through civic virtue, morally upright Americans would presumably sow prosperity for the American republic as a whole. Although the classical republican and liberal ideas of virtue shared some of the same value of a moral and just citizenry, the means by which each sought to produce a virtuous republic ultimately were incompatible. In liberalism, good government began with a free people. In the classical republican sense civic virtue stemming from the government made individuals good citizens.

Connecticut’s establishment certainly held to a more classical republican ideology than did many Republican clergymen. The liberal ideas of virtue coupled with jarring social changes, such as the softening of deference to a social hierarchy and lessening reliance on formal institutions for guidance, were too much for them to accept. The established clergy upheld the idea in the social good being more virtuous than the individual good as it was more in line with their Calvinist theology. For Connecticut’s Standing Order, associating virtue with self-interest and personal autonomy was detrimental to the nation. As clergyman and Princeton University president John Witherspoon stated, virtue could never be separated from religion because knowing the characteristics of virtue meant knowing the characteristics and will of God.

Ironically, the emerging liberal ethos in America that stressed individualism and personal independence gave the Standing Order an additional argument in their defense of state-supported religion. Under the law all Protestant denominations had permission to

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63 Ibid, 166.
levy their own ecclesiastical taxes, and taxpayers could obtain a certificate to be exempt from the religious taxes. In this legal structure, the Standing Order claimed that all denominations in Connecticut had religious freedom. They all had the freedom (autonomy) to levy their own taxes, or use their freedom to rely on voluntary contributions from their memberships. No one who belonged to another denomination was compelled to financially support the Congregationalists; they had their own autonomy.

No region of the nation exemplified a classical republicanism ideology of a nation governed by virtuous leaders during the early Republic more than New England. Connecticut in particular strove to promote an ideology, which had preserved the state’s existing Federalist polity, in which “an elite of virtuous statesmen rules through patriotic consensus rather than self-seeking competition.” During the early national period Connecticut’s Standing Order sought to connect their reemphasis of civic virtue based upon a “corporate social ethic” rooted in local communities with the nation’s evolving social norms that minimized the importance of class and wealth in determining power and influence. Their ideology therefore had to be reconciled with the increased importance of individualism. It was between these two worlds of the social compact and the autonomy of the individual that the clerics of the Standing Order tried to defend their privileged position in the state. Their solution was to ensure the lasting stability of the

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64 Conforti, *Imagining New England*, 81. Conforti argues that “the descendants of the Puritans in the early republic often trafficked in the politics of virtue as if they had cornered the market.”
republic by seeking to ensure that America would be comprised of a citizenry and a political class committed to the Standing Order ideas of virtue.

PART THREE: CREATING A VIRTUOUS REPUBLIC

In their letter to Thomas Jefferson the Danbury Baptists complained that “what religious privileges we enjoy (as a minor part of the State) we enjoy as favors granted, and not as unalienable rights.” Of course, the Standing Order, with their ideology of virtue firmly grounded in a classical republican context, would have argued that commitment to the larger community superseded individual or minority “privileges.” Connecticut’s established clergy used the opportunities given to them at public events to exhort the commitment to building a virtuous republic over following individual pursuits. They described how virtue was to be applied in the infant nation. First, America needed a virtuous citizenry. The Standing Order believed that a virtuous citizenry was paramount for the survival of a republic because they insulated the republic from violent uprisings, revolution, and anarchy. Second, this virtuous citizenry would naturally elect virtuous political leaders who would build and strengthen a virtuous government. Finally, institutions that transmitted moral values, such as family, churches, and schools, were essential to foster this sense of virtue throughout the nation, as the values of classical republican virtue needed to be instilled within the people.

67 Danbury (Conn.) Baptist Association, Minutes of the Danbury Baptist Association: Holden at Colebrook, October 7 and 8, 1801: Together with Their Circular and Corresponding Letters (Hartford, 1801).
The ministers of the Standing Order wrestled with the dichotomy of a nation whose citizens prized liberty and independence with the willingness to submit to law and order which was vital to promote security and happiness. Their solution was to make sure that the virtues of classical republicanism, ultimately found in Christianity, were imparted within the American people. Congregational ministers joined Timothy Dwight in the belief that a virtuous citizenry was essential for a stable and prosperous republican government. Matthias Burnett preached to the General Assembly that so long as the great majority of people adhered to the Protestant values of sobriety, industry, and stability, society would thrive.68

Established clergymen Nathan Perkins preached that virtue among the people was pivotal to the stability of the government because a virtuous people would be inclined to obey good laws. To this end, Christian piety and morality were the keys to national happiness and prosperity because they promoted the highest form of virtue. Perkins defined “piety” as expressing love for God, and “morality” and displaying love towards others. These twin traits of loving God and others promoted the highest forms of virtue in individuals which in turn would create a stable government. As long as people were well-educated in Christian virtues, a free government would be able to stand.69

For many of Connecticut’s clergy, both established and dissenting, Christian morality strengthened society by transforming the lives of individuals as they accepted and lived out the truth claims of the faith. Religious belief may be acceptable as a strictly

68 Matthias Burnett, An Election Sermon, Preached at Hartford, on the Day of the Anniversary Election, May 12, 1803 (Hartford: Hudson and Goodwin, 1803), 18.
private affair between individuals and God, but the expression of faith should be public. Christian virtue had to improve the lives of individuals if it was to be effective at compelling them to be good citizens. Many clergymen preached that there was an almost unbreakable connection between virtue and the work of God in a person’s life. The Republican-supporting Presbyterian minister Elijah Waterman preached that true virtue required a Christian impulse. He warned against the “impropriety…in talking to a depraved and corrupt human heart, about the amiableness of virtue and the moral fitness of things, while you leave out the agency of God.”

For Timothy Dwight, religious duty—actively engaging in spiritual, moral, and charitable endeavors—was paramount in the life of a Christian. Mere agreement with a particular theological point was insufficient for attaining the assurance of salvation. The individual must demonstrate the fruits of a regenerate life in the way he or she lived. Virtue needed to be demonstrated externally instead of simply being believed internally.

The importance of religious activity in the reformed-Protestant tradition lent many Congregationalists towards supporting the ecclesiastical establishment. Christian morality and piety should overflow from internal beliefs of individuals into social actions, which in turn should positively affect the local community and the government. As Nathan Perkins stated, religious institutions needed state support because through them people improved their personal character, their government, and worked towards the general well-being of the community. Religious action strengthened the relationship

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between the individual and God, and it also benefited the relationship between individuals and their community. In this paradigm, the Puritan emphasis of personal introspection was the center of one’s relationship to God. Christians should constantly examine themselves in order to make sure that their hearts were free from pride and other vices, and that they strove to improve their own personal morality and benevolence. Consequently, religious conviction must transform the external actions of a person. This should make the individual more moral, an upstanding citizen, and an example of virtue to the community. In this way people would be assured of their love for Christ and continue to demonstrate that love in their interpersonal relationships and their interaction with the society at large, strengthening their own character and their community.

Timothy Dwight taught that citizens had a God-given command to civic responsibility. However, people must be taught to choose morality, duty, and virtue over sin and selfishness because the great stumbling block to building a godly society was the sin of pride. Through religious introspection and reflection, pride could be eliminated. This was an important point because, to Dwight, pride was the root of separation from God, and a people in rebellion to God were a detriment to the stability of the republic. Individuals ultimately would only choose these if they were converted to Christianity. Thus, Dwight communicated that building Christian faith among Americans was a necessary, active agent in building a virtuous citizenry.

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The Standing Order’s commitment to supporting missionary societies reflected their devotion to promoting Christian virtue as a way to stabilize society by building a “civilized” society on the western frontier. They viewed missionary work to settlers in the western territories as a means to transmit moral values and a sense of virtue in a frontier populace that threatened to lose its sense of civility living in the wilderness of untamed nature and a “savage” native community. Consequently, the Connecticut state legislature issued in 1798 an Act for the Support of Missionaries to disseminate Christianity to western settlers “in order therefore to preserve those habits of Vertue [sic], which have distinguished the People of the State…as a necessary means of perpetrating social Order…”

If America continued to be a nation that celebrated freedom and liberty, then the Standing Order was intent on using religious means to spread virtue among the expanding population.

Just as they believed that Christianity would promote virtue in white citizens, so too the established Congregationalists encouraged efforts at evangelism and education for slaves in order to prepare them to lead virtuous Christian lives once their emancipation would, hopefully, be secured. In a 1791 election sermon, Timothy Dwight preached, “The negroes of Africa, whose injuries exceed computation, conception, or credulity, behold the day-star of liberty, rising on the gloomy, and desperate religion of slavery… Societies, associations, and plans, are forming for the purpose of destroying this scion of

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infernal policy.” In the 1790s a benevolent society of Congregational ministers, including Dwight, stated their intention to educate and train African Americans for “honest employment.” The goal of Congregationalists to build virtue in slaves through education and Christianity persevered into the nineteenth century. Almost two decades later, in their annual meeting in 1818, the General Association of Congregational Churches in Connecticut lauded the Presbyterians for their efforts in encouraging slaveholders to allow their slaves to hear the Christian gospel. The Association hoped that biblical knowledge would be of great benefit for the slaves upon the day of their emancipation.

For the Standing Order, the virtue of the people was the foundation of a free government. Leaders could only be as good, wise, and virtuous as the citizenry that elected them and submitted to their authority. Therefore, a virtuous citizenry was vital for the development of the republic. Institutions like churches and schools were significant ways to achieve that type of populace. Virtuous people who elected virtuous rulers would produce a flourishing republic. Without public virtue, a republican government existed in name only. The people were the “fountain” of liberty and

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75 Timothy Dwight, Oration Before the Society of the Cincinnati, July 4, 1972 (Hartford, 1792), 16. Connecticut’s Standing Order began the process of abolishing slavery within its borders in 1784 by instituting a plan for gradual emancipation.
76 Essig, “Connecticut Ministers and Slavery,” 38. Essig notes that no evidence exists from the meeting of the society that efforts at training and education for slaves went beyond offering moral support for other antislavery organizations.
77 Congregational Churches, Proceedings of the General Association, 1818, 16. Of course, Congregationalists were not the only Christian sect that opposed slavery. While virtually every denomination had both supporters and opponents of slavery within its ranks the Quakers were notorious for their abolitionist position. See Joseph Ellis, Founding Brothers: The Revolutionary Generation (New York: Vintage Books, 2002), 81-90.
prosperity. Magistrates were therefore only as “pure” as the fountain from which their authority came. The virtuous people of Connecticut, the ministers preached, had preserved a government of good, capable leaders in the Standing Order, thereby protecting the prosperity and morality of the communities therein. It therefore “will be the devout wish and earnest prayer for every wise and virtuous citizen” that the people will continue to have Standing Order candidates for whom to vote against the Republicans.

The political philosophy of the Standing Order placed a premium upon the need for virtuous leaders. Individuals must be obedient to civil authority, something they would be more inclined to do if civil authority were founded on Christianity. A government that adhered to this foundation would naturally seek the “greatest general good” for its citizens. The elected officials – “rulers,” as the clergy and other Federalists often labeled them – needed to be active practitioners of Christianity in order for them to govern effectively. The conviction of the Standing Order ministers that rulers must be virtuous was not simply a ploy to encourage voters to continue to vote for Federalists. Nor was it an idea that was born primarily from their Calvinist theology. It came largely in part from the eighteenth century belief that no free republic or commonwealth could survive without the confidence in the people towards the character and virtue of its officials. The stability of the government rested not only on good laws and wise judges, but also upon the personal character of those in charge. If rulers could not be trusted, if

80 Moses Welch, An Excellent Spirit Forms the Character of a Good Ruler…, May 14, 1812 (Hartford: Hudson and Goodwin, 1812), 29.
they seemed to value their own self-interest over the concerns of their constituents, then the strength of the government would invariably erode.  

If Christianity and prosperity were linked as the ministers of the Standing Order believed that they were, then it only prioritized the need for people to make sure that their rulers were also pious Christians, as they were the ones who made and enforced the laws. Like other Standing Order ministers, Asahel Hooker clearly stated that sanctified legislation was only possible if a pious citizenry, filled with the fear of God, elected godly representatives. When casting their votes, “those who expect to give an account with God” will, by the leading of their conscience and inspiration from the Almighty, “choose men of wisdom, ability, and integrity, who practically acknowledge the God, who is above.”

Good Christian people elected good Christian rulers, who made good Christian laws. This equation necessitated public support for religion in order to ensure its truthfulness. The established clergy preached that Christian leaders were more trustworthy. People “confide in [rulers] because we believe [they] will take council of the Lord.” It would be of little consequence to build a pious citizenry in Connecticut if the leaders undermined their benevolence with deceit and despotism. Thus, it was “of vast importance” for the prosperity of the state that the citizens of Connecticut elected

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82 Wood, Empire of Liberty, 203.
83 Dan Huntington, The Love of Jerusalem, the Prosperity of a People…., May 12, 1814 (Hartford: Hudson and Goodwin, 1814), 10.
84 Asahel Hooker, The Moral Tendency of Man’s Accountableness to God…., May 5, 1805 (Hartford: Hudson and Goodwin, 1805), 19.
85 Diodate Brockway, A Sermon, Preached at Hartford Before the Honorable General Assembly…., May 11, 1815 (Hartford: Hudson and Goodwin, 1815), 28.
pious leaders to office, as “Nothing but piety in rulers gives proper security, for fidelity to the interests of human society; much less to those of the church.”

In the reformed-Protestant tradition of the Puritan Congregationalists, the government was derived from God therefore it followed that God commissioned the rulers to their stations. Because their authority was delegated from God, it was imperative that they have knowledge of, concern for, and desire to follow His commands. Therefore, it was up to the people to not only elect virtuous leaders, but also to support them once they got into office because the government rulers were agents of God in the world. In an election sermon in 1810, a Congregational minister went so far as to claim that the civil representatives in the state were the equivalent of ministers of God, promoting piety and virtue. He boasted that they are “Gods among men. In this world they are the highest order of beings.” Because leaders were essentially “ministers of good,” their model should be the source of all goodness, namely God Himself.

It was important to the clergy for politicians to actively practice Christian virtues because they believed that a Christian foundation would guide and instruct the rulers as to how to best govern the people. Magistrates, judges, and legislative representatives must be morally upright and religiously pious in order to ensure that the government would be just. Only pious leaders had the capability to ensure the political and economic security of the people. Leaders who governed out of “Christian benevolence” would produce peace and harmony in society. Therefore, the clergy sometimes referred to the

88 *Connecticut Courant*, June 27, 1810, p. 2.
government officials as “nursing fathers,” forming a nurturing bond with religious institutions to educate people to help build a better society.\textsuperscript{91}

Government officials had a duty to put the good of the public over their own ambitions. Civic virtue in a political leader meant that he would not “seek the good of a single friend, or a few favored individuals, to the exclusion of all the rest of the community.”\textsuperscript{92} In an 1801 sermon Benjamin Trumbull declared that because the difficulties of government greatly taxed the character of elected official it was “of the highest importance” that civil leaders displayed “piety, knowledge, prudence, fortitude and magnanimity.”\textsuperscript{93} To the clergy these traits were not going to be evidenced in all leaders. Those rulers who were devoted to the Christian faith who would best promote those virtues that benefited all of society.

Asahel Hooker joined the chorus of established ministers in declaring that the best rulers were those who devout Christians, concerned with the will of God. Leaders who “believe themselves accountable to a righteous God, for all their official, as well as private conduct,…will doubtless act accordingly.” As such, the civil leaders will see themselves as “God’s ministers, invested with power and authority, derived from him.” Consequently, pious legislatures would invariably create laws which “harmonize” with “the perfect laws of heaven.” In the same vein, religious judges would interpret the laws

\textsuperscript{91} Welch, \textit{An Excellent Spirit}, 22; The “nursing fathers” metaphor originated with John Calvin. The established clergy in America used this metaphor throughout the colonial and early republic periods. Hutson, \textit{Forgotten Features of the Founding}, 45-62.

\textsuperscript{92} Ibid, 13.

\textsuperscript{93} Trumbull, \textit{The Dignity of Man}, 7.
and make rulings that conform to God’s standards for morality and ethics, thereby leading towards a better society.⁹⁴

It was insufficient for magistrates to simply profess Christianity or affirm religious principles; they needed to be pious themselves. Therefore, the established clergy largely agreed with the Republicans in opposing religious tests or oaths as prerequisites for taking a political office. Religious tests in and of themselves simply brought about an “empty profession of religion” and proved nothing as to the actual spiritual condition of the individual.⁹⁵ One reason that religious tests proved nothing was because an irreligious leader could not be trusted to tell the truth. As an editorial in the Connecticut Courant stated, “The national constitution requires no religious test, as a qualification for any office… It was judged [that tests were unreliable], because an atheist can be under no tie of conscience.”⁹⁶

Truly pious leaders would not persecute or stifle the religious liberty of other religious individuals. Nathan Perkins preached that civil rulers should be pious Christians, but part of that piety meant not persecuting dissenting churches. Magistrates should instead work to promote and protect the freedom of conscience and show toleration for all religions that do not threaten to undermine the government. Thus, the civil ruler demonstrated his piety not by promoting one religion, or sect, above another, but through his own personal example by his actions.⁹⁷ If the official exercised faith in

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⁹⁴ Hooker, The Moral Tendency of Man, 17.
⁹⁵ Huntington, The Love of Jerusalem, 30.
⁹⁶ Connecticut Courant, August 18, 1800.
this capacity, the established clergy surmised, the minor sects had nothing to fear about possible intolerance towards their religious beliefs.

Not only were Christian leaders the safest bet in order to build a good society, but some Standing Order ministers went so far as to preach that Christian piety itself was a delineating mark between good and bad leaders. In his 1812 sermon on the virtue of rulers, Moses Welch dismissed the idea that the irreligious were able to be competent leaders, claiming that a “government of infidels, never did, never can, prosper.” To some ministers, distinguishing between a truly benevolent leader and one who feigned piety for the sake of securing power could be extremely difficult. Claiming concern for God and society while in reality engaging in selfishness and corruption was a hypocrisy and “inconstancy and guilt” more prevalent in the human condition than any other vice.

In his 1816 Anniversary Election sermon, Abel Flint warned his audience about the consequences of electing irreligious officials. Such rulers would have no “higher” moral foundation to guide them. They were career politicians who cared for nothing except their chances for reelection, a focus that would lead them astray from enacting laws that benefited the whole community and not just their ability to remain in office. More worrisome, without Christian morality to guide them irreligious leaders would “wink at transgressions” and “become a friend of the wicked.” In 1815 the Connecticut Evangelical Magazine observed that “heathen” legislators used religion in

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100 Abel Flint, *A Sermon, Preached at the Anniversary Election*, May 9, 1816 (Hartford: Goodwin and Sons, 1816), 10.
order to subject people to their legal and social obligations. Thus, it was imperative that citizens elected only Christian leaders, for only they had the moral basis to serve the good interests of the community. This mentality represented classical republicanism in its finest. The irreligious man, in his liberalism, would only serve himself, thereby damaging the community. Conversely, the Christian ruler, concerned primarily about the concerns of God, would strive to sacrificially serve the needs of the community over his own interests.

Stephen Stebbins took a subtle swipe at the theology of deism purportedly believed by prominent Republicans by preaching about the “vain philosophy” which “ascribed to nature and to second causes” the physical and moral laws of the world. To Stebbins, deism revealed the unreasonableness of its proponents, as it was obvious that God had created every intricate and minute aspect of the universe. Those who would not give God his credit for creation, nor submit to his laws, had no business governing over a town, state, or nation. Nathan Perkins preached that, “Perhaps no position is more dangerous to FREE STATES, than that men who feel no moral ties, fear not God…who are awfully vicious in life, will make good rulers, judges, and legislators.”

Republicans and other dissenters also used the term “rulers” to describe Connecticut’s political elite, but they used it as a slander. Federalists interpreted such sarcasm as disrespect for authority. They claimed that Republicanism was dangerous for the stability of society because its followers mocked and ridiculed those who had been

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101 Connecticut Evangelical Magazine, and Religious Intelligencer (Hartford, 1815), 259.
102 Stebbins, God’s Government of the Church, 8-9.
democratically elected to govern the state. For supporters of the Standing Order, the virtuous ruler was preferable to the type of demagogue that could rise to power if Jeffersonian democracy came to dominate the political process.\textsuperscript{104}

According to the Standing Order, the traits of piety and morality could not thrive independently in a free marketplace of ideas; they needed to be buttressed by state-supported institutions. The popular Federalist sentiment was that a secure and flourishing Connecticut society was based upon its “steady habits” of supporting its traditional government and institutions. The “social fabric” was held together by extra-governmental institutions, such as schools and churches. These institutions not only connected individuals to their communities, but they also served as a remedy for political ignorance and public immorality.\textsuperscript{105}

The civic virtue so important to the many of the leaders of the early nation essentially meant the responsibility of citizens to participate in and support institutions, such as churches and schools, which maintained and strengthened the political and social order of the community.\textsuperscript{106} For example, Benjamin Franklin, although not religiously devout, believed that religion must not be marginalized from society because religion was vital for instilling moral habits in the nation’s citizens. He reasoned that only the morally righteous were capable of living in a free society. Therefore, religion should be required curriculum in public schools in order to boost morality.\textsuperscript{107}

\textsuperscript{104} Connecticut Courant, April 2, 1816, p. 2.
\textsuperscript{105} Siegel, “‘Steady Habits’ Under Siege,” 209.
Presbyterian minister and Princeton president John Witherspoon, who taught several of the leading figures of the Revolutionary period including James Madison, believed that churches were required to teach people not just the doctrines of Christianity, but the habits and virtues of good citizenship too. Witherspoon proposed that the while the government should leave churches free to worship as they pleased it should support religious institutions due to the highly beneficial role they play in the state’s stability. The conception of civic virtue lobbied by the Standing Order, which included the need for religious institutions to promote virtue among the populace, shared the political philosophy of many of the nation’s Founders during the Revolutionary period.

The clergy and other defenders of the Standing Order were comfortable with the ecclesiastical tax because they believed that churches played vital roles for promoting morality and virtue, and as such should be supported by the government. The ecclesiastical establishment was a primary way in which they believed they could continue to instill morality and virtue in local communities that had become increasingly dissimilar from those that had flourished in Connecticut for over one hundred and fifty years. The civil theology of the Standing Order clergy maintained that government support for religious institutions, including the minister’s salary, was essential for ensuring the social stability of the state because churches taught virtues such as charity, frugality, and morality. Ministers were convinced that good institutions were paramount to transmitting morality and virtue to the populace. Asahel Hooker’s 1805 election sermon declared that the irreligious, people who had no fear of God and disregarded the

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“doctrine of retribution,” were subsequently more inclined to stray from any sort of moral foundation. As such, the perceived rise in vice and immorality stemmed from a growth of irreligion. Education was one way in which this erosion of morality might be prevented and individuals would continue to possess “sober habits” which would lead to a stable society.  

Thus, Hooker associated institutions of church and schools with the promotion of morality. Without such institutions, the degradation from virtue to vice would quickly spread throughout the nation.

To the established clergy the government and Christianity were the two foundations of a stable, secure, and prosperous society. However, they did not presume that churches alone possessed the capability of instilling the necessary virtue and morality in the American people. They supported state-funded public school and educational programs because of their potential value to grow a republican government. Social stability and religious prosperity needed to be girded by the government’s promotion of both religion and public schooling. Of course, they believed that virtuous Christian leaders were more likely to support their educational agenda than would irreligious leaders. A pious official will “appreciate the interests of literature,…and advocate all proper means for the general diffusion of knowledge among the people,” rather than

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110 Although the focus of this section is the promotion of virtue through institutions such as churches, schools, and missionary societies, it is important to point out that in the early United States virtue was also to be taught to children by their mothers. It was held that a good republican woman “was to encourage civic participation, virtue, in her children. She was a citizen, but not really a constituent.” See Linda Kerber, Women of the Republic: Intellect and Ideology in Revolutionary America (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1980), 283.
attempting to use the government for their own benefit. In turn, the citizenry, being properly educated, will be “peaceable, steady, and joyful.”\textsuperscript{111}

Educational institutions, infused with Christian principles, were also necessary to teach children proper classical-republican virtues. The clergy believed that learning helped to make an informed and virtuous citizenry, one which would not be “blown up by the wildest enthusiasm” or “duped…by every designing demagogue.” Instead they would be more likely to uphold the established laws and customs of the land.\textsuperscript{112} If the government financed and supplied Christian education in the schools, then children would be raised with a greater sense of liberty, morality, benevolence, and civic virtue.

Federalist politicians and community leaders who were not necessarily evangelical Christians joined the clergy in recognizing the value of institutions that taught virtue. Benjamin Rush, for instance, echoed the sentiments of many in Connecticut’s establishment with his claim that above all education should train the young, through Christian principles, to become virtuous citizens. With such training, children would be converted into “republican machines.” Such thinking was also shared by Timothy Dwight and Horace Bushnell.\textsuperscript{113} With the propagation of the Federalist conception of republican virtue through education, individuals in Connecticut would not only obey the

\textsuperscript{111} Trumbull, \textit{The Dignity of Man},”23.
\textsuperscript{112} Burnett, \textit{An Election Sermon}, 9-11; Of course, Republicans also saw the value of education in promoting strong social values. Thomas Jefferson believed that educational institutions were important for strengthening morality. He did not, however, believe that orthodox Christianity had a legitimate role in education. Yarbrough, \textit{American Virtues}, 26, 126; In fact, Jefferson went so far as to suggest that not only should religious materials be omitted from public education, but ministers and clergymen should not be allowed as instructors or teachers of any sort. Mayer, \textit{The Constitutional Thought of Thomas Jefferson}, 165; Munoz, \textit{God and the Founders}, 74, 106.
\textsuperscript{113} Abzug, \textit{Cosmos Crumbling}, 21.
laws, they would also be guarded against the Jeffersonian-Republican insurgency and defend the Standing Order.

Missionary societies functioned as a main institution used by the Standing Order to promote virtue, morality, and civility in the expanding American frontier. Unlike the missionary efforts of the minor sects, the designs of the CMS went beyond the personal salvation and religious edification of frontiersmen. Baptists and Methodists in particular made great efforts in providing religious instruction and evangelism to those on the frontier. The Congregationalists held the additional goal of using religious institutions to stabilize frontier society by teaching morality and virtue. The CMS existed in part to set up churches in these areas as a means of bringing social cohesion and order to these largely unsettled areas. The Standing Order reasoned that if the state of Connecticut wanted to support the growth of communities in the west then it was the state’s responsibility to build institutions which worked to that end. Contrasting the stability of New England with the uncertainty of frontier life, Timothy Dwight remarked, “Long established institutions and habits have a mighty influence over the whole population of old settlements. [Such institutions] operate as so many checks, upon the corrupt propensities of our nature.” Conversely, alone in the wilderness, without the restraints of shared culture or institutions, the frontiersman can sin “if they chuse [sic], with impunity” because “human depravity is ever impatient of restraints. It requires strong barriers, to keep it within any tolerable bounds…”114 Thus, the Congregationalists considered state

support for the CMS to be a just expense because it forged conservative social norms. If, as their civil theology maintained, religion was beneficial for building up society, then religious institutions were absolutely vital in order to civilize the “wastelands” of the western lands.\textsuperscript{115}

CONCLUSION

The “wall of separation” between church and state that Jefferson described to the Danbury Baptists was in large part wishful thinking. Not even the Danbury Baptists desired for Christianity to be torn from the political fabric of the United States. Many Americans believed that theirs was a Christian nation, regardless of whether or not the Founders shared that opinion. Many judges and politicians interpreted the law through the prism of Christianity. Even the First Amendment of the Constitution was widely regarded as being only applicable to the federal government. In this context of a nation saturated with Christianity the desire of Connecticut’s Standing Order to maintain the establishment of Congregationalism was not nearly as offensive to the religious sensibilities of contemporary Americans as the modern reader might believe. Based on the widely-held belief that America was indeed a Christian nation, the efforts to support the Congregational church were not the desperate attempt of a political “old guard” to

hold on to power. Rather, support for religion was founded upon a distinct concept of virtue.

The virtue promoted by the Standing Order was based upon a classical republican ideology whereby American citizens placed the good of the community over their own individual interests. Ultimately, this virtue needed to be grounded in Christian principles in order to be most effective. The application of this Christian virtue was to build a virtuous citizenry in order to elect a virtuous political class that considered the good of the nation above any selfish ambition. To this end, it was necessary for the government to support institutions that cultivated this sense of virtue in the American people.

Creating a virtuous citizenry was far from the only motivation the established clergy had for their ecclesiastical system. In sermons, pamphlets, and missionary publications they articulated a whole host of benefits that the state support of religion had for the nation. Further, their Federalist allies supported the same ideas in their newspapers and broadsides. The conviction of the Standing Order that the ecclesiastical establishment should remain is based upon this ideology that Christianity held a wide variety of benefits for society. The logical conclusion of this conviction was to defend the state support of religion. To that end, the established clergy became increasingly political as they aligned with the Federalists who shared their belief that the ecclesiastical system was a vital component of a prosperous society.
CHAPTER FOUR:

THE PARTY SPIRIT

Throughout Thomas Jefferson’s presidency the Federalists warned Americans about the potential for the odious policies of the Republicans to destroy the developing nation. Connecticut voters remained skeptical, as by 1812 the state’s Republicans had gained seats in the General Assembly and the minor sects increased their memberships. Republican momentum was briefly halted by the initial unpopularity of the War of 1812 among New Englanders. The national Republicans’ hawkish foreign policy towards Great Britain angered the anglophile New England region. Deeply connected to Britain through both family ties and commercial interests many New Englanders, regardless of political affiliation, favored a pro-British foreign policy. One of their main grievances of the war was the economic suffering in the region due to the conflict’s devastating effects on maritime commerce that crippled the New England shipping industry.¹

With the nation in the throes of a renewed war with Great Britain, the admonitions of the Federalists that the Republicans would wreck the nation seemingly came to fruition. Connecticut’s Congregationalists agreed with their Standing Order

¹ Against the war from its outset, New England merchants profited from the war early on by privateering and continuing to do business with British merchants. However, the British eventually extended their naval blockade to include New England, effectively ruining the region’s shipping industry. For New England’s support for England due to their communal ties to the British in both Canada and England see Alan Taylor, The Civil War of 1812: American Citizens, British Subjects, Irish Rebels & Indian Allies (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2011).
brethren. Among Connecticut’s established clergy the war was “unnecessary and unjust” not because Great Britain was faultless – it was not – but rather because the first duty of a Christian nation was to attempt all reasonable means to protect the peace. Thus, the nation had disobeyed God by entering into a war without first exhausting all avenues of peace. Ultimately, war produces sin, misery, and evil.

Congregational minister Chauncey Lee lamented in an 1813 election sermon at Hartford that the United States had “fallen on the worst of times.” From the perspective of the Standing Order, Lee’s jeremiad had plenty of evidence. The British had burned down the nation’s capital, the economy was ruined, and no clear path to victory lay in sight. In these “worst of times,” Lee called for leaders who were skilled and wise enough to steer the country from the impending “national shipwreck” of the American republic due to the uncertainty of a nation in crisis and the alleged recklessness of the Republican Party. The Congregational ministers accepted this challenge in part by arguing for the merits of their ecclesiastical system in protecting the nation’s future.

What the Standing Order did not anticipate was that in the years immediately following the War of 1812 “the times” for them would get much worse. In late 1814 through early 1815 New England Federalists gathered for a series of meetings known as the Hartford Convention in which they declared the war to be a Republican failure, sought to pressure the national government to accept their demands in exchange for their continued assistance in the war effort. The members of the Convention noted, “In the

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1 Timothy Dwight, A Discourse, in Two Parts Delivered August 20, 1812, on the National Fast, in the Chapel of Yale College (Boston: Cummings and Hilliard, 1813), 49.

prosecution of this favourite warfare…. The Administration, after a long perseverance in plans to baffle every effort of commercial enterprise, has fatally succeeded in their attempts at the epoch of the war. Commerce, the vital spring of New-England prosperity, was annihilated.”

As the Convention’s petition was en route to Congress, word reached the American shores that the war had ended. Not only had New England’s commerce been decimated by the conflict, now the ill-timing of the Convention made the region’s political elite appear weak and reactionary in the shadow of the triumphant Republican majority in Washington. The debacle of the Hartford Convention caused freemen, who were already voting for Republican candidates on a large scale, to lose trust in the Federalists completely, as well as to blame them for all that was wrong with party politics, thereby sealing the Federalists’ fate nationally. It also improved the fortunes of Connecticut’s Republicans at the state level as they won fifty-seven seats in the lower house in the fall elections of 1815.

Although the Federalists were already obsolete as a national party, America’s pseudo-victory in the War of 1812 coupled with the disastrous timing of the Hartford Convention crippled their effectiveness in their last stronghold of New England. Despite the Republican gains, in the New England states the Federalist dominance as a local party...
continued for several more years. To the consternation of Republicans, even with the
demise of the Federalist Party nationally, the Standing Order was firmly entrenched in
Connecticut well into the second decade of the nineteenth century. The presence of the
Standing Order as a prevailing political force certainly frustrated Connecticut
Republicans who were eager for their state to join the rest of the nation in heralding an
“era of good feelings” marked by Republican political control.

For their part, the established clergy and the Connecticut Federalists worked to
atone for their seeming betrayal in their participation in the Hartford Convention by
continually reminding their audiences about their love of country. Soon after the war
ended an anonymous Federalist proclaimed that if a person is “religious, honest,
intelligent… Though he have all these things, but want patriotism, he is as nothing.”
The author clarified that the “government and laws [are the] real objects of patriotism.”
Through their Fourth of July orations and political sermons the clergy were vocal about
their own patriotism and the patriotism of the Standing Order. During the war Nathan
Perkins declared in a sermon, “We should be the FRIENDS OF ORDER… Never was
true patriotism more wanted.” As Jonathan Sassi surmised, it might have been the case
that the clergy “wished to rid itself of any lingering odor of disloyalty that remained in
the wake of the War of 1812 or the Hartford Convention.” If so, then the strategy
worked in Connecticut, at least temporarily.

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5 “What is Patriotism?” reprinted from the *Boston Weekly Messenger*, in *Connecticut Journal*,
May 15, 1815, p. 2.

6 Nathan Perkins, *The National Sins, and National Punishment in the Recently Declared War…*
July 23, 1812 (Hartford: Hudson and Goodwin, 1812), 28.

7 Jonathan D. Sassi, *A Republic of Righteousness: The Public Christianity of the Post-
The established clergy’s involvement in Federalist politics and the Hartford Convention was the result of decades of forging ties between the two groups. This chapter will explore the factors that created the alliance between the clergy and the Federalists as well as the origins of the relationship between Republicans and dissenters. From these coalitions arguments were put forth as to the relative merits of the church establishment. The Standing Order support of the establishment was based in part upon the perceived value of religious institutions to the government. During such perilous times as the War of 1812 the Standing Order found that the stability offered by the establishment was welcomed amidst the uncertainty of the times.

PART ONE: ALLIANCES BETWEEN CHURCHES AND POLITICAL PARTIES

Despite the collapse of the Federalists nationally, the party was able to retain control of Connecticut for several more years due in large part to the support of the established clergy. For clergymen to publicly espouse political positions was not uncommon, as in America the Protestant tradition has always expressed itself both as religious expression and as political action. Many clergymen in early nineteenth century Connecticut expressed their faith through both means. In a region that had known an established church since its founding, a political clergy was nothing unusual in Connecticut. To understand the importance of the established church in the political battle in Connecticut one must understand why the Congregationalists aligned themselves

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with the Federalists in the first place as well as the factors that led the minor sects to side with the Republicans. It is equally important to understand the degree to which many clergymen avoided political speech in their regular sermons. Finally, the recognition of the Republicans of the need to sever the clergy from the Federalists illustrates the crux of the importance over the issue of a state church in Connecticut.

As the nation’s political factions coalesced into two distinct parties in the 1790s, the Congregationalists gravitated towards the Federalist Party, as they both shared similar perspectives of politics, society, and religion. Regarding social status, Federalists disdained the democratic populism of the Republicans while the established clergy could not tolerate the “unlearned” preachers and emotional revivals of the “minor sects.”

As previously discussed, supporters of the Standing Order were skeptical of Jeffersonian democracy, equating it with the radical and violent uprisings of the French Revolution. Further, Federalists and many Christians, Congregationalists or not, believed that morality and civic virtue were vital components for a republican society. They were skeptical of ideas of an innate goodness of humanity; people were by nature motivated by their own self-interests. Only virtuous people were capable of creating and maintaining a free society. If self-interest and personal gratification were permissible, a free society would not long last.

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As for the political side of the Standing Order, most irreligious Federalists supported the continuation of the church establishment, for Christianity served a role in their conception of the American republic. Spiritual or social benefits aside, the reformed-Protestant faith also worked towards a political aim as well. The traditional Puritan conception of God essentially operated as a “fourth branch of government” in the Federalist view. Religious duty reinforced moral duty. In turn, the improved morality of the community enhanced the stability of the government, from the local level to the state (and, hopefully, the nation as a whole). Many Federalists asserted that Christianity was a key component for a stronger government. Freedom of religion was important for protecting the personal convictions of individuals, but freedom of religion could not include the loss of the support of religion by the state, lest the community reap the whirlwind of a social and political order without the latent benefits of religion.¹²

A significant reason why the clergy eventually aligned themselves enthusiastically with the Federalists was due to the evolution of social bonds in America. In the changing social world of the late 1700s, Connecticut communities underwent a transformation from being comprised of a hierarchy of persons based upon economic class and social status into pockets of like-minded individuals whose common bond was their political or religious affiliation. This was problematic for the established clergy as the Federalism of the Standing Order was more than just a political party. The Federalism of New England was also a philosophy of how individuals connected with

their community. It encompassed “religious, moral and economic principles more profound and culturally entrenched than any mere party agenda.”\textsuperscript{13} As such, long after Federalism as a political entity faded, its ideology survived for generations. Whereas for Federalists, aligning themselves with the established clergy was a means to consolidate and strengthen political power, to the Congregational clergymen the Standing Order was far more significant. It was the basis of the local culture, tradition, and social morality – the “steady habits” – upon which community was based. The shift in the composition of social ties worried the clergy, and although it initially made them reluctant to align themselves squarely with the Federalist Party, they ultimately recognized the Federalist ideology as the best means to preserve their idea of community.\textsuperscript{14}

For the Standing Order, the liberalism of the Jeffersonian mindset was detrimental to the very foundations on which their society was built. Jeffersonian republicans actively sought to undermine social and political structures that were based upon hereditary or privilege, and replace them with ones that depended solely upon the achievements and abilities of individuals.\textsuperscript{15} In Connecticut, where many towns had literally been established by a single family, where many communities were founded upon social covenants, and where the state still operated on a modified version of its original charter, veering from traditional social bonds and institutions that had allowed the region to prosper for over a century seemed to many to be dangerous and reckless.


As the ideologies of the Federalists and Republicans came into focus in the late 1700s, and the differences between the two became more pronounced, the Congregationalists found themselves in consistent agreement with the politics of the Federalists over the Republicans. Both the Congregationalists and Federalists condemned ideas of popular democracy, the French Revolution, separation between church and state, and the rise of political factions. By the turn of the nineteenth century the public sermons of Congregationalists were strikingly similar to the public politics of the Federalist Party.

Although the Federalist-clergy relationship aided both sides, the clergy were neither the architects of their partnership with the Federalists, nor did they eagerly seek out such a union in the first place. In fact, most of the clergy denounced the rise of party politics, as did many Congregational lay persons.\(^1\) Before the formation of the Federalist and Democratic-Republican political factions, the church-state relationship in Connecticut was accepted as the norm because no political voice existed to challenge the establishment. Like most New England conservatives, they believed that elected officials should be chosen based upon their wisdom, skill, and standing in the community, not primarily because of any political party affiliation. Ideally, a government leader must possess “character grounded in principles that led him to conduct his office as a form of higher duty, a divine and public trust.”\(^2\)

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\(^2\) Dan Huntington, *The Love of Jerusalem, the Prosperity of a People…*, May 12, 1814 (Hartford: Hudson and Goodwin, 1814), 23.
Congregationalists generally disdained the “party spirit” of partisan political disputes which they felt disrupted the social fabric of the local community and threatened the Standing Order. Timothy Dwight warned that focusing on political parties and political arguments was a fast-track to immorality and infidelity in the nation. Partisanship “engrossed” individuals, and subsequently “their hearts were drawn away from their religion, and their God.”\(^{18}\) The divisiveness within communities that Dwight interpreted as being caused by “the party spirit” was not just detrimental to the stability of the local community, or the American republic. The stakes were much higher, as ultimately disputes between political parties were an affront to God. In the words of Dwight, the “party spirit” was “a smoke in the nostrils of Jehovah; an abomination, which he cannot away with.”\(^{19}\)

Many preachers stressed that political parties compromised the character and virtue of the elected official and the integrity of the government. They believed political independence was the most important characteristic of a good public official. Therefore, party politics ultimately undermined the Congregationalists’ conception of community. Congregational ministers believed that the formation of political parties created a political environment in which politicians might be increasingly tempted to seek their own wealth and power while disregarding the welfare of the community in which they served. There was concern that loyalty to a party would invariably lead to politicians serving either their own interests, or the interests of their party, over those of the public.

\(^{18}\) Dwight, *A Discourse*, 40
\(^{19}\) Ibid, 47.
which would undermine the classical-republican ideal of virtue.\footnote{Matthias Burnett, An Election Sermon, , Preached at Hartford, on the Day of the Anniversary Election, ... May 12, 1803 (Hartford: Hudson and Goodwin, 1803), 16; Lee, The Government of God, 44-45.} Party factions threatened to undermine the republic itself, possibly replacing a free government with despotism. In the face of divisive political factions in America, “and the unyielding spirit that accompanies them” the clergy could only despair.\footnote{Ibid, 40.}

Contrary to the exasperated commentaries of dissenters and Republicans, as well as the uncited claims of some historians, ministers on both sides of the Standing Order generally refrained from offering political commentary in their regular weekly sermons. They understood that consistently bombarding their parishioners with political messages on Sunday mornings might alienate them. State-supported Congregationalist programs such as the Congregational Missionary Society (CMS) refrained from using political speech in their magazines, lest they offended the political sensibilities of potential donors.\footnote{James Rohrer has noted this lack of political speech in regular sermons in Keepers of the Covenant: Frontier Missions and the Decline of Congregationalism 1774-1818 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 68.} Rather, ministers generally saved their fiery political rhetoric for special sermon occasions, such as elections, public festivals, funerals, ordinations, and retirements.

The mundane nature of weekly sermons is evidenced in the sampling of the sermons of some of the most prominent ministers in Connecticut on either side of the establishment. For example, two weeks before the state constitution and its accompanying disestablishment clause came to the people for a vote, the young minister of the First Congregational Church in Southington, David Ogden, delivered a sermon...
about God’s judgment and the need for Christians to be in prayer. His message made no mention of the pending changes to the ecclesiastical system. He preached the exact sermon again in 1822, demonstrating that its subject had no overtly political connotations. In fact, his sermon was much more topical to harvest season, as the sermon alluded to seasons of harvest and on both occasions it was delivered in the autumn. Two weeks after Ogden delivered his sermon, Republican minister Elijah Waterman preached the simple themes of the need for Christians to improve themselves before God, and that they should be “useful to others.” Standing Order minister Chauncey Lee reminded his congregation about the need to focus on heavenly riches. During the same time period he preached sermons on infidelity (arguing that it comes from a depraved heart), apostasy, and the marks of genuine repentance. Henry Rowland’s sermons ignored the news of the ratification of the state constitution, focusing instead upon the need to submit to God grace. Thus, ministers of various political persuasions were reluctant to offer political commentary regardless of how circumstances went for their particular cause.

Although the clergy largely refrained from delving into politics during their regular Sunday sermons, they preached at these special occasions the theology and political ideology that leaders such as Timothy Dwight had taught them. The ministers of the Standing Order held influence and significance among the members of the community (albeit diminished compared with earlier generations) not because of any political power they held but because of their cultural power that in turn could potentially

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shape political sensibilities. The established clergy’s value to the Standing Order, and a reason for their hatred by the Republicans, was in their potential ability to shape cultural values through their sermons. Lacking any civil power, “the clergy received money, deference, and status on the basis of their cultural virtuosity well into the nineteenth century.” Consequently, the preached theology and ideology of these ministers further strengthened the Standing Order, making the ministers important allies of the Federalists and the scourge of the Republicans attempting to gain control of the levers of power in Connecticut.

Despite their constant attacks against party politics, the clergy became increasingly entangled in it. Over time the Congregational clergy’s support for Federalism and their privileged position as the established church became very pronounced and public. For example, on election-days the Congregational clergy gathered in the First Church in Hartford and marched in a procession with state politicians. Additionally, it was always a Congregational minister who delivered election-day sermons. This tradition finally ended in 1818 when the Toleration Party took control of the state’s government and clergy from dissenting churches were given the opportunity to preach political sermons during state functions. Ultimately, the Congregationalists’ association with the Federalists aided the party for a time, but eventually the alliance eroded the popular support of either group. The alliance of the

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clergy with the Federalists compromised their legitimacy as independent figures of authority. Appearing to be blindly partisan, the established clergy lost their position as the social and spiritual representatives of their local communities.

The new unflattering public persona of the established clergy persuaded some Federalists to distance themselves from religious issues, becoming increasingly irreligious in their rhetoric, ideology, and policies. For example, Jonathan Treadwell’s strong religious convictions coupled with his support of the established church (such as serving as the president of the Missionary Society, even while governor) made him a liability in the eyes of many Federalists. Although he had been a long-time public servant in Connecticut, the party eventually pushed him aside in favor of Roger Griswold, who appealed to those voters for whom religion was a secondary issue.28

Thus, in the case of Treadwell the Federalists violated one of the core steady habits of Connecticut politics, namely that officeholders were entitled to serve in their positions until they retired, because they understood that the clergy could be a liability to their power. In the end, the clergy supported the Federalists despite their disposition towards party politics, but some Federalists were reluctant to reciprocate. The ecclesiastical component of the Standing Order was only viable so long as the established clergy remained loyal to the dominant political leadership. The party embraced the Congregationalists when convenient, and ignored them when they were no longer assets. The Standing Order indeed became a house divided.

28 Scott, From Office to Profession, 31.
Whereas most of the Connecticut Congregationalists were Federalists, those belonging to dissenting churches generally aligned themselves with the Republican Party, primarily because of the party’s position against the ecclesiastical system. Many people throughout the state sided with the Federalist policies towards Great Britain, and valued the social and political stability of the New England region. Religious dissenters nevertheless gravitated towards the Republican Party for both ideological and practical reasons. Ideologically, dissenters joined the Republican cause because they found in the Jeffersonian rhetoric of inalienable rights their justification for the removal of the established church. All persons should have the right to worship as they pleased without being forced to support one denomination over another. Republican ideology gave the dissenters a framework upon which they could communicate their dissatisfaction with the church-state relationship. Just as Republicans held a bias against the authority of traditional institutions, dissenters challenged the institution of the church establishment. Many dissenters feared that the established church invariably would be corrupted by conforming to the interests of politicians. The Jeffersonian ideology of a people who experienced true liberty by being free from government interference dovetailed nicely with the dissenters concerns about the worldly corruption of the church and their financial ethic of voluntary contributions to churches over government compulsion.²⁹

Just as the Federalist Party did not wholly defend the Congregationalists, the Republican Party initially wavered in their support of dissenters. At the 1801 celebration

for Jefferson’s election to the presidency, Republicans toasted to “The Scepter and the Altar – may they no longer combine to dishonor Heaven and usurp the Earth.”

Although the ecclesiastical issue was important to Republicans, it was not as crucial to them as it was to religious dissenters. Consequently, the state Republicans were slow to make the issue a plank in their political platform. As a result, many dissenting sects, especially the Episcopalians, were reluctant to show political support for the Jeffersonian Party, a decision which helped to keep the Standing Order in power in Connecticut long after the Federalist Party had diminished in most other regions in the United States.

As the political landscape changed throughout the nation, the supporters of each major party in Connecticut grew anxious and frustrated. Adherents of the Standing Order were nervous as Republicans took charge in almost every other state and had clearly made inroads in Connecticut. For the Republicans, frustration mounted as they seemed to be waging an almost impossible battle to unseat an entrenched foe. To many Republicans, the prominence and authority of the established clergy along with their voice in public festivals, holidays, and political meetings, gave the clergy considerable sway over public opinion with regard to politics.

Consequently, Republicans concluded that the influence of the clergy was a main factor in the continued control of the Federalist Party in the state. Rather than viewing establishment as a secondary dispute, many Republicans came to regard it as the paramount issue to tackle in order to gain control of the state. As a result, the Congregational clergy came under attack from Republicans as being the central cog in

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the Federalist political machine. If the influence of the Congregationalists could be minimized or neutralized, surmised Republicans, Federalist dominance might finally wane in Connecticut. Their agenda became to discredit the ties between the Federalists and the clergy in order for the religious and political dissenters to gain a strong foothold in the state. So great was the perceived obstacle of the clergy that many Republicans considered them to be the “front line” of the Federalist army in the battle against the Standing Order. In the midst of this political tension both sides accused each other of using religion as a weapon by pandering to their respective religious voting bases.

If David Daggett was the prime political representative of the Standing Order, then Abraham Bishop was his chief counterpart in the opposition party. The prominent Republican led the charge against the ecclesiastical establishment in Connecticut. Like most in his party, he recognized the established clergy as a linchpin in keeping the Standing Order intact. Remove it, and the Federalist power in the state would collapse. “Church and State,” he insisted, “is the grand fortress of Connecticut federalism.” He charged that the Standing Order had rigged the state’s political system against allowing the Republicans to have legitimate opportunities to get elected into office. Therefore, the traditional powers had little reason to gloat about their continued regional dominance, because if the parties were on equal ground, the Republicans would quickly prevail over the “aristocratic” state government.

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33 Abraham Bishop, Oration, In Honor of the Election of President Jefferson, and the Peaceable Acquisition of Louisiana, Delivered at the National Festival in Hartford, May 11, 1804. (Hartford [?]: Sidney’s Press, 1804), 18.
Republicans were just as comfortable as Federalists in using religious issues as weapons with which to attack the political opposition. In their fight against the Congregationalists, dissenting ministers reminded their congregations that the established clergy were trying to undermine religious freedom and control the spiritual direction of the nation.34 A favorite Republicans attack was to charge Federalists with using establishment as a bribe to the Congregationalists in order to keep their political favor. While the Standing Order held up European systems of church establishment as proof that the state needed religion to survive, Republicans turned the argument on its head by claiming that the systems existed for the state to manipulate religion. Republicans posited that European nations had religious establishments because the political elite recognized that the clergy held great influence over the people, and establishment was a means to “purchase” the influence of the clergy.35 They argued that their ideology freed religion from this type of government corruption and further displayed the uniqueness of the United States, especially compared to Great Britain.

For example, Republicans charged that money the General Assembly gave to the Congregationalists, along with the state’s support of the ecclesiastical tax code, was tantamount to bribery. As long as the Federalists continued to give handouts to the Congregational clergy then the state’s largest denomination would remain loyal to the Standing Order. Republicans claimed that their plan to implement the complete disestablishment of religion in the state proved that they had no need to dole out political

favors to the clergy. Turning the arguments of the Standing Order against them, Republicans retorted that because they rejected such bribes they showed that they were the ones who truly were interested in electing officials who were independent of any potentially compromising loyalties. By seeking disestablishment they, unlike the Federalists, were the “friends to true religion,...to every principle that has a tendency to increase the virtue and happiness of men.” Those “principles” certainly did not include funneling money in order to gain the support of one particular interest group.

The Standing Order countered that Republican charges of bribery were hypocritical because in their view the Republicans were active in manipulating members of dissenting churches to join their party. The Standing Order attempted to convince the people of Connecticut that the Republicans had tried and failed to launch a direct political assault against the state as voters continually rejected Republican candidates in Connecticut in favor of the “good old steady habits where we have found prosperity and happiness.” Due to repeated setbacks, Federalists charged that the Republicans turned their attention to religion, attempting to “sow the seeds of discord between the different denominations of Christians.” This argument essentially was a complaint that the Republicans had attempted to unite the dissenting churches against them. As one Standing Order member lamented, the “democrats” in Connecticut are “those who change their religion…to get votes, those who love Frenchmen because they hate

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36 Ibid, 14.
37 Federalist Party (Conn.), $50,000, March 21, 1817 (New Haven, 1817).
Christians and Christianity...those who hate an energetic tho’ free Government, because it restrains their profligacy and compels obedience.”

The denomination which Republicans most actively tried to sway from the Standing Order was the Episcopalian church. Federalists noted that the Republicans came to the defense of the Episcopaliains for not receiving $20,000 from the General Assembly as part of the reimbursement money the state received from the federal government from the War of 1812 that they set aside for the state support of religion. More importantly, the Federalists pointed out that once the Episcopaliains received their $20,000, the Republicans, rather than celebrating, lamented the fact that any state money went to any religious institutions at all. Therefore, the Federalists tried to show the people of Connecticut that the Republicans did not particularly care about political fairness towards the Episcopaliains as much as they did the destruction of religious influence in the state. The incident revealed that the Republicans had “deceived the Episcopaliains,” a ruse that Federalists hoped the Episcopaliains would see through.

PART TWO: LIMITS OF FREEDOM AND DEMOCRACY

One reason the Federalists of New England considered making demands of the federal government – to even entertain whispers of secession – at the Hartford Convention was based on their conviction that the Republican leadership in Washington was inept and corrupted beyond redemption. At the time of the Convention, Federalist John Lowell confided that the members in his party did not disagree upon,

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38 Connecticut Courant, March 17, 1800.
39 Federalist Party of Connecticut, $50,000.
“the incapacity and injustice of our rulers, nor as to their having deserted us, and in effect abdicated the government; nor does there seem to be any hope of redress in a usual course. It is admitted, also, that pecuniary ruin is inevitable; and that there is a certainty of national disgrace, and some danger of attempts against our civil liberties.”

The incompetence and betrayal of the government was seen as the result of adherence to a competing understanding of liberty, especially with regards to religion, as well as an inferior understanding of human depravity. The Standing Order’s conception of these ideas informed their goals for securing the happiness of the American people as well as their distrust of those loyal to the Jeffersonians.

A major source of consternation between the Standing Order and their political and religious opponents concerned whether or not the Connecticut establishment violated the rights of freedom of religion and conscience. The issues hinged upon the interpretation of what constituted religious freedom. The idea of religious liberty was contested in the Revolutionary and early republic periods. This was especially true in the context of majority vs. minority rights. Debates often arose over the issue of whether the government should protect the liberty of the majority or the rights of the individual. Questions arose over the freedom of the states to operate without interference from the federal government as well as the protections local communities had from the decrees of the state. In the case of the established clergy, the issue was to what degree they had the protection to minister to their communities in the best manner that they saw fit.

Pertaining to religion, the issue became whether or not individuals, or Christian groups, had freedom from religious institutions in order to pursue their own liberty. It was in this

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disputed space of the freedom of the majority versus individual rights that that the Standing Order justified and continued their support for the church establishment in Connecticut.

Naturally, Federalists and Republicans were philosophically divided on the understanding of religious liberty. Although each side agreed on the importance of an American republic that afforded religious freedom to all, Republicans focused on the right to freedom of worship for both individuals and sects without fear of persecution or marginalization by the government whereas Federalists framed freedom of religion around the understanding that the personal, private faith of an individual should be permitted. From this perspective, personal faith fell within the realm of religious liberty, but taxation for religious institutions was a civil matter which stood outside of the right to religious liberty and freedom of conscience.\textsuperscript{42} Conversely, religious dissenters, in line with their Republican leanings, believed that the idea of liberty of conscience encompassed freedom from religious establishments and taxation.\textsuperscript{43}

That the Standing Order interpreted religious freedom to be a freedom from compulsion to belong to or support one particular sect was a key component in their argument that Connecticut did not have a religious establishment. Since America’s inception as a free nation the Federalist clergy touted America as a home of religious liberty. Many established ministers agreed that state support for Christianity was a

\textsuperscript{42} Although the phrase “freedom of conscience” does not appear in the First Amendment, the idea was a philosophical foundation for the religious liberty clause. See Bruce T. Murray, \textit{Religious Liberty in America: The First Amendment in Historical and Contemporary Perspective} (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2008), 48-52.

\textsuperscript{43} West, Jr., \textit{The Politics of Revelation and Reason}, 14; James H. Huston, \textit{Church and State in America: The First Two Centuries} (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 154.
necessary staple of civilized cultures and good governments so long as other religions
had the right to liberty of conscious and public worship. Connecticut’s Standing Order
did not recognize a contradiction between the ecclesiastical establishment and religious
liberty, although religious liberty was an essential part of American society. For example,
Connecticut’s Oliver Ellsworth, a senator who was influential in framing First
Amendment’s religion clause, was adamant in protecting the freedom of conscience for
all Americans, yet he also advocated for government support of certain religious sects.44

Timothy Dwight taught the young men at Yale this narrow interpretation of
religious liberty as the right of other Protestant denominations to worship freely. The
favored position of the Congregational churches in the Connecticut government did not
interfere with the religious liberty of dissenting churches because those churches
remained free to worship as they saw fit.45 Dwight posed the question to his senior
students “Ought religion be supported by law?” Through their discussion they concluded
that a church establishment did not violate freedom of conscience because “If a person
has no religion, their conscience can’t be hurt by the support of any religion, and if a
person has any religion, his conscience can’t be hurt by supporting that one.”46

Established clergyman Nathan Perkins was adamant that Connecticut in no way
represented a theocratic government. He declared that “In our happy land, nothing
resembling, even, in a remote degree, the INCORPORATION OF CHURCH AND

44 William R. Casto, “Oliver Ellsworth’s Calvinist Vision of Church and State in the Early
Republic,” in The Forgotten Founders on Religion and Public Life eds. Daniel Dreisbach, Mark David
Hall, and Jeffry H. Morrison (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2009), 75.
45 Berk, Calvinism versus Democracy, 152.
46 Notes taken from Observances Made by Dr. Dwight in the Senior’s Recitation Room. Yale
College, 1806-1807, Dwight Family Papers, Series II, Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University Library.
Similarly, in 1800 John Smalley preached that in Connecticut the religious “liberties are almost unbounded… Every creature, has equal liberty to preach the gospel: and to preach what gospel he thinks proper.” Presumably Perkins and Smalley understood the relationship between church and state in the same manner as Zephaniah Swift or David Daggett in that the government did not discriminate against individual denominations from practicing their faith in public. Although the government granted more aid to some sects over others, none were persecuted against (in the Standing Order perspective), and no one denomination was the official authority of the state government. Unlike in England, where officials had to take oaths of loyalty to the Anglican Church, no religious loyalty oaths to a specific sect were permitted in America. Thus, compared to England, Connecticut had no establishment of a particular religion. The Connecticut clergy celebrated the fact that all faiths had the opportunity to propagate their beliefs, notwithstanding the equal rights of sects to establish universities, or the freedom from supporting religion altogether.

The Standing Order and their opponents differed on the importance of religion for sustaining the republic in part because of their respective understandings of the fundamentals of human nature. Many Congregationalists, both clergy and laypersons, held a restrained view of liberty and freedom because they believed that a republic based upon unfettered liberty was incompatible with the human condition, which was selfish and sinful. This mindset was based upon the Puritan theological ideas of original sin and

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human depravity. As John Diggins observed, “Religion compels us to doubt what politics asks us to believe – that virtue can triumph over sin.”

The society advocated by Republicans based upon liberalism and individualism seemed to the Standing Order to be idealistic and impractical because they were founded on a notion of inherent human goodness. To the Connecticut establishment, a liberal vision of popular democracy would work in a perfect world. But the Congregationalists’ Calvinist conviction in the idea of total depravity reminded them that the world was far from perfect.

Their theology clearly affirmed that humanity was by nature sinful and incapable of genuine goodness apart from the work of God. Further, the natural inclination of all persons was toward rebellion and disobedience. In this corrupted state people would hurt themselves, each other, and ultimately reject God. Some of Dwight’s students, most notably Nathaniel Taylor, adopted a more liberal theology which affirmed the goodness of people, a theology which Dwight unwaveringly rejected. Although Dwight could not bring himself to agreement with the Hopkinsonians, he understood the depraved nature of humans well enough to also reject a theology which exalted the positive value and goodness of humanity apart from the sovereignty of God.

Many Federalists shared this belief that people inherently succumbed to their immorality, desiring to act purely out of self-interest. These dueling conceptions of the sinfulness and goodness of humanity played religion against liberal ethics; the two were irreconcilable. The Standing Order

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did not doubt Calvinism’s premise of human sinfulness while many Republicans trusted in the promise of human goodness.

Many Federalists agreed with the Standing Order that religion was important and should be supported in some form based in part on the conviction in the Calvinist idea of the total depravity of humanity. Because of the condition of human depravity, “a virtuous citizenry were made, not born.”\footnote{Kerber, Federalists in Dissent, 206.} People would solely serve their own self-interests if not taught to care for the greater social good and understand the proper social order. It was the government’s responsibility, for its own self-preservation if nothing else, to develop and support institutions that taught virtue and civic responsibility to the people. That both communities and individuals were imperfect stemmed not from a lack of education or misguidance, but rather “the origins of the evils” of society were found in “the depravity of man.”\footnote{“Sir Benjamin” in the Connecticut Herald, June 29, 1806, p.1.} Historians of the period argue that the leaders of the Revolutionary period “steered Americans through the Revolution” with political views based on a conviction of human depravity.\footnote{Shain, The Myth of American Individualism, 220; Mark A. Noll, Christians and the American Revolution (Grand Rapids, MI: Christian University Press, 1977), 150; Michael Lienesch, New Order of the Ages: Time, the Constitution, and the Making of Modern American Political Thought (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), 41–43.} Examples of a fallen, sinful world were fresh in the minds of the citizens of the early republic. The American people had proven their capacity for insurrection and violence in their war with Great Britain. Although for many of them the victory validated of the justness of their cause they also recognized that revolution might one day occur again under less virtuous auspices. If visions of
autonomy continued to reign freely among the people then there would be little to prevent Americans from eventually descending into violent anarchy.

Uncertainty remained among the nation’s political elite as to whether or not Americans were capable of exhibiting the virtue necessary to sustain the republic. Some of America’s founders, including George Washington and John Adams, did not believe that the average citizen was inherently capable of promoting the good of society above their own self-interests. Through this skepticism they designed the Constitution not as an appeal to the innate goodness and virtue of people, but rather to render them harmless from threatening the republican government. Political and social leaders, primarily Federalists, believed it was important for the government to cultivate institutions that instilled in people characteristics of morality and patriotism. Many of America’s political founders became the very embodiment of virtue for the people to emulate. Washington in particular was exalted as the preeminent symbol of lasting virtue, a modern Cincinnatus.

The widespread American belief in the theological constructs of both original sin and human depravity was one of the justifications used by the Standing Order in their defense of maintaining an established church. A republic based upon individualism and liberty could not survive for long if society and the government did not take into account

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these conditions. Federalists and their allies feared that a nation which had tasted success in the political sphere using violence might be prone to it again. They reasoned that the nation should focus on stability and the respect for authority through traditional institutions, not an expansion of democracy.\textsuperscript{57} Religious institutions were essential for subduing the sinful passions of individuals, thereby making people more virtuous citizens who could better participate in public polity. Without the support of religious and educational institutions, the American experiment was doomed to failure in horrific bloodshed and chaos following the pattern set in France’s Reign of Terror.\textsuperscript{58} The naïve Republican beliefs in human goodness, if allowed to become policy in Connecticut, would surely bring the state to ruin.

Even Republican clergymen like Elijah Waterman conceded that the natural depravity of humankind required the work of God to overcome if a society of liberty were to take root in America. Although a Republican, Waterman was still a Calvinist, and the belief in total depravity informed his political worldview as well. Rejecting secular philosophers, Waterman scolded, “Away then with your heathen moralists, such as Socrates, Plato and Aristotle, who…had no motives to enforce the love or the practice of it upon depraved men.”\textsuperscript{59} The writings of the ancients may appear sound on paper, but even Republicans like Waterman believed that morality required the activity of God in the human heart.

\textsuperscript{57} Kerber, Federalists in Dissent, 22, 174.
\textsuperscript{59} Elijah Waterman, The Noble Convert...Preached at the Request of the Hon. Pierpont Edwards, Esq., May 28, 1809 (Bridgeport, CT, 1809), 13.
Of course, other Republicans and religious dissenters in Connecticut disagreed with the Standing Order over humanity’s intrinsic capacity for democracy. These denominations challenged the Calvinist idea of predestination, holding a fundamentally different view on the inherent goodness and sinfulness of humanity. As one dissenter proclaimed, the religious beliefs of the Methodists “have not been formed in the school of Calvin, or Edwards, nor Doct. Hopkins; but in the school of Christ.”60 As dissenter churches gained more converts in the early republic than did the Congregationalists, their theological beliefs became more prevalent. Many of these sects taught that individuals could work out their own salvation by choosing to turn from sin and immorality. All people had an innate degree of virtue, human ability, and natural inclination for doing what was good. While Christianity strengthened virtue, an innate sense of goodness alone was sufficient to determine upright political representatives and the general prosperity of the community. They believed in the possibility of the goodness of men and the ability for self-improvement. Because humans were capable of making good decisions on their own, full participation in the political sphere by the majority of men was not perceived as a threat to the republic. Any violence threatened by a small group of citizens would be contained, condemned by the public at large. Many Baptists and Methodists were more comfortable with Republican political ideology partially because few of them shared the Calvinist theology of the Congregationalists.

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Republicans charged the Standing Order with using the Calvinist concepts of original sin and total depravity as a means to convince people that democracy should not be placed solely in the hands of a society whose members’ natural, sinful inclination was towards vice. These doctrines, they argued, was the Federalists’ justification for supporting civil control by a ruling class. By contrast, Republicans claimed that the social and political progress in America proved that people were capable of ensuring their own prosperous futures and did not need to be governed by a political aristocracy of elites.  

Rather than being controlled by a privileged class, society should be led by men who valued democratic ideals which took into consideration concern for the community. Such ideals were superior forms of social and political structures than traditional class hierarchy based upon wealth or family ties.

Although the Congregationalists of Connecticut fought for liberty and believed in the ideal of republican government, their belief in total depravity made them wary of the possible excesses of democracy that might plunge the nation into anarchy. To ensure that the new government would not degenerate into either of the extreme excesses of tyranny or anarchy, many Americans turned to the principles of Christianity as a means to stabilize society. The Standing Order believed in democracy, but a democratic

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61 Democratic Party, Republican Address to the Freemen, 2.
government in which only elite men of wisdom and social standing would be able to attain political office. They were concerned that if expanded, political suffrage and increased participation in the political process by ordinary citizens took root, then the popular will might diminish the influence of social and political institutions. In the Federalist paper *Connecticut Courant*, “Sidney” asked the readers, “My fellow citizens – You have a School Fund…Will you commit it to democracy? – You have Courts established for the safety of your liberty…ask if you will commit the administration of justice to democracy?… Ask the solemn question, is democracy to tread them under foot?”64 A citizenry which showed proper deference for virtuous leaders and institutions would keep democracy in check.

The Yale men of the Standing Order included class as a criterion for democratic participation in a world comprised of flawed men. During this summer recess in 1807, Yale student Comfort Williams wrote a letter to his brother Merriam lamenting the growing chorus made by men lower social and economic classes demanding political suffrage. He feared such a political turn would be detrimental to the wealthy because the poor “know that they can loose [sic] nothing but they hope they shall be able to gain much by embarrassing the wealthy or by putting into office such men [who] are enemies of the rich.” Yale students such as Williams believed that such changes threatened the political and social stability that Connecticut had enjoyed for more than a century. Williams insisted that prosperity required the people of the state to forego the pattern of

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64 *Connecticut Courant*, April 2, 1816, p. 2.
change sweeping throughout the rest of the nation and instead rely on the traditions, institutions, and leadership that had guided Connecticut for over one hundred years.\textsuperscript{65}

Nathan Perkins lamented that although piety and morality were the only “\textit{CERTAIN MEANS}” of a flourishing nation, nevertheless Christian doctrine had been “overlooked by most philosophers and statesmen.” Perkins was ambivalent as to whether the lack of a state church would ultimately undermine Christianity, but he was certain that a complete lack of Christianity in the government would destroy the state. Without Christianity as a foundation, morality would fail, creating in society a loss of trust in leaders, a disregard for the laws, and an eventual usurpation of the government.\textsuperscript{66}

\textbf{PART THREE: DEBATING THE MERITS OF ESTABLISHMENT}

As the War of 1812 continued in the winter of 1814, New England Federalists, including those in Connecticut’s Standing Order, remained entrenched in their conviction that the moral, political, and religious sensibilities of the region were only hope for the survival of the United States. The effects of the war proved to them the error of Jeffersonian rule. The Standing Order surmised that they would have to assert their positions more directly, which they did in the form of the Hartford Convention. In advance of the Convention, Timothy Pickering wrote to Connecticut Federalist James Hillhouse, “We have too long contented ourselves with memorials and remonstrances: they procure for us nought but contempt… From sound Federalists in this portion of the

\textsuperscript{65} Comfort Williams to Merriam Williams, June 10, 1807. Comfort Williams Papers, Connecticut State Library.

\textsuperscript{66} Nathan Perkins, \textit{The Benign Influence of Religion}, 41.
Union, I have for years heard only this declaration, “We look to New England for salvation.” 67 Part of the salvation for the nation included the affirmation of the ecclesiastical system of the New England states such as Connecticut.

A key component of the Standing Order defense of the religious establishment was that religion significantly benefitted America. As Asahel Hooker proclaimed, adhering to God’s laws was not just about morality, it was an act of patriotism. True patriots affirmed God’s goodness and supremacy over all creation, and loved following God’s will. Additionally, through their concern for holy living, true patriots possessed an utmost concern for “seeking the public happiness” and made themselves “examples of piety, benevolence, and well-doing.” Just as importantly, true patriots promoted the “universal diffusion and influence” of Christianity throughout society. 68 Thus, true patriots supported government participation in propagating Christianity. Conversely, “pretend patriots” loved pleasure more than God, and only feigned concern for the community. These charlatans offered impressive speeches of freedom and happiness, but in reality their lust for temporal things made them “an enemy of God and religion, and in league with iniquity, sensuality, and the grossest impiety.” 69 Consequently, those who opposed the religious component of the Standing Order were not simply proponents of a different style of republicanism, but they were instead enemies of religion and traitors to the American republic.

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68 Asahel Hooker, The Moral Tendency of Man’s Accountableness to God...May 5, 1805 (Hartford: Hudson and Goodwin, 1805), 24.
69 Ibid, 25.
Nathan Perkins proclaimed that “the natural effect of religion is to secure and promote the peace, order, and well-being of society, and to give efficacy to the wholesome laws of a free government.” Perkins emphasized the “natural” effect of religion to claim that the value of something was derived from its “natural” tendency. Because religion held such an important natural tendency, it was extremely valuable to society and the state. Character traits of honesty and virtue, which Christianity supplied, were important for either a stable, happy family or a nation. Conversely, “a dissolute, idle, and profligate family must be eventually ruined, and so must a vicious nation.” The value of Christianity was that it was able to support both individual households and entire national governments. Therefore, the government should lend its full support to such a valuable institution.70

According to Perkins, the state should support religion because religion supported the state. Recognizing the power of Christianity as a source of morality, ethics, and personal conviction, the government should openly facilitate its growth. This was evidenced in that throughout history many of the most educated, wisest leaders found it prudent to incorporate religion into the very fabric of the government. These leaders understood that “some kind of religion is necessary to civil society.”71 Many political leaders agreed with Perkins’s point, believing that even in a land of religious liberty the government still had a responsibility to promote Christianity because of its value to building a virtuous society and government. For example, George Washington’s Farewell Address (which was heavily influenced by Alexander Hamilton) stated to the

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71 Ibid, 26-27.
American people that “Of all the dispositions and habits which lead to political prosperity, Religion and morality are indispensable supports.”\(^72\) The Standing Order argued that if many of the nation’s leaders believed that religion was important for morality, and morality was necessary for a strong government, then the position that Christianity should be supported by the state was an orthodox one.\(^73\) Connecticut’s leadership took this idea one step further by elevating one church above the others in terms of support, while not interfering with the other churches’ freedom to worship. This would strengthen society, they surmised, because no other institution was “better adapted, to this end” than churches for promoting both salvation and morality.\(^74\)

According to the Congregational ministers the ecclesiastical establishment was a boon to the government at least as much as it was for the churches. Because religion helped to produce virtuous, moral people, it followed that supporting religion meant that the nation would be comprised of citizens who possessed such attributes, thereby creating a strong and prosperous society and government. Minister Moses Welch affirmed that “the sum of our teaching is that men must first fear God, love Jesus and one another, obey rulers, and seek the good of civil society.” Additionally, Welch preached on the benefits of spiritual peace and eternal rewards in heaven, as well as the temporal

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\(^72\) George Washington’s Farewell Address, 1796. Many of the founders, including Adams, Jefferson and Madison, shared Washington’s conviction that, at least to some degree, morality depended on religion to some degree, see Gaustad, *Faith of the Founders*, 130. However, Washington went beyond the political convictions of Jefferson and Madison in his belief that the government should encourage religious practices and stimulate Christian morality, see Munoz, *God and the Founders*, 50-55.


blessings of becoming good, obedient citizens to the state.\textsuperscript{75} Therefore, leaders of the state should regard Christianity as the best means through which to encourage morality in the citizenry and prosperity for the state.

In a plea for churches to support struggling Congregational churches within Connecticut, the Domestic Missionary Society appealed to the idea that society needed religion in order to function. In asking for money for their cause they warned that the lack of regular religious instruction on the frontier had already taken a toll on society. In these parishes godliness had been weakened to the point that, “the diminution of moral restraint; the prevalence of error and the profanation of the Sabbath, are evils already experienced, and to be experienced, if nothing be done to counteract their influence, with augmented power, and to a greater extent, from year to year.”\textsuperscript{76}

As a “steady habit” of the Connecticut political and social system, the proposed disestablishment of religion threatened to tear apart the nature of Connecticut society that had existed for over one hundred years. State support of religion had proved its usefulness to the Standing Order by virtue of having always been a part of Connecticut polity. An editorial in the \textit{Courant} pleaded with the people of Connecticut to realize that the free schools, libraries, and just court system were all products of the Standing Order. The Republicans promised to destroy the Standing Order, and as a consequence important social institutions would be taken down as well. The state had enjoyed

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\textsuperscript{75} Moses Welch, \textit{An Excellent Spirit Forms the Character of a Good Ruler…}, May 14, 1812 (Hartford: Hudson and Goodwin, 1812), 28.
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prosperity and freedom since its inception as a colony. The Standing Order could not understand why anyone would want to abolish such a successful system.\textsuperscript{77}

Asahel Hooker mocked the Republican supporters of disestablishment, claiming that that supposed “friends of liberty” invented preposterous arguments in order to justify their immorality and prove that their infidelity is actually beneficial for society and the freedom of religion. To Hooker, beneath the guise of toleration and respect for religion, the opponents of establishment aimed to remove religious influences from society in order to glorify their own decadence. These enemies of religion wished to impose their immorality and corruption upon the state through the power of public office.\textsuperscript{78}

Some in the established clergy feared that many of their constituents did not share their conviction that Christian leaders were superior to irreligious politicians. They believed that there was a growing popular sentiment that Christian officials were no better than deist or atheist rulers. Although suspicious that their belief in the importance of Christian leaders was not winning the Standing Order any support in elections, they continued to preach to their conviction. They cared deeply about the future of the American republic, and as a result their political sermons reflected their confidence that devotion to Christianity was a vital qualification for government officials.\textsuperscript{79}

Based on their arguments for the benefits of Christianity upon America, the Standing Order defended the practice of the parish tax. They argued that because religious institutions strengthened the community, they should be supported by tax

\textsuperscript{77} Federalist Party (Conn.), \textit{To the Freemen of Connecticut}…(New Haven: Nathan Whiting, 1816); \textit{Connecticut Courant}, April 2, 1816, p. 2.
\textsuperscript{78} Hooker, \textit{The Moral Tendency}, 20.
\textsuperscript{79} Burnett, \textit{An Election Sermon}, 15.
money. Just like tax money for the military, schools, or roads, individual citizens had no right to choose which taxes to pay and which to ignore. If society deemed a particular institution valuable, then all individuals were required to support it, whether or not they personally agreed with it.\(^8^0\) The Standing Order considered the ecclesiastical tax to be fairer than other taxes because a freedom of choice existed in how the tax revenue was directed. For example, on a tax for supporting roads, no one had the option to direct their tax money to a particular road project. Nor did any citizen have the right to decree how their tax for the military would be directed. With the religious tax, however, individuals had a choice as to which denomination their money would support. In this way the argument for an ecclesiastical tax followed Zephaniah Swift’s logic about the tax being a part of the democratic process. Because churches benefited all of society, using state money to support religion was just.

The ecclesiastical tax was also important because it helped to support ministers, who in turn supported the community. The prospects of bi-vocational ministers worried the established clergy. In a sermon delivered at the General Association, Heman Humphrey argued that communities should make sure to supply their ministers with ample salaries lest the minister have to take a secondary job in order to supplement his income. He warned that if a minister only worked at his religious duties part-time, “the people begin to suspect that he is growing rich.”\(^8^1\) His dire prediction was that the inevitable result of bi-vocational ministers would be a decline in religious devotion.

\(^8^0\) Connecticut Mirror, November 4, 1816, p. 3.

throughout the community. Further, the institution of the church would be ineffective in communities where the minister could not devote adequate care for his parishioners because he needed to work a secondary job. He predicted that if citizens properly supported ministers’ salaries revivals of religion would become more frequent, prosperity would ensue, America would be blessed by God, and, of course, ministers would have more influence in their communities. In light of such potential blessings, failing to support ministers would be an injustice.  

The established clergy feared that the nation would sink into anarchy if Americans refused to strictly adhere to the Christian-based morality established by the first settlers of the region. Yale’s president Timothy Dwight’s most famous students, Lyman Beecher and Nathaniel Taylor, were convinced that local communities must be spiritually obedient to God in order for them to prosper. Taylor warned that because sin and irreligion ran counter to the God-ordained moral order, a community that was unrepentant of disobedience would suffer destruction. The requirement of piousness was especially true of a nation that was a republic and not a monarchy or dictatorship as a republic depended upon its citizenry for its survival and development. Beecher reminded his audiences that New England was founded on Christian precepts. Religion was the cornerstone of the community; “remove it, and the building falls.”

The Standing Order used the violence of the French Revolution as a justification of their conviction that Christianity was essential for a stable society opposed to the

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82 Ibid, 11.
“godless republic” of France. For the Standing Order, anything that resembled
“jacobinism” or similar ideas of the French Revolution were masks for despotism and
atheism. For the Federalists in America as well as some of the Whigs in England, the
future of a free society for either nation rested in part on ensuring that the dreaded French
leviathan of jacobinism did not wash up on their shores. Federalists throughout the
nation feared that if the radical egalitarian ideology of the French Revolution took hold in
America it would fray the social and political fabric of American society. Consequently,
the established clergy were quick to denounce any supporters of France, or any of the
social or political ideas which came from that nation, as inherently anti-Christian.

In America, Democrat-Republican societies were one such group demonized as
“jacobin” by the Standing Order. These assemblies were initially organized out of a
growing enthusiasm for the revolutionary spirit coming out of the French Revolution.
Many of the members of these societies belonged to the growing middling classes of
workers – such as farmers, small manufactures and merchants – who were frustrated with
their perceived lack of opportunities to participate in the political process in a Federalist-
controlled polity. Generally, these societies also were more radical in their political
beliefs than were Republican elites. Federalist conjecture held that the Democratic-

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85 In England, Edmund Burke is most famously remembered for his treatises against jacobinism
and the French Revolution, and in the process articulated the political foundations for both the classical
liberal ideology as well as modern conservatism. In the United States, Federalists embraced Burke’s
political philosophy in their critique of both the French Revolution and the Republican Party.
86 William C. Dowling, Literary Federalism in the Age of Jefferson: Joseph Dennie and the Port
Folio, 1801-1812 (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1999), 10.
87 Gordon S. Wood, Empire of Liberty: A History of the Early Republic, 1789-1815 (New York:
Oxford University Press, 2009), 162-63.
Republican societies in America were in reality vessels used to spread jacobinism throughout the American republic.

The Standing Order had good reason to be wary of these societies – they supported Republican ideology, were enamored with the French, and detested the air of aristocracy that enveloped the Federalists. For the Standing Order these societies did not simply threaten the Federalist Party. They were seen as promoters of dangerous ideas that, if spread throughout the nation, would cause the United States to collapse under a torrent of social and political chaos. At an announced Republican event at which Connecticut’s party leader, Pierpont Edwards, planned to deliver a speech about Jefferson’s political virtues, a Federalist pamphlet mockingly suggested the address had already been written. All Edwards had to do, it was suggested, was recite the words of the French radical Robespierre. After all, the political radicals who unleashed the bloodshed and violence of the French Revolution were advocated by “the Monticellian Party.”\textsuperscript{88} These potentially destructive ideas threatened to corrupt the moral and religious convictions of Americans and turn the United States into a land of anarchy. Their negative reaction to the French Revolution indicated the dire straits the country faced if it abandoned the traditional European model of state-supported Christian institutions.

The irreligion of the Revolution’s ideological leaders greatly worried the Standing Order because they viewed it as the linchpin for the excessive violence during the Reign of Terror. Like Timothy Dwight, many Congregational ministers were skeptical of the ideas of the architects of the Revolution, such as Robespierre and Voltaire. They

\textsuperscript{88} Article 2 -- No Title. \textit{The Port Folio (1801-1827)}: Feb 26, 1803. Printed in \textit{American Periodicals}, 69.
believed that the “modern philosophers” in Europe claimed to promote liberty and social harmony by “exterminating religion” as the cornerstone of society in favor of empirical reason and natural law alone.\(^8^9\) The perception that atheism was at the heart of the French Revolution made it impossible for the Congregationalists to support any politician or political society that gave any credence to Jacobin ideology. The established clergy feared that in France the “liberty” being celebrated was simply “licentiousness” in the form of a society without Christianity as its central mooring. This in turn led to social chaos. The seeming removal of religion from society produced “an almost universal corruption of morals” which fostered crime and corruption. The eventual consequence of this “flood of wrongs, unparalleled in the history of nations” was that the people of France had “tamely” submitted to “despotich power.”\(^9^0\) The prominent fear was that without a religious underpinning, the ultimate outcome of the Revolution would be chaos, followed by the rise of a despotic regime. This pattern should serve as a forewarning to Americans that a government and society that was not based upon the laws of God and did not have a proper fear of God would eventually succumb to the same fate. Thus, religion was of utmost importance for a republic of freedom.

The established clergy were part of a large segment of the American populace worried about the brazen efforts of the French Revolution to disconnect political and social life from any form of religion. Charles Downer Hazen’s 1897 study of what contemporary Americans believed about the Revolution concluded that, more than any

\(^8^9\) Huntington, *The Love of Jerusalem*, 15.
other aspect of its ideology or polity, “It was with the accusations of irreligion that the American defenders of France had the most difficulty.”⁹¹ American proponents of the events in France could tolerate the execution of Louis XV, the creation of a new government, and even some of the violence that ensued in the wake of the change of political leadership. What was most unpalatable to Americans was the French hostility towards orthodox Christianity in the midst of their violent upheaval. The combination of irreligion and the terror of the guillotine convinced many that the freedom of religious liberty could be dangerously abused.⁹²

Decades after the bloodshed ended the Standing Order continued to hold up the French Revolution as a warning of what lay in store for America without Federalism and the support of Christianity as a foundation in the political sphere. In an 1805 sermon, Asahel Hooker lamented that France had become a “golgatha…filling its deluded inhabitants, with the very dregs of the cup of tears, of humiliation, and wo.”⁹³ The philosophies and politics of the Revolution, devoid of any Christian underpinnings, seemed to the Standing Order to be the cause of the violence and chaos. In 1810 the Connecticut Journal reprinted a sermon from Boston in which the minister warned that the best protection for the American system against the godlessness of France was the “prevalence of true Christianity.” The turmoil in France was the consequence of the

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⁹³ Ibid, 35.
attempt to fuse liberty with atheism.\textsuperscript{94} It was therefore obvious that the state should do all in its power to foster strong religious sentiments among its citizenry.

Additionally, many clergymen interpreted the ideology of the French Revolution as essentially liberal, extolling the supremacy of the individual good over that of the collective. This ideology ran counter to their classical republican vision for America in which the good of society outweighed personal interests. They assumed that many Republican supporters of the French Revolution did so because it appeared as though the emerging French republic would “symbolize the entry [of liberalism] onto the stage of world history.”\textsuperscript{95}

For the New England Congregationalists, their Francophobia based upon religious differences predated the French Revolution. The anti-Catholic sentiments of their Puritan heritage factored into their distrust of the French and made them more inclined to be skeptical of the Revolution from its outset. Fears of the Catholic French gave way to fears of the atheist French of the Revolution and how their vision for a society without God would throw the nation into anarchy. Consequently, the Standing Order feared that the supporters of France might potentially hold either Catholic or atheist sympathies, which in their view made such persons dangerous to the social order.\textsuperscript{96}

This was a significant ideological reason why the ecclesiastical establishment was so vital to the Standing Order. Remove the political clergy, the Congregationalists argued, and a critical component of government support would be severed. Whereas


\textsuperscript{95} Dowling, \textit{Literary Federalism in the Age of Jefferson}, 14.

\textsuperscript{96} Cleves, \textit{The Reign of Terror in America}, 6, 9.
dissenters insisted that ministers’ involvement in political affairs tainted both Christianity and the government, the Congregationalists surmised that the disconnection between church and state was the real threat to each institution. Because government was a divine institution, severing government from religion would be akin to “separating man from his Maker.” An irreligious government as proposed by many Republicans exalted human authority over God. To the clergy, such a thing would prove disastrous. Thus, the clergy’s messages benefited both church and state. Consequently, as they affirmed the Standing Order as a mutually beneficial relationship between the two entities they questioned the motives of those who desired to see the partnership severed.

Congregational clergymen used theology and biblical passages to support their position of affirming that America was a land given to them by God, and therefore should not shy away from being a “Christian” nation with an ecclesiastical establishment. Stanley Griswold declared that America was another Canaan, a Promised Land, a “gift from heaven, not far inferior to that which was given as an inheritance to Israel.” In this comparison, God had delivered the Americans from slavery just as he had the ancient Israelites: “Israel had a tyrannic [sic] and inexorable Pharaoh to deal with, and the Americans a British King.” The Old Testament prophet Daniel, Moses Welch argued, never “treated the public institutions of religion with a sarcastic sneer.” In fact, it was to Daniel that Christian leaders should turn as a model of keeping a pious character when

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98 Stanley Griswold, *The Good Land We Live In*, July 7, 1802 (Suffield, CT: Edward Gray 1802), 8, 14. Griswold was not a proponent of the establishment, nevertheless his comparison of the righteousness of the American Revolution with the plight of the Hebrew people was shared by many established and dissenting clergymen alike.
faced with being stabbed by “the venomous tongues of slander” of political opponents.\(^9^9\)

Thus, Welch used Daniel to promote the Standing Order and to take a swipe at Republicans as well. Timothy Dwight’s contemporary Benjamin Trumbull held the biblical king Solomon as an example of the benefits of having religiously devout leaders in Connecticut. Following Solomon, civic leaders should be “eminently religious” and that the “most essential part of the character of a good ruler is that he must be truly pious and religious” just as God had instructed Solomon.\(^1^0^0\) Many ministers in the early republic, including Connecticut clergymen Andrew Lee and Matthias Burnet, employed the “nursing fathers” metaphor of Isaiah 49:23 to describe the role of civic leaders in promoting godliness, religious institutions, and Christian ethics through their duties as political leaders.\(^1^0^1\)

Conversely, to Republicans and dissenters, the established clergy’s endorsement of and active participation in politics, and their overt support from the government made a mockery of organized religion and was blatantly unbiblical. Turning to Old Testament imagery of the first Israelite government, Abraham Bishop declared that “eminent…is the visible junction of Moses [the spiritual leader] and Aaron [the civil leader] in [Connecticut].” This unholy union between the sacred and the secular was evidenced, Bishop declared, in the state support for Yale, public education (for which there were

\(^1^0^0\) Benjamin Trumbull, *The Dignity of Man, Especially as Displayed in Civil Government*, May 14, 1801 (Hartford: Hudson and Goodwin, 1801), 16-17.
some tests for orthodoxy), and especially the Missionary Society which directly funded Congregational missionaries in the western territories.  

Many opponents of the Standing Order rejected the ecclesiastical establishment not because they felt that religion should not have any impact on the government at all; religion should make a positive contribution to society. Rather, dissenters argued that history had proved that state churches ultimately ended up as failures. Merging the two either contorted religion into a prop for the state, or the religious intolerance of a government with a state church prompted widespread persecution or warfare.

For the opponents of the church establishment a significant problem with the ecclesiastical system was that it made the established churches pawns in the Federalist coalition. They believed that the Congregationalists had begun to work at the behest of the Federalists. State Republican leader Pierpont Edwards stated that wherever Christianity was established by law, it invariably ended up doing the bidding of the government. George Richards warned in an 1817 pamphlet that a formal connection between ecclesiastical and civil institutions “must be monstrous – an unnatural brood of hypocrisy, cruelty and intolerance. The admixture of human ingredients in the chalice of religion converts its nectar into poison.” He then offered the example that the clergy did not pay taxes in the state, giving them added incentive to support those politicians who promised the retention of such benefits. Their concern was that an established clergy

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would be tempted to support politicians that pandered to them, rather than electing those who were ultimately concerned for the well-being of the state.

Dissenters and Republicans argued that the involvement with the Federalists degraded the established clergy as much as it did their religion. Many of them determined that the Congregational association with the Standing Order had already corrupted the clergy. Following in the convictions of Republican leader Thomas Jefferson, Abraham Bishop proclaimed that although the established clergy made “great professions of piety” they actively pursued “strong leagues with the powers of this world,” using their position as spiritual leaders to control and manipulate the public.\(^\text{105}\) Congregational prominence during election days and fast days gave improper overt support to particular civil leaders. In a similar fashion Pierpont Edwards claimed that through the ecclesiastical laws the state legislature had created an “injury done to the cause of religion, by poisoning the priesthood itself.”\(^\text{106}\) Consequently, rather than helping and supporting the Christian ministry, ecclesiastical laws had instead corrupted the clergy and their churches by hindering the spread of genuine Christianity.

As a result of this corruption, Republicans and dissenters accused the established clergy of being more interested in trying to attract converts to the Standing Order rather than to compel people “to love and follow the Saviour.” Elijah Waterman, a minister in Bridgeport, employed the common Republicans slur referring to the Standing Order clergy in deriding, “I well know that the contractedness of the Bigot, instead of pointing


the new born soul to Jesus…, points him to his own fold, denomination and forms.”

Ministers such as Waterman believed that the established clergy practiced bigotry by demonizing and discriminating against political opponents, a practice that was both odious and unbiblical.

Similarly to Waterman’s argument, Edwards remarked that the Congregational “federal priests” preached politics more than the gospel because the scriptures were not “fit” for “federal work.” So great was the corruption and hypocrisy of the established clergy that he snidely mused that their vices were so evident that “the morals of a people may be improved by the preaching of such hypocrites.” For those Republicans, the immorality of the established clergy to follow the Standing Order was so great that the only credibility they had was in being examples of vice.

Additionally, dissenters maintained that the ecclesiastical establishment undermined Christian ethics. In 1802, Abraham Bishop warned that rather than being beneficial for Protestantism, a church-state relationship was detrimental to Christianity because it tempted churches with greed and pride. Ecclesiastical establishment “courts earthly greatness, thrives in the midst of wealth and honors, delights in war, and purifies with zeal whatever Christianity forbids.” Renegade Congregational minister Stanley Griswold insisted that the Standing Order suppressed religious liberty and ultimately corrupted legitimate Christianity. Public displays of allegiance to a political party seemed to these dissenters too much of a resemblance to the role of the papacy in the

107 Both quotations in this paragraph from Waterman, The Noble Convert, 17.
109 Abraham Bishop, Proofs of a Conspiracy, Against Christianity and the Government of the United States; Exhibited in several views of the Union of Church and State in New England (Hartford: John Babcock, 1802), 15.
Catholic Church. A comparison to Catholicism was a strong accusation, for no matter what else they disagreed on, most Congregationalists and Protestant dissenters in Connecticut agreed that Catholicism was anything but a legitimate expression of Christianity.  

Two of the major charges the Standing Order levied against Republicans were that the upstart political organization desired to eliminate religious influence in the state (through the elimination of the ecclesiastical establishment) and that they sought to overturn all the traditional social and political structures which had made Connecticut prosperous. Republicans turned these arguments against the Standing Order. To the first point they replied that if religion in the state was truly dependent upon God and not the General Assembly, then it did not need state support. Any institution which relied upon God and had his blessing certainly did not require any help from the state. In fact, a democratic society in which people freely chose their religious affiliation strengthened Christianity. In a laissez-faire marketplace of ideas, “Monopolies in religion…are not agreeable to the spirit of a free people; competition having always a beneficial influence on old establishments.”

Republicans also claimed that the union of church and state kept Connecticut bound to traditionalism, unable to meet modern demands. Responding to David Daggett, dissenters viewed the Standing Order as uncompromising traditionalists, unable to accept social change. They argued that social change may threaten tradition, but it did not

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111 Columbian Register, January 25, 1817, p.2.
threaten society; in fact, as the Bible showed, it could lead to improvements. If innovation was wrong then it was also wrong for Christ to improve upon the Old Testament Jewish system through his teachings and his actions. Further, the Federalists were akin to the Pharisees of the gospels, slavishly following tradition and strict social rules rather than discerning what policies were in the best interests of individuals. Perhaps even more damning, they compared Federalists to the Pope, a grave insult in an anti-Catholic society.\footnote{112 “A Friend to the Public Welfare” [Pseud], \textit{Oration Delivered at Greenfield, on the Fourth of July…} (Bridgeport, CT: Mallory, 1805), 11, 14.}

Advocates of this argument understood that they could not press this point too far, lest they fall into the Standing Order claim that they were trying to upend traditional authority. The Republicans offered that they had no interest in undermining the “steady habits” of Connecticut. Rather, they postulated that steady habits should give citizens confidence to seek innovation in improving the prospects of the state, as the inclination towards sobriety, industry, and order would save any innovation from potential recklessness. To them, the events of 1776 proved that the steady habits of their forefathers included altering “political institutions, whenever necessity or expediency called for such change.”\footnote{113 Ibid, 15-16.}

Further, dissenters pointed out that contrary to the wildly delusional predictions of some conservatives, the Republican ascendancy to national power did not lead to a widespread persecution of churches. “Have bibles been generally burnt, or meeting-houses wantonly destroyed since the present order of things has taken place in the United
States?” The nation was not filled with atheists, and dissenting churches did not
disregard law and order. Religious institutions had little reason to fear Republican
politics. Republicans were usually quick to note that the churchgoing citizens of
Connecticut had nothing to fear about the future of public worship should their party run
the government. The proof, they pointed out, lay in the fact that Federalists had feared
for the future of churches once Jefferson became President in 1800. Although the
Federalists “pronounced that the election of Mr. Jefferson would annihilate public faith,”
four years in to the administration had proven that “religion and its altars have been
safe.” The success of Jefferson’s administration should not only alleviate anxiety, but
should encourage voters to side with the Republicans.

To the contrary, Abraham Bishop claimed that the Republicans held the utmost
respect for religion, stating, “as to religion, we shall never be guilty of pressing it into
public service, nor shall we refuse it the aids, which public sentiment may demand.” In other words, if the public desired that the government support of religion through
taxation or legislation, so be it. However, all religions should have equal access to funds
and equally beneficial legislation and opportunities to participate in the political arena.
Thus, the main Republican charge against the established Congregationalists was that the
clergy was not trying to use religion to help strengthen the government, but rather was in
union with the civil powers to exercise control over the people of the state.

115 Bishop, Oration, 18.
116 Ibid, 23.
There were opponents of the Standing Order who believed that the ecclesiastical system should be modified, not removed. These dissenters sought religious equality rather than disestablishment in the political realm. For example, in an 1817 letter to the Connecticut *Times*, a Baptist attacked the Congregationalists for monopolizing the local political offices throughout the state. His argument stated that since Baptists represented one-eighth of the state, then Baptists should have one-eighth of the office holdings. The same ratios for office holders should be held for all the Christian denominations. His argument was not for the disestablishment of the church, but rather for a system that included more religious sects. For him and others like him, religious liberty simply meant the right for all denominations to participate in supporting and influencing government and society.¹¹⁷

The state’s Republican Party defended itself against the Standing Order’s argument that the loss of religious establishment would turn the United States into anarchy and bloodshed like the excesses of the French Revolution. They retorted that their support of France was limited to that of a nation on a quest for representative government over the authority of a king; it was not the violence they condoned or supported. Nevertheless, the Republicans did not apologize for or ignore the violence that took place in France. Rather, they minimized it, claiming that a political revolution was “never accomplished without hazard.”¹¹⁸ If people died during the turmoil of the

¹¹⁷ *The Times*, March 18, 1817, p. 1. A year later, the *Times* ran a letter from another religious dissenter stating that the duty of individuals to support religious institutions was not even a question in the minds of the people of Connecticut. *The Times*, September 1, 1818, p. 2.

¹¹⁸ Democratic Party, *Republican Address to the Freemen*, 1803, 10.
Revolution, it was the unfortunate consequence of radical social and political change. The battle for liberty, not the absence of religion, sparked the violence in France.

Republicans employed the French Revolution as a counter-argument to the Standing Order position that state-support of religious institutions were beneficial for society. They used the Revolution as a caution against church establishments, arguing that the established church in France was a factor in sparking the Revolution. A state church ultimately hindered Christianity because it made people distrust religion and the value of religious institutions. In the *American Mercury*, “Zacheus” argued that the people of France preferred revolution to ‘popish’ rule.\(^{119}\) His argument was that the dominance of the Catholic Church burdened the people to the extent that they turned on it as a source of authority and blamed it for their social and economic condition. Consequently, the French Revolution proved that establishment tended to make individuals hate religion; would establishment in America be treated with any less contempt? Disestablishment, therefore, served as the best way to protect Americans from suffering a similar loss of religion as the French.

**CONCLUSION**

As the Hartford Convention showed, the Standing Order was willing to take drastic measures to protect their vision for the American republic from the perceived recklessness of the Republicans. New England Federalists and Congregationalists were kindred spirits in that both were leery of the natural ability of people to participate in

\(^{119}\) *American Mercury*, July 28, 1818, p. 3.
republican politics, and both adhered to a social vision for the nation that relied upon
traditional institutions to promote the virtue of the citizenry. They both believed in
democracy and freedom; they were supporters of the American Revolution, after all. But
they also believed that the people would have to be able to control themselves from their
own depravity if the republic were to survive. To that end, as the French Revolution had
so clearly demonstrated to them, the state support of religion was vital. 120

The fears of the Standing Order about the potential violence for America if it
abandoned ties to Great Britain and instead closely followed France was a significant
driving force in their ideology for the republic. They feared for their nation, their state,
and their local communities if the people rejected the Christian tenets upon which they
believed their society was founded. They were not interested in resisting social changes
per se, or desperate to cling to their privileged status of the past. Rather, they
legitimately believed that social and political chaos would ensue throughout America if
the Jeffersonians, with their vision of popular participation in the political sphere and
religious freedom from the government, came to power.

Many established ministers feared that if the church establishment were to be
removed in Connecticut then Christianity, virtue, and the social benefits of religion would
dissipate throughout the state and, ultimately, the nation. Although the Standing Order
recovered from the misstep of the Hartford Convention enough to keep control of the
state, the incident offered an opportunity for Republicans to gain support. Popular
allegiance for the Standing Order eroded until 1818, when the coalition of Republicans

120 Cleves, The Reign of Terror in America, 37-40.
and religious dissenters finally took charge of Connecticut politics and drew up a new state constitution that included the disestablishment of religion. Their path to victory was not inevitable nor was it easy. Through the battle for political control and drafting a new Constitution the ideology behind the Standing Order’s commitment to the ecclesiastical establishment came into further focus.
CHAPTER FIVE:

THE LAST BATTLE

In the aftermath of the War of 1812 the Jeffersonians made great inroads in Connecticut. Shifting cultural patterns such as emigration, a more transient populace, and a loss of deference for the clergy further weakened the authority of the Standing Order in the state. More importantly, the self-inflicted wound of the perceived treasonous actions of the Hartford Convention crippled the Federalists greatly. New England was ground zero in the cultural struggle between those who wanted to preserve a society based upon a Puritan heritage that had served the region for well over one hundred years, and those who embraced the demise of traditional sources of authority in favor of the possibilities promised by the rise of social, political and religious diversity.

The church establishment was a central battleground in this contest. A major aspect of the debate over the continuation of the church establishment was whether or not the establishment actually benefited either the state or the church. Of course, the Standing Order argued that it did. As a good Calvinist and Federalist, Yale president Timothy Dwight reminded his students that the government should be led from the top-down. Therefore, moral and just civic leaders were imperative for a strong republic. He also taught that while the government must be virtuous, the promotion of morality and
ethics were also the responsibility of institutions such as family, churches and schools.¹ When Timothy Dwight died in early 1817, the Republicans had still been unable to dislodge the Standing Order from their tenuous control of the state government.

By the time Jeremiah Day took over as Timothy Dwight’s replacement as Yale president in July 1817, the governorship had fallen to the Republicans. At Day’s instillation ceremony minister Isaac Lewis admonished the new president to continue to train Yale students in the religious doctrine of his predecessor. The upstart sects of Methodists and Baptists, along with heterodox churches such as the Unitarians, had been “corrupting the faith of many professing Christians.”² The established clergy saw their state support as essential to prevent this from happening. Many Congregational ministers shared the fear that Republicans would persecute the religious and promote atheism just as the leaders of the French Revolution had two decades earlier in their country. Their anxiety intensified as the opposition party gained seats in the General Assembly.

It was in the fall of 1817 that the opposition to the Standing Order took control of the Lower House of the Assembly, accomplishing the improbable goal they had sought after for almost two decades. So it was that Connecticut became the first of the New England states to lose its Standing Order as the association of Republicans and religious dissenters eventually wrestled enough popular support to unseat the Federalists for political control. The following year the Republican-controlled Assembly created a new state constitution that included a formal separation between the government and the

Congregationalists. The process by which this change came about first required Republicans to marginalize certain aspects of their platform and even change their party name in Connecticut in order to garner sufficient support.

The ratification of the state’s first constitution in 1818 eliminated the certificate requirement and compulsion for the parish tax, a major victory for the state’s religious dissenters. The *Register* reprinted an editorial from the *Albany Register* which praised the Constitutional convention for its objective of destroying “the fiend intolerance” from Connecticut and protecting “the rights of conscience” for its citizens. ³ To the Standing Order this act seemed to be the first salvo fired against religion by the “Jacobins” then in office.

In the interim between losing control of the General Assembly and the adoption of a state constitution, the Standing Order did not go quietly into the night. Congregational ministers such as Lewis and Day continued to fight for the preservation of their ecclesiastical system. At elections, ordinations, and other special occasions the ministers of the Standing Order called for public support for the ecclesiastical establishment in order to promote virtue among the people, for the election of good leaders, and for the continued prosperity of the state. The Standing Order took to partisan newspapers, broadsides, and even the halls of the General Assembly to defend the established clergy. During the constitutional convention they even proposed a variation of the establishment that allowed for the possibility that Congregationalists might be relegated to the status of a minor sect. The debate over the religious establishment that

³ *Columbian Register*, October 27, 1818, p. 3.
surrounded the constitutional process demonstrated that the establishment was a central issue for many of the people of Connecticut.

**PART ONE: EROSION OF STANDING ORDER SUPPORT**

Despite the effects of the Hartford Convention and the changing social landscape, the Standing Order continued to win elections in Connecticut for several reasons. First, Connecticut still maintained a property requirement for male suffrage. This meant that those eligible to vote in elections were generally wealthier and more established in their communities – in other words, the very type of person who was more inclined to favor tradition and conservatism. As a result, the majority of the men who might agree with Republican principles of greater democracy – non-landowners who were shut out of opportunities for social, economic, and political advancement – were ineligible to vote for such a change to come about in Connecticut. Second, some Federalist policies, such as favorable trade relations with Great Britain, appealed to the economic interests of many in Connecticut. Third, a great number of voters still agreed with the established clergy that Christianity benefitted to the common good, and so the state should support it.

Finally, the Standing Order used newspapers effectively as tools to reinforce their ideology throughout Connecticut. The rhetorical battles in the Connecticut newspapers over the disestablishment of religion were essential in the debate because of the important role newspapers played in the early republic. Newspaper editors were crucial political figures in the early nineteenth century, as they were the main promoters and distributors of political ideology for their respective parties.
Although during John Adams’s presidency Federalists throughout the nation tried to suppress political newspapers, with the election of Jefferson in 1800 the Federalists quickly reversed course and took up running partisan newspapers in earnest. They recognized the influence that Republican newspapers played in distributing their political ideas and promoting Jefferson. Federalists decided that the best way to promote their ideology was by using the same means as their rivals. This strategy was particularly employed by Connecticut’s Standing Order, which had come to completely dominate the state’s partisan newspaper business by the start of the War of 1812.⁴ Printers Hudson and Goodwin became the prominent publishers of the Federalist propaganda. Timothy Dwight’s brother, Theodore, spent several years as the chief editor of the Federalist Connecticut Courant. Through such papers the Federalists attacked Republican ideas and leaders and they also promoted the merits of their own political positions throughout the state.

At the turn of the nineteenth century Connecticut’s Standing Order and their Republican opponents engaged in a torrid and sordid battle of libel litigation. For example, in 1806 the Congregational clergyman Dan Huntington pressed charges of libel against Elisha Babcock, printer of the Republican American Mercury. Babcock was convicted of libel and fined $1,000.⁵ This torrent of litigation ceased completely after 1806. However this was not due to a “new tone” of civility among the partisan press.

⁵ Philip I. Blumberg, Repressive Jurisprudence in the Early American Republic: The First Amendment and the Legacy of English Law (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 218. After his conviction, Babcock complained in the Mercury that the Standing Order slandered Republican clergymen at their leisure, “but turn the tables and a federal court and jury will discover that society is on the precipice of anarchy.” American Mercury, April 3, 1806, in Repressive Jurisprudence, 218.
Although the libel battles ended, the newspapers continued to champion their own partisan cause and attack political opponents. These skirmishes intensified as Republicans increased their efforts to launch and maintain their own state newspapers.

The Federalists dominated the state’s newspaper until about 1816 when Republican John Niles founded the Hartford Times, a Republican paper that offered legitimate political competition for the Federalists’ papers. Although Babcock’s Mercury had been in publication longer, Niles’s paper was the first Republican paper to gain any significant widespread influence upon public opinion. In fact, concerning the rise of the Republicans and the disestablishment of religion in Connecticut, the common contemporary opinion was that Niles was the man most responsible for overturning the Standing Order.6

Unable to tolerate the Republican entry into newspaper politics, Federalists blasted the opposition papers for allegedly launching smear campaigns against the established clergy. A Federalist, “Sidney,” who was also a contributor to the Courant, lambasted Republicans for supposedly demeaning the clergy in their newspaper. He claimed that the goal of the opposition papers was to “degrade and eventually destroy the Presbyterian congregations… Look at the Toleration papers – see how constantly the Presbyterian Clergy and professors of religion are reproached.” Sidney followed those charges with listing some of the common derogatory slanders the clergy were called, such as “blue-skins, bigots, platformists, puritans, etc.”7 An article in the Courant charged

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6 Pasley, The Tyranny of Printers, 382.
that “Democratic printers take so much delight in abusing and ridiculing Connecticut, its federal character, its federal representatives in Congress, and its learned and pious Clergy.” Such accusations were common in the print culture of the Connecticut papers. Although the libel litigation ceased after 1806, the fiery rhetoric, blatant partisanship, and personal slanders intensified as the state became more politically divided and the creation of a new state constitution, complete with a disestablishment clause, loomed on the political horizon.

Finally, despite losing some of their social prestige and moral influence to the political class the clergy still retained a significant amount of moral capital in New England society. Loyalty to their established clergy swayed some to defend the Standing Order when they otherwise might not have. In order to move public opinion in their favor Republicans had to persuade the people that the ecclesiastical establishment was actually detrimental to the good of society and religion. Further, they needed to demonstrate that the Standing Order was patently unfair to other churches and actually hurt the merits of genuine Christianity in the public eye. They had to convince voters that the presence of the established clergy in political affairs negatively affected both church and state. Their first major opportunity to prove their case against the Standing Order came with the Act for the Support of Religion and Literature.

In 1816, the General Assembly seemingly affirmed the Republican accusations that denominations were unequal in the eyes of the government with their Act for the Support of Religion and Literature. The Act took $145,000 that the state had received as

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8 Connecticut Courant, March 17, 1800.
reimbursement from their militia support during the war of 1812 and distributed those funds among the various Protestant sects in proportion to their size in the state. The design was to mollify religious dissenters who had been clamoring for disestablishment by giving each sect some state revenue. In essence, however, the Act made explicit what each denomination was worth in the eyes of the state by assigning a monetary value to each one. Naturally, the Congregationalists received the lion’s share of this money.9 This legislative decision infuriated dissenters on three fronts. First, it served as proof that the Congregationalists remained in a privileged position in the state, further demonstrating the subordinate status of the minor sects and the absurdity of Standing Order claims to the contrary. Second, additional money to the Congregationalists meant that they had more to spend to grow their own churches and religious societies, which would in turn reinforce the strength of the established church. Many dissenters believed that if the state wished to give money to support religion then it should be given equally to all denominations, as not to give an advantage to one over the others. Third, dissenters interpreted the Act as a Federalist attempt to bribe them into supporting the practice of state-supported religion, to “approve of what [the dissenters] conscientiously believed was an injustice.”10 While some denominations did accept their share of the money, others, such as the Methodists, followed their conscience and refused to take the state’s

9 As reported in the Connecticut Courant, 1/3 of the money went to the Congregationalists, 1/7 to Episcopalians, 1/8 to Baptists, 1/12 to Methodists, and 1/7 to Yale. Connecticut Courant, April 1, 1817, p.2.

10 Submitted by “A Friend to the Methodists” to the Columbian Register, April 18, 1818, p. 4. See also M. Louise Greene, The Development of Religious Liberty in Connecticut (New York: Da Capo Press, 1970 (1905)), 467, 469.
money based on their conviction that state-supported churches corrupted both the state and the church.

The Federalists responded by threatening those denominations that refused to accept their share of the money from the Act for the Support of Religion and Literature. They hinted that the sects that had been “influenced” to refuse the money would have their share given to those sects who accepted the funds.11 This threat put the minor sects in a difficult position. If they accepted the money they would implicitly condone the decision of the legislature and capitulate the majority of the funds to the Congregationalists. If they rejected the money their denominations would face further financial setbacks while other sects received a larger infusion of money at their expense. Consequently, some dissenting churches relented and accepted the money.

For their part, the Standing Order argued that the unequal distribution of money was fair because the money was allocated based on the size of the denomination. The Congregationalists received the most simply because they were the largest sect in the state. A completely unfair arrangement, they argued, would be to give all the sects equal amounts of money when they were unequal in their numbers of churches or members. This justification conveniently favored the very denomination to which the majority of the politicians belonged.

Their rationale remained unconvincing to many who did not support the Standing Order. The allocation of the money for religious institutions instead of other public projects, the apparent slight to the other sects, and the seeming abuse of power of the

11 Federalist Party (Conn.), $50,000, March 21, 1817 (New Haven, 1817).
legislature to blatantly support Congregational churches all worked to upset those who stood outside of the political power. The irreligious certainly did not appreciate such a sizeable amount of money given to churches while there were many other uses for the funds available. Dissenters chafed at the reaffirmation of their subordinate status. The Act was a major catalyst towards uniting them against the Standing Order and energizing their efforts to topple the traditional state of Connecticut politics.

The fatal blow to the reign of the Standing Order was the failure of the General Assembly to grant the Episcopali ans the same privileges as the Congregationalists. The Congregational-Episcopal alian voting bloc gave the Federalists the advantage in state elections. The Episcopali ans had long supported the Standing Order in part in hope of joining the establishment themselves. They even supported their ministers through taxation at a greater rate than did the Congregationalists. As a Federalist noted, “it is presumed that every episcopal clergyman in the state is supported by taxation – but there are some congregational societies who do not tax themselves for the support of their clergymen; and now let us ask, do they belong to the established church, or not?”

Although technically a dissenting sect, the Episcopal pianists had much in common with the clergy of the Standing Order. They both were inclined towards social and political conservatism. They both had a longer history in Connecticut than the upstart sects, an advantage which gave them prominent places in their communities, meaning that they were held in high standing by many throughout society, their congregants were largely older, more conservative, and wealthy. Both sects emphasized the need for an

12 Connecticut Journal, September 4, 1818, p.3.
educated clergy and frowned upon the itinerant and “unlearned” preaching of many Baptist and Methodist ministers. Episcopalians (and occasionally the Methodists) sided with the Standing Order because they shared the same vision of a state, and a nation, governed by virtuous politicians who were supported by virtuous institutions.

The Standing Order routinely refused to reward the loyalty of the Episcopalians. The Congregationalists consistently declined to allow the Episcopalians to participate in civic functions such as leading prayers before the state General Assembly and giving July 4th orations, facts which the Republicans used in vain to try to sway the Episcopalians to their side. For more than a decade the Republicans futilely tried to appeal to the Episcopalians. A Federalist under the pseudonym “Sidney” claimed that the Republicans “pretended to take a deep interest in the Episcopal Church, intending thereby to rise into notice and consequence. Is it not evident, then, that the leaders in this clamor sought only to create a spirit of opposition, that they might profit by it.”

Whichever party could gain the support of the Episcopalians would have a decisive advantage in the state elections of 1817.

The first major legislative mistake that fractured the alliance between the Standing Order and Episcopalians came when the General Assembly rejected a plan for the establishment of an Episcopalian college in Connecticut in 1810. Yale was the only college available to young men in Connecticut and the institution was a bastion of Congregationalism and Calvinist theology. Knowing that sending their sons to Yale meant that they would also have to study Congregational theology, many Episcopalians

13 “Sidney,” Modern Toleration, 2.
viewed the inability to start their own college to be an unacceptable position of the legislature. In the *Connecticut Herald* “Toleration” mused, “It is so great a misfortune, that, *without abjuring his faith*, an Episcopalian cannot become an officer in Yale College… Yet he has the good fortune to be allowed to send his sons to be educated and indoctrinated…in said college. Yet he has the good fortune to pay taxes for the support of the government of this State and for that of the college.”

14 Although Toleration meant the phrase sarcastically, the stance of the legislature against the Episcopalians became “good fortune” for the Republicans as it served as an important issue for persuading members of the denomination to join their cause.

The unity of the Standing Order was irrevocably damaged with the legislature’s refusal to support Episcopalian educational efforts. Episcopalian leaders recognized the potential of Yale to wield religious influence that upon the young men of the American republic. They eagerly wanted a college in part to transmit their own religious values throughout New England as well as provide a doctrinally consistent school for their own young men to attend. Seeking their own educational facility to train students in their doctrine and ecclesiology, the Episcopalian church opened its own academic academy in 1796. However, this academy was far from being a full-fledged college. When the Episcopalian Theological Seminary finally opened in 1820, Samuel Turner declared at his Introductory Discourse, “…the design in view is not merely to make in theory, the able theologian; but so to train the pious youth, that he may enter, with some probability

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of success, on the office to which he has devoted himself.”

Having their own college was not a trivial matter to the Episcopalians; they viewed such an institution as important for strengthening the faith of their children.

The denomination repeatedly petitioned the state for funds to support the school, many of which were denied. Episcopalians eventually concluded that these rejections for their own university were evidence of a bias by the state government against them. Their fears seemed to be realized when the state refused to grant the church a charter to turn the academy into a college. The Governor’s Council, backed by the staunch Federalist David Daggett, rejected the Episcopalian petition, fearing that a rival school would lessen the prestige of Yale. Dejected, the Episcopalians slowly began to eye the Republican Party as a means to secure more opportunities and privileges that were denied to them by the Standing Order.

The final injustice that fatally severed the Episcopalian alignment with the Standing Order came over the Bishop’s Fund controversy. For years the Episcopalian churches in Connecticut sought to raise sufficient funds to hire a bishop to oversee the denomination in the state. In 1814 a group of investors petitioned the General Assembly for the right to charter a bank based out of Hartford, called the Phoenix Bank. In exchange for the bank the investors offered five percent of the initial investment to the state government, which would then be distributed to two funds: Revenue for a new medical school at Yale and the support for a bishop for the convention of Episcopalians.

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15 Samuel H. Turner, *Introductory Discourse...at the Opening of the Theological Seminary of the Protestant Episcopal Church of the United States, September 13, 1820* (Hartford: S. Lincoln, 1820), 31. Beinecke Rare Books and Manuscript Collection, Yale University.

churches in Connecticut. Presumably the inclusion of funds for Yale was meant as a means to gain favor for the project within the General Assembly. Whatever their motivation, the plan was successful and the state received fifty thousand dollars, five percent of the one million dollar initial offering.

Soon thereafter the General Assembly transferred twenty thousand dollars to trustees on behalf of the medical school at Yale. The legislature’s Council authorized the remaining money to go towards the Bishop’s Fund, but the Lower House voted down this allocation of the money. Citing the costs of the war with Great Britain, eventually both Houses of the legislature rejected releasing the remainder of the Phoenix Bonus to the Episcopalians. This excuse might have sufficed for supporters of the denomination had the state not already granted the Congregational Yale College its share of the money. Consequently, many people in the state regardless of their religious affiliation viewed the incident as a blatant double-standard and an attempt by the government to manipulate the churches in Connecticut.17

The eagerness of the General Assembly to give Yale its share of the Bonus may not have been as sinisterly motivated as dissenters claimed. Rather, it may have been born out the decades-long repeated petitions by the struggling College for more state support. Despite its notoriety the College often scrambled for funds.18 The school was reluctant to impose tuition hikes as many of its students already accepted private donations in order to finance their schooling. The 1792 state grant to Yale and the

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subsequent absolving of that debt along with another grant issued in 1796 proved to be the exceptions to the rule for the degree of financial support that Connecticut offered the school. The Yale trustees consistently told the legislature that the only way to “prevent [the college] from ruin” would be for the state to channel significant funds for growing the school.\(^{19}\) Only then could Yale take its place as a prestigious American college.

State support for private schools was common in other states. The trustees at Yale noted that the Massachusetts legislature supported Harvard and that New York distributed approximately three quarters of a million dollars to Union College and Hamilton College combined.\(^{20}\) In comparison, the Connecticut legislature appeared woefully behind the times and unsupportive of the state’s only college run by its established church. Thus, the legislature may not have seen any favoritism in granting Yale its money, as offering twenty thousand dollars to Yale paled in comparison to the sums other schools received from their state legislatures. Further, because the money was specifically earmarked for the medical school, the Assembly could reasonably argue that the fund did not aid the growth of Congregationalism at all. Ultimately, while spending money in support of private schools was a common (and more lucrative) practice elsewhere, authorizing money in a time of war for the support of a bishop may have been regarded as the more extreme and radical position to take.

Regardless, dissenters from across the state, and the Episcopalians in particular, viewed the state’s use of the money from the Phoenix Bonus to support Yale as a blatant usurpation of religious liberty. They believed that the money rightly belonged to the

\(^{19}\) James L. Kingsley, *Remarks on the Present Situation of Yale College* (New Haven, 1818), 12.

\(^{20}\) Ibid, 6.
Bishop’s fund of the Episcopalians. Further, this incident convinced them that the Federalists were indeed bribing the Congregationalists to continue to support their party. Showing a continued loyalty to the Federalist Party, many Episcopalians still sought a way for reconciliation over the issue. Episcopalians claimed that they would not complain about state money being used to support Yale as long as the legislature gave them their rightful share of the Phoenix premium.\(^{21}\) The fact that the General Assembly refused to compensate the Episcopalians served as proof to many of them that the legislature willfully promoted the spread of the Congregationalists’ Calvinist theology at the expense of other churches. The fact that the bonus money went to the medical school at Yale was of little consolation for dissenters as even the faculty at the medical school was required to take a religious test in order to serve at the college.\(^{22}\)

At this juncture the Episcopalians looked towards the Republican Party as a viable political alternative to the Standing Order in which their grievances could be addressed. The Republicans recognized that gaining the support of the Episcopalians against the Federalists could expedite their goal of winning control of Connecticut and consequently they courted the denomination in earnest. To the delight of Republicans, in 1816 the Episcopalians aligned themselves against the Standing Order at last. This shift in loyalties gave the dissenters the popular majority they needed in order to make a concerted effort to change the political and ecclesiastical structures of the state.

The Federalists responded to this new political coalition by denouncing both the Republican Party as well as the Episcopal church. One such attack levied against the


\(^{22}\) *Columbian Register*, January 25, 1817, p.2.
Republicans which was printed in the *Connecticut Courant* accused the Republicans of exploiting the Episcopalians for their own gain. The Federalist Party appealed to the people of the state to recognize the Republican ruse of stirring up false claims of Standing Order intolerance in order to create dissention between the Congregationalists and Episcopalians.\(^{23}\) An editorial in the *Connecticut Journal* accused the Episcopal churches of selling out their political ideology for their own religious gain. The author insisted that they had no reason for joining the Republicans based upon political beliefs, so they must be joining the party because the Republicans had promised them greater ecclesiastical power. Employing the bribery argument he lamented, “Federalists shall understand that the Episcopalians are up for sale – that Federalists may have them if they will pay well to the Church?”\(^{24}\)

Just as not all Congregationalists were a part of the Standing Order, not all Episcopalians wanted to abandon the Standing Order. Episcopalian minister Andrew Beers made an impassioned argument against the denomination’s decision to side with the Republicans. He argued that the conservative, traditionalist character of Episcopalians were Federalist by nature. Their affinity for religious piety, respect for the “steady habits,” and view of the role of the government were inconsistent with Republican ideology. He wondered why his spiritual brethren would join a political party with which they shared little in common. Beers answered his own question by claiming that the Episcopalian abandonment of the Standing Order was motivated by revenge for

\(^{23}\) *Connecticut Courant*, April 2, 1816, p.2; Federalist Party (Conn.), *To the Freemen of Connecticut*…(New Haven: Nathan Whiting, 1816).

their treatment by the General Assembly. Such a motive violated Christian virtue, and therefore his people should instead seek reconciliation with the Congregationalists. He insisted that for generations the Episcopalians helped to support and defend the Standing Order. To join the Republicans, therefore, was tantamount to betraying their heritage. Voting against the Federalists because they were denied their own college was a selfish reason which was inconsistent with republican virtue as well, as “none but a mercenary patriotism can be frozen by the denial of selfish demands.”

The arguments made by Federalists and conservative Episcopalians such as Beers were of no avail. With the Episcopalians in the fold, this alliance of religious dissenters and Republican ideologists believed that they finally had enough popular support to wrestle political control away from the Standing Order.

Many Republicans determined that the battle for votes would not hinge on political ideology alone, but would also need to engage the religious persuasions of the people. They decided to make establishment the central plank of their platform. In the spring of 1816 the dedication of Trinity Church for the Episcopalians in New Haven doubled as the occasion for the creation of a new political party in Connecticut. A coalition of religious dissenters, which now included Episcopalians, joined with Republicans to form the Toleration Party, highlighting their primary political focus of disestablishment. The name connoted that the main issue in the state revolved not around economic policy or voting rights, but about the state of religion in Connecticut. This new

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26 Philie, *Change and Tradition*, 100.
political party in Connecticut minimized the issues of the national Republican platform, such as increased suffrage, and focused primarily on ending the religious establishment. Their main platforms were to create a new state constitution and to end religious establishment in Connecticut. This new party quickly gained popular support and most of its leaders belonged to the Episcopalian church.  Although the most active political campaigners for the party were Republicans, they buried much of their Republican ideology in favor of making religious toleration the central issue. Their newspapers, pamphlets, broadsides – even the very name of the party – made clear to the public that the primary political focus of this coalition of Republicans and “renegade” Federalists was the complete disestablishment of religion in Connecticut. This primacy on the issue of “tolerance” made it too enticing for dissenters, especially the Episcopalians, to pass up.

In a short time the Toleration Party made significant headway in the state. Although many clergymen of the minor sects were wary of the well-known religious skepticism of the most prominent Republican, Thomas Jefferson, they supported Republican policies because of a shared opposition to authoritarian rule. Even the socially and politically conservative were drawn to the Toleration Party because it promised to break apart the Federalist monopoly in churches, local municipalities and in

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28 See Paisley, *The Tyranny of Printers*, 377-79. Paisley describes that the party initially had the sole plank of toleration in their platform, but eventually prominent Republicans such as John Niles also promoted the abolishment of property ownership as a prerequisite for voting rights, and the need for a written constitution. This last item was taken up by the Tolerationists early in 1818.
the state’s General Assembly.\footnote{Alain C. White, \textit{The History of the Town of Litchfield, Connecticut 1720-1920} (Litchfield, CT: Enquire Print, 1920), 164-166.} Many in Connecticut were frustrated with the resistance by the social and political elite against greater opportunities for advancement in the lower classes like many other areas in America were experiencing. For them, the Toleration Party was seen as the vehicle through which their “steady habits” could for the most part be preserved while offering a more egalitarian society.

The gains for the new political party were swift. A narrow defeat in the fall election of 1816 did not diminish the prospects for the Tolerationists. In the spring of 1817, the state Federalists printed a broadside which implored “every serious man, of whatever religious denomination” to ask themselves if they will “deliver into the hands of Democracy the Religious Institutions of Connecticut!!”\footnote{Federalist Party, \textit{S50,000}.} In the spring elections of that year, the answer came back an unequivocal “yes,” as for the first time in the state’s history a Standing Order leader was not elected to the governorship. Instead, the position went to Oliver Wolcott, Jr., who won governorship of the state by a mere 334 votes.\footnote{\textit{Connecticut Courant}, May 13, 1817, p. 3.}

The same year the Tolerationists also took control of the Lower House in the General Assembly, gaining thirteen seats from the previous year to give them 103 seats to the Federalists’ ninety-eight, providing them with a mandate to enact sweeping political reforms.\footnote{Michael Besso, “A Study in Constitutional Development: The Effect of Political and Social Institutions on the Campaign for a Written Constitution in Connecticut,” \textit{Studies in American Political Development}, 17 (2003): 145.} They would soon busy themselves with trying to put their political goals into practice.

\footnote{The following year the Tolerationists took total control of the Assembly by securing eight seats on the Council of Assistants.}
Of all those Federalists in Connecticut who converted to the Toleration Party, Oliver Wolcott Jr., may have been the most unlikely. Wolcott came from a strong conservative, Federalist background with his family being leaders in the state’s Standing Order. He was a cabinet member in the Federalist administration of George Washington, replacing Alexander Hamilton as Treasury Secretary. He was one of John Adams’s “midnight judges” that became the object of the famous *Marbury v. Madison* Supreme Court case. He would be the last survivor of Washington’s cabinet, and the last in the line of those who represented the principles of the nation’s founders.33 Wherever he lived, his houses were often meeting places for Federalists. Had he returned to state politics a decade earlier, he never would have joined the Republican coalition. Despite his family history and his dedicated service to the Federalist Party, when Wolcott returned to Connecticut he aligned himself with the Tolerationists. By 1816, the Toleration Party stood for issues in which he agreed, such as the creation of a state constitution, a more democratic political process, as well as the disestablishment of Congregationalism.34

The Toleration Party was ultimately successful in Connecticut because its leaders and its ideology were much more conservative than that of the Republicans. Wolcott obviously had tremendous credibility among Federalist supporters through his years of service in the nation’s capital. His running mate, Jonathan Ingersoll, was a Federalist who joined the new party because he sympathized with the religious dissenters. The Republican strategy of focusing on religious issues instead of the major planks of the

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33 White, *The History of the Town of Litchfield*, 146.
34 Ibid, 166-67.
national party platform ultimately paid off. The Tolerationists sought to prove that Christian sects could thrive without an ecclesiastical establishment, and some dissenters were eager to see the Congregationalists fail without one. The Standing Order had a very different perspective, one that feared for the future of Connecticut if the establishment were eliminated.

The effects of the new government on the established clergy were immediate. On May 11, 1818, the Episcopalian priest Harry Croswell became the first minister from a dissenting sect to preach an election sermon before the General Assembly. The invitation to give the address went first to Yale president Jeremiah Day. This offer was a disingenuous gesture as it was only extended because it was known that Day, a Congregational minister and Dwight’s successor at Yale, would never accept the offer. The next invitation, this one more legitimate, was accepted by Croswell. However, the fact that the Tolerationists continued the practice of a state-sponsored election sermon shows that they did not immediately seek to end the association between church and state in Connecticut. Their very first act involved extending an insincere invitation to include the Congregationalists and choosing an Episcopalian to deliver the sermon. With the state under the control of the Toleration Party the relationship between the churches and the state government was not “torn asunder” as Lyman Beecher famously declared, but rather was first reversed. Rather than equality, the dissenters received the places of prominence on Election Day. It would still be some time before the influence of religion in state politics and in the local communities eventually dissipated.
The choice of Harry Croswell to deliver the first election sermon by a Republican-controlled state government perfectly reflected the new upside-down political reality in Connecticut. A decade before his historic sermon, Croswell was a prominent Federalist. He operated partisan newspapers, such as the New York Wasp, which he used to launch verbal assaults against the Republicans. As editor of the Wasp, Croswell was not hesitant to indict prominent Republicans – including Thomas Jefferson – of slander and poor ethics. For instance, in an 1802 article in the Wasp, Croswell accused Jefferson of paying a Republican newspaper editor to disparage George Washington and John Adams. In addition to slandering those specific Federalists, Croswell charged that Jefferson paid to slander “the private characters of men who, he well knew were virtuous.”35 These attacks against the President led to Republicans filing libel charges against him under the Alien and Sedition Acts, which were still in effect. His defense counsel at his trial was the staunch Federalist Alexander Hamilton.

The controversy over the Bishop’s Fund convinced Croswell, who had become an Episcopalian clergyman, to reconsider his political allegiances and side with the Tolerationists. Thus, Croswell represented the changing political attitudes in Connecticut with regard to religion. Like him, many still valued their “steady habits” of traditional communal and political values. Nevertheless, the legislature’s continued preferential treatment for the Congregationalists left many dissatisfied with the status quo. Consequently, despite the Toleration victory the swift, drastic changes that more liberal Republicans had hoped for the future of the state were still far off in the distance. This

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35 The Wasp, September 9, 1802, p. 3.
included the complete disestablishment of religion, as provisions to provide for its support were far from severed even with a Toleration-controlled Assembly.

In the historic election sermon in 1818 Croswell used the unprecedented opportunity to make clear his belief, which many dissenters shared, that the clergy should not participate in political affairs, an ironic proclamation for a political election sermon. His sermon text was Luke 20:25, in which Jesus commanded his followers to “render unto Caesar the things that be Caesars, and unto God the things which be God’s.” Based on this text Croswell argued that Jesus himself set the example that religious leaders should refrain from engaging in party politics. There existed a clear distinction between civil and religious rights and responsibilities, and the leaders of each sphere should not invade the jurisdiction of the other. Croswell also raised the issue of the degree to which civil rulers should create laws that affect the churches in the state. He argued that laws which established distinctions between various denominations essentially meant that the government had claimed “for Caesar, the things that be not Caesar’s.” Although under the rule of the Standing Order all denominations had the freedom to meet for worship, they were still unequal due to the elevation of the Congregationalists over the rest. It was this policy that needed changing immediately.

Among the shots he lobbed at the clergy of the Standing Order for their overt support of the political establishment included the charge that they cared more about the Federalists than they did about Christianity. Croswell remarked, “I am more ambitious to

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37 Ibid, 10-12.
fulfill my obligations as a minister of Christ, than to offer the incense of flattery to any sect or denomination of men.” He questioned if the established clergy, “so mingled with the maxims of the world…do they not prove themselves the slaves of Caesar, though disguised in the livery of Christ?”

Far from confirming Congregationalists’ fears that Republicans in power would upset the bounds of civil society, Croswell reminded his audience that Jesus did command his followers to “render unto Caesar.” This meant that people had a duty to obey, support, and willingly follow the laws of the civil government. Thus, Croswell called for the same obedience to leaders and the law that the Congregationalists did when they presented election sermons. Although his election sermon attacked the established clergy and called for the end to laws which elevated certain sects above others, Croswell was just as conservative as the Standing Order in his call for civil obedience and respect for the state’s rulers.

PART TWO: THE BATTLE FOR ESTABLISHMENT

The political victories of the Toleration Party offered little in the way of immediate additional religious liberties for dissenters. Dissenters enjoyed some of the rights of the established churches, namely the freedom to worship and the ability to collect taxes for their parishes, but these had already been granted by the Standing Order years earlier. In May 1817 the General Assembly passed an Act for securing equal rights for all denominations in the state which made it easier for dissenters to obtain certificates.

38 Ibid, 5, 14.
while at the same time giving *all* religious sects the authority to levy an ecclesiastical tax upon their memberships.\(^{40}\) Nevertheless, these reforms did not appease those dissenters who thought the certificate system itself was unjust and needed to be removed, not just modified.\(^{41}\) Nor did it help those who wished to not support any church at all. The Baptists resubmitted their petition to the General Assembly calling for complete religious disestablishment in Connecticut. Despite having a more sympathetic audience the Baptist Petition was postponed by the Assembly until the following legislative session.

A year after the Toleration victory, Federalists continued to attack the alliance between the party and the Episcopalians, accusing the Tolerationists of abandoning their platform of religious tolerance now that they had taken control of the government. “Sidney” remarked that the Republicans “clamored loudly for the bonus, and for an Episcopal college… They succeeded in casing [sic] many upright Federalists of that denomination…to believe that the gentlemen in power were intolerant…” Despite their claims to be on the side of the Episcopalians, Sidney mused that the Tolerationists abandoned the Episcopalians soon after their political victory, claiming “…this Toleration Party have been in power…for two sessions, and neither the bonus, nor the College, have been brought, at all, into consideration. Is it not evident, then, that the leaders in this clamor sought only to create a spirit of opposition, that they might profit by it?”\(^{42}\) Federalists such as Sidney undoubtedly took joy in the failure of the Tolerationists to accomplish anything for the minor sects, including the Episcopalians. However, a few

\(^{40}\) *Connecticut Courant*, June 10, 1817, p. 2.


months after Sidney’s publication the Tolerationists began to make good on their promise to alter the religious landscape of the state.

Despite the Toleration victories, dissenters remained dissatisfied with the state of ecclesiastical affairs in Connecticut. Yale remained Connecticut’s sole state-sponsored university, the Federalist clergy still collected tax money from the irreligious, and the certificate laws remained in place. Dissenters grew frustrated that the gains made towards religious equality since taking control of the government were minimal. To accomplish their full agenda the Toleration Party would have to propose ambitious, perhaps even controversial legislation. What they brought before the people of Connecticut in September 1818 was a new constitution.

In August 1818, the Toleration-controlled Assembly convened a convention to create a new constitution for Connecticut, which had been governed using a modified form of the royal charter from its days as a British colony. Oliver Wolcott presided over the Constitutional Convention of 1818, and allegedly wrote much of the document himself.43 While the Tolerationists hoped that the convention would produce significant reforms the Federalists were much more skeptical of the merits of the whole enterprise.44

The convention began on August 28th, the General Assembly passed the draft of the Constitution on September 5th, and three weeks later sent it to the eligible male citizens for ratification. The short window between the adjournment of the convention and the October 5th election meant that there was little time for debate over the issue in

the state newspapers.\textsuperscript{45} Although bringing the constitution before the people was a more democratic gesture than most states took with theirs, the lack of time for serious discussion and argument over the document was certainly a source of contention for the Standing Order.\textsuperscript{46} To them, the Republicans had “hurried on the delusive work of toleration and reform” in order to consolidate their own power and strengthen their political offices.\textsuperscript{47}

Among the propositions in the proposed constitution, the one most contested by the Standing Order was Article Seven, which called for complete religious freedom as well as the disestablishment of ecclesiastical institutions from the government. The Article still allowed any religious sect to levy taxes upon their own local congregations. It also revoked the Congregationalist advantage of automatically counting all citizens without a certificate as part of the Congregational parish. The document read that “no person shall by law be compelled to join or support, nor be classed with or associated to any congregation, church, or religious association.” Therefore, if ratified the constitution would abolish the established position of the Congregational Church in Connecticut.

The Standing Order believed that the disestablishment clause in Article Seven was unnecessary because the existing laws already granted religious societies the freedom to practice their faiths in the manner they desired. The previous year’s change to the parish tax laws made the power of taxation ecumenical, meaning that all faiths could

\textsuperscript{45} McLoughlin, \textit{New England Dissent}, 1060.

\textsuperscript{46} Because it did not create a constitution during the Revolution, Connecticut was unique in bringing its constitution up for a popular vote. Most states had simply ratified their constitutions by legislative vote. Even Georgia, which did not create a constitution until 1798, passed its constitution by the convention called to draft it.

\textsuperscript{47} [Anonymous], \textit{The Crisis: To the People of Connecticut}, (Hartford, 1819), 1.
either practice receiving financial contributions through taxation or through voluntary contributions. The Baptists acknowledged this right for dissenters in a plea for disestablishment during a meeting of the General Assembly in May 1818. They asserted that although the law gave them the power to tax they never used it, nor did they ever accept money from the state government. While that claim applied to the majority of Baptist congregations, it was not entirely true, either. The Baptists did eventually accept their allotment of funds from the Act for Support of Religion and Literature. More importantly, some of their congregations did issue their own taxes. In December 1818 an atheist praised the Constitution in the Connecticut Journal for its dissolution of the requirement of church membership. He complained that before the constitution, in order to avoid the parish tax, he had joined first the Episcopalian, and later the Baptist church, only to have each society lay a tax upon their members to furnish new meetinghouses. The fact that some dissenting sects put into practice levying taxes upon their members lent credence to the Congregationalists’ argument that all religious societies operated upon equal ground. All denominations had the opportunity to tax, or to exempt their members from taxation. To the Standing Order, this was a perfectly fair and just system of religious establishment. Consequently, the change to the ecclesiastical laws by the Republicans had unwittingly weakened their rationalization that disestablishment was necessary for religious freedom.

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49 Connecticut Journal, December 8, 1818, p. 2. The complaint that Episcopalians also levied taxes was echoed by another citizen in the August 25 edition of the Journal.
Tolerationists countered those claims by arguing that the article did not prevent the Congregationalists from changing their ecclesiology. Rather, it granted all churches the right to do as they pleased. The *American Mercury* ran a letter from “Franklin” who observed that while Article Seven promoted religious freedom by not establishing a tax for any one particular religious society, at the same time it did not prevent any sect from levying a tax on its own members. Congregational churches could continue taxing their members while other local congregations were free to collect money through the voluntary contributions of its constituents. The rescission of the certificates along with permitting individuals to be completely disassociated from all religious societies were important victories for the freedom of worship and were of no harm to the practices of the Congregational church. To the dissenters, this was a superior system of religious equality.

Grasping at straws, the Federalists tried to use the legal argument that, as an institution established by the state, the Congregational clergy had a legal contract with their local communities. Therefore, if ratified, the constitution would violate this contract, a precedent that made a mockery of all future contracts between the government and state-funded institutions such as schools. On the floor of the convention former Federalist governor Jonathan Treadwell debated Article Seven on the basis of the contract argument. He rationalized that the established sects had “certain rights and privileges,” namely the right to taxation which could not be taken from the ecclesiastical societies.

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50 *American Mercury*, September 29, 1818, p. 3.
51 The transcripts from the debate were published in the *Connecticut Courant*, September 22, 1818, p. 2.
unless they had decided to forfeit those rights. Those who wrote to the Federalist newspapers often framed their jeremiads against the constitution in the context of the rights of the established churches to tax themselves. Writing in the Courant, “Sidney” proclaimed that Article Seven took away from the established church the right of taxing themselves.\textsuperscript{52} A month earlier, “Alfred” wrote to the Courant that by voting for the constitution the people of Connecticut gave away “their just rights and dearest privileges.”\textsuperscript{53}

The Tolerationists did not pay much attention to this argument most likely because they understood that a new constitution, by its very being, would supersede the authority of all previous laws and agreements. Asa Wilcox astutely reminded his audience at a May 1818 meeting of the General Assembly that the Congregational ministers settled in their parishes with the knowledge that the local community had control over their salaries, and therefore they should not assume that the legislation which gave them their power was not malleable.\textsuperscript{54}

Concerned for the future of Connecticut society, supporters of the Standing Order were willing to make severe concessions in order to keep religious establishment in place. They insisted that some form of a religious establishment be preserved, even if another Protestant sect held that privilege. Jonathan Treadwell futilely proposed a modified version of the certificate law in which the denomination with the greatest membership in each town should be the established sect of that town, and all other sects should then file

\begin{footnotes}
\item[52] Connecticut Courant, November 10, 1818, p. 2.
\item[53] Connecticut Courant, October 20, 1818, p. 2.
\item[54] Wilcox, A Plea for the Baptist Petition, 16.
\end{footnotes}
That the Standing Order was willing to subjugate the Congregationalists to the rank of the “minor sects” demonstrated their conviction that a connection between church and state was imperative to the positive development of American society. From their perspective that religion was an integral support to the social and political order, the proposed changes to the ecclesiastical laws threatened religious and social prosperity.

These last, desperate pleas for the continuation of a church establishment – even one that meant in some cases Congregationalism would be reduced to a “dissenter” status – revealed that a Congregational establishment was not in and of itself the focus of a general church establishment. Most in the Standing Order would have been satisfied with a polity that formally incorporated Protestantism in some fashion, not necessarily Congregationalism. Regarding Zephaniah Swift’s argument for religious freedom, the Standing Order defined religious freedom as the private beliefs of the individual, or the legality of public worship for other Protestant denominations. What they resisted was religious freedom defined as the absence of Christian morality from state-supported institutions like schools and the government. The constitutional debate revealed that some in the Standing Order feared that religious freedom defined as the absence of state-supported religion would create a void of commitment to social order, virtue, and morality that the established clergy had once provided. As Robert Abzug observed, they railed against the prospects of disestablishment not out of a “simple expression of lost

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55 Debate transcripts from the convention were published in the *Connecticut Courant*, September 22, 1818, p. 2. Two months earlier a similar argument was made in the July 14 edition by “Hamilton.”
power and status. It reflected a keen sense of faith dislocated and of a spiritual order destroyed.”

Dissenters offered alternative theories as to why the Standing Order decried Article Seven. “Freedom” wrote to the *Times* that the religious independence offered in the Constitution meant that “Presbyterians are to hold all they now have belonging to them.” He claimed that the reason the establishment did not support the constitution was because “all they now have” was insufficient. The Presbyterians wanted *all* expressions of religion; their real goal was not equality, but dominance. A Federalist named “Alfred” wrote in the *Courant* that the constitution took away the rights and privileges of the Standing Order, a claim to which Freedom retorted, “You cannot mean the right to worship God according to your understanding of his word, for this right is forever affirmed to you.” Instead, Freedom accused, Alfred must mean that the privilege revoked by the constitution was the ability of Presbyterians to mandate taxes for the support of their ministers. This, Freedom happily conceded, was now indeed denied. For the dissenters, the constitution offered what the Standing Order considered to be true of the old laws, namely the equality of all religious societies before the state and the freedom for all persons to worship in their own manner.

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57 *The Times*, November 10, 1818, p. 3
58 Ibid.
PART THREE: THE DEBATE IN THE PUBLIC

In the summer of 1818, as the Tolerationists tightened their control of the state and the creation of a new state constitution was underway, the established clergy chose to focus on the examples of their continued significance and positive contributions to Connecticut society. At the state’s 1818 General Association of Congregational churches, the clergy ignored the Standing Order’s political defeats and the looming separation between their sect and the government. Rather, they praised their ongoing efforts in voluntary societies, such as creating an asylum for educating the deaf and mute. The gathering described the state of Christianity in Connecticut as having declined, probably an allusion to the rise of the Tolerationists, but affirmed that it had been strengthened through efforts such as providing education through Sabbath schools and the growth of the Connecticut Missionary Society. Another continued source of optimism amidst a cloud of despair was Yale College, which the clergy recognized as an important resource to what remained of the Standing Order, a “fountain of refreshing streams” to the Congregational churches.59 Their political influence was in the throes of a collapse, but the established clergy were still eager to demonstrate their relevance to Connecticut society.

With Tolerationists/Republicans in control of the General Assembly and the specter of a state constitution lurking in the political shadows, a fierce debate ignited in the pulpits and in the newspapers throughout the state as each side defended its position as the best for securing religious prosperity and social harmony in Connecticut. Like the

Federalists, the Tolerationists also believed that the future of religious and political liberty rested upon the question of religious establishment. Unlike the Federalists, however, dissenters maintained that establishment was the cause of moral and religious decay in Connecticut. Also unlike their counterparts, they were unwilling to compromise on the subject. Treadwell’s plan for a state church of some kind, Congregational or not, was quickly rejected by the constitutional committee. From the political side, the coalition of Republicans and dissenters asserted that the changes to the church establishment made the practice of religion equal to all denominations and kept the state out of religious affairs. From a religious perspective, dissenters argued that without an established church the practice of the Christian devotion would be free from state interference, thereby making it more authentic. The removal of an established clergy would actually make the office of pastor more esteemed in the eyes of the public. These arguments played out in the newspapers during the time of the creation of the state’s constitutional convention.

The Standing Order considered the ecclesiastical arrangement fair enough that a minister in Philadelphia remarked that in Connecticut no civil establishment of a sect even existed. Supporters of establishment continued to claim that the dissenters’ accusations of unjust ecclesiastical laws were unfounded because the there was no religious establishment in Connecticut. In response to the actions of the Tolerationists in forming a state constitution, a Federalist asked, “it has long been the policy of certain politicians to hold up the plea of ‘an established congregational church’ in Connecticut…

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60 Religious Remembrancer, February 22, 1817, p. 26. This was the publication of a speech to the Religious Historical Society in Philadelphia in September of 1816.
Is there indeed an established church in Connecticut…or does not every religious society support its clergymen in such manner as it pleases?” This system maintained equality among the sects, as

“the congregationalists choose to support their clergymen in most cases by taxation; the baptists and methodists choose to support their clergymen by contribution – and if each denomination has a right to do as it pleases…what fault can it find in the other?... But what is there in the law which establishes congregationalism as the religion of Connecticut? It is this - the law permits all religious denominations to support their clergymen as they choose.”

Further, they contended that the certificate system was fair to all denominations. Writing in the Courant, “A Freeman” alleged that the Baptists and Methodists suffered “no injury” in the religious tax; through the certificate system they did not have to pay the Congregationalists. Earlier in the year the same author claimed that the ecclesiastical laws were not created with intended malice towards other sects, for Congregationalism was the sole church in the state when the laws were first written. The certificates, therefore, were a way of accommodating those religious societies that had entered Connecticut well after its religious laws had been established.

Congregationalists insisted that the religious sects of Connecticut were already on equal footing before the state constitution and that the Toleration-controlled government was intolerant and oppressive towards them. Their ire was directed first towards the Republicans refusal to honor the tradition – the “steady habits” – of reappointing Federalists to civil offices, such as sheriffs, clerks, and magistrates. Federalist politicians decried the audacity of the Toleration Party to actually appoint men from their own ranks

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61 Connecticut Journal, September 4, 1818, p.3.
63 Connecticut Courant, August 4, 1818, p. 2
to fill these posts.\textsuperscript{64} Federalist newspapers joined in the attack by publishing scathing editorials against the failure to reappoint Federalist officers to their positions of power.\textsuperscript{65} For the dominant political party to favor its own members over those from the opposition was intolerant to the Federalists, even though they had spent decades perfecting the practice of partisan politics in Connecticut.

Antagonists of the constitution believed that religious disestablishment was intolerant because it forced Congregationalists to adopt the dissenting sects’ methods of collecting money and enrolling members through voluntary contributions. Simply because the dissenters believed that voluntary associations were a superior form of church government did not mean that standard should be forced upon the Congregationalists. The \textit{Connecticut Journal} published a letter from “Inquirer” who wondered what was tolerant in compelling all sects to conform to the dissenter’s church polity. He argued that the current laws allowed churches to support worship in their own style, while disestablishment would in effect become a new establishment by forcing all sects to adopt the dissenter style.\textsuperscript{66} “Offended Justice” submitted a letter to the \textit{Journal} (which, not surprisingly, had initially been rejected by the Republican-supporting \textit{Register}), insisting that for the advocates of disestablishment to refuse, “to those who wish it, the right to \textit{tax themselves} for the support of the gospel ministry, is downright intolerance.”\textsuperscript{67}

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\textsuperscript{64} One such debate was reprinted in \textit{The Times}, June 9, 1818, p. 1.
\textsuperscript{65} For example, see editorials in the \textit{Connecticut Mirror}, August 3, 1818, p. 3, and November 16, 1818, p. 3.
\textsuperscript{66} \textit{Connecticut Journal}, August 18, 1818, p. 2.
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Dissenters certainly took offense to the charges that they were the ones who were intolerant as they believed they had been the victims of intolerance for over a century and especially in the decade before they took control of the state government which had been a period of significant Congregational growth and revival.\textsuperscript{68} They presented ample examples of their claims of intolerance by the Standing Order. The \textit{Columbian Register} published the case of a Baptist minister who was barred from offering an opening prayer at a town meeting in Waterbury because he was a dissenter and a Republican.\textsuperscript{69} Tales of ordinary folk suffering at the hands of the Standing Order circulated throughout Connecticut. The \textit{Register} informed its readership about a man who had moved to another town and was quickly placed on the Congregational rolls before he had an opportunity to declare to which religious society he wanted to belong. His tax burden to the church was so great that he eventually was forced to sell some of his property to meet the demands of the tax collectors.\textsuperscript{70} The \textit{American Mercury} lamented that the tax collectors took livestock and home furnishings from poor citizens who could not pay their dues to the established church.\textsuperscript{71}

Defenders of the establishment continued the refrain that because religion was vital to the stability of society, the government should support it. The \textit{Courant} ran a propaganda article in the summer of 1818 entitled “Church and State” alleging that a formal connection between the two was a “most wonderful effusion of genius.”\textsuperscript{72}

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\item[69] Editorial in the \textit{Columbian Register}, June 20, 1818, p. 2.
\item[70] \textit{Columbian Register}, June 20, 1818, p. 2.
\item[71] \textit{American Mercury}, November 3, 1818, p. 2.
\item[72] \textit{Connecticut Courant}, June 23, 1818, p. 3. Article reprinted from the \textit{New-York Adviser}.
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Without religion individuals would have little reason to respect the civil laws, as the threat of prison was not comparable to the fear of eternal damnation. That the churches shared the burden of promoting morality with civil institutions meant that the establishment of religion was good for the government since it improved the quality of society. A few weeks later “Hamilton” wrote a column for the paper detailing the benefits of establishment and assuring dissenters that even with a state church, the nature of a democracy prohibited ecclesiastical powers from rising above the civil.\textsuperscript{73}

Following the lead of Nathaniel Taylor, a disciple of Timothy Dwight, the Congregationalists pushed the theory that establishment was necessary because it infused the morality of Christianity with social values. The moral strength of the community depended upon the ecclesiastical strength of the church. At a gathering of New England Presbyterian clergy in 1818, it was remarked that “Publick Morals are decidedly better than they were sometime back throughout the church,”\textsuperscript{74} a statement which reflected the alleged health of the New England social order. Americans could not be moral people without adhering to Christian principals. The Federalist newspapers, especially the Courant, supported this argument which they believed the dissenters could not challenge. The Courant went so far as to reprint a series of letters from 1789 that had defended

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\item \textsuperscript{73} Connecticut Courant, July 14, 1818, p. 1.
\item \textsuperscript{74} Presbyterian Church in the U.S. A Narrative of the State of Religion...During the Last Year (Philadelphia?, 1818), 6.
\end{itemize}

In Massachusetts in the same year, Henry Ware made a similar argument to his fellow ministers that faith and morality were an indissoluble connection. Henry Ware, A Sermon Delivered Before the Convention of Congregational Ministers of Massachusetts, at Their Annual Meeting in Boston, May 28, 1818 (Boston: Wells and Lily, 1818), 10.}
religious establishment on moral grounds. The paper also allowed “Hamilton” to explain that since there was a great deal of morality in religion it should subsequently be used by the state to improve the morality of the citizens.

To supporters of the Standing Order, without an established church Christianity would be ruined in America and its people would become like the atheistic revolutionaries of France. It was inconceivable to them that people would, without any compulsion or incentive, voluntarily choose to join a church. “An Episcopalian” warned the Journal that the constitution’s proposal that “No person shall be classed with, or associated to, any...religious association” would lead to the extinction of religion in Connecticut, as children would leave the churches of their parents to join another, or, worse still, none at all. He concluded that the proposed law would ‘ruin’ the minor sects because children would most likely choose to support no church at all rather than to join the church of their parents.

The fear that children would become irreligious was echoed by “Sidney,” writing in the Courant that “Can it be expected that many of our young men...will voluntarily enroll themselves as members, when by doing so they will subject themselves to heavy taxes? Certainly not.” Even worse than not joining the church of one’s parents was the

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75 According to one of the letters, “The deeper the principles of religion are fixed in the human breast, the greater the sense of the obligation to...every social and moral virtue.” Connecticut Courant, August 11, 1818, p. 2.
77 Connecticut Journal, September 29, 1818, p. 2; In his autobiography Lyman Beecher recalls sharing this fear that the children of Connecticut would scatter from their religious moorings. See John F. Wilson and Donald L. Drakeman, eds., Church and State in American History (Cambridge: Westview Press, 2003), 87.
fear that children would adopt a faith outside of Protestantism. “Hamilton” boasted to the Courant that religious establishment prevented the “superstitions” of other lands from finding “their way to this happy land – yea, our very homes.”\(^7^9\) Without the religious compass of establishment, such “superstitions” as Catholicism and Judaism might spiritually corrupt a generation of children.

It was at the issue of religion’s value to both society and the government that advocates of the Standing Order made their strongest plea for religious establishment during the constitutional convention. During the debate over Article Seven the staunch Federalist Nathaniel Terry argued that because of religion’s benefit to the community, a mandatory religious tax should remain, to be distributed equally among the denominations.\(^8^0\) A taxpayer had no right to be exempt from taxes which society has deemed valuable. For example, while citizens who disagreed with the War of 1812 still had to pay taxes for support of the military. The same was true of public schools. A week after the debate transcript was published George Leyland supported Terry’s argument in the Courant.\(^8^1\) The central feature of his proposition was that communities levied taxes to support all that was deemed necessary for the improvement of the common good. If religion was also vital to the development of society then, like schools or the military, it too should receive tax money. Individuals had no right to claim an

\(^{79}\) Connecticut Courant, July 14, 1818, p. 2.

\(^{80}\) Debate published in the Connecticut Courant, September 22, 1818, p. 3.

\(^{81}\) Connecticut Courant, September 29, 1818, p. 2.

This argument was employed by those within the Standing Order throughout the early nineteenth century. Timothy Dwight had made the comparison of disestablishment to those who plead “exemption from contributing for the support of roads…because they do not use them.” James Fulton Maclear, “‘The True American Union’ of Church and State: The Reconstruction of the Theocratic Tradition,” Church History 28, no 1. (1959): 46-48.
exemption from the will of the larger community. This was a very populist, Republican approach to the issue of religious establishment.

The Standing Order reasoned that the minor sects could not argue that Christianity was not beneficial to society. If it was harmful, then the Christian faith was of little value. After all, the minor sects had used their camp meetings and revivals as forums to preach not only the message of Christian salvation, but also religion’s ability to rescue individuals from vice and immorality. In late October the American Mercury reprinted an article from another newspaper which touted the efforts of the Methodists to “correct the morals and improve the state of society” through their churches and missionary efforts.\(^8^2\)

Proponents of establishment correctly believed that the dissenters would not challenge the theory that Christianity was good for the improvement of society. Unfortunately for the Standing Order, however, the dissenters did not accept the line of reasoning that just because religion was good for society meant that one church should be established over others. They concurred that Christianity provided the government with a moral basis for its laws, and that civil leaders should encourage religion.\(^8^3\) Religious establishment, however, went beyond promoting morality by administering religious tests for office holders or compelling government officials to esteem one sect over another. This was more than the dissenters would accept. Government positions had gone almost exclusively to members of the Standing Order for decades, and the minor sects were not

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\(^8^2\) American Mercury, October 27, 1818, p. 2.  
\(^8^3\) Philip Hamburger, Separation of Church and State (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002), 73.
about to compromise their historic ascension to political prominence by retaining a form of religious establishment. Countering claims made by the aforementioned “Hamilton” in the July 14 edition of the Courant, “Zacheus” argued in the Mercury that the Standing Order position was flawed because Hamilton failed to compare the overall morality in townships where establishment was prevalent with ones where it was not. If he had, Zacheus assured, “This would have destroyed the force of his argument in a moment” as the benefits of religion had always been disassociated from power, especially from wealth.84

While dissenters conceded that the citizens of New England needed Christian morality in order to prosper they disagreed that establishment was the best means though which to accomplish it. Members of the dissenting sects believed that absolute power, which the Congregationalists held as the established sect in the state, corrupted morality and integrity. Consequently, they asserted that the lust for power ultimately weakened the morality of the established clergy, and in turn the community.85 Harry Croswell preached before the General Assembly that while Christianity was important for the strength of the government, integrating it into the law ruined the quality of genuine worship by sincere believers.86 A just government and moral society could not be supported by an inauthentic spirituality. Thus, the minor sects, who did not want for

84 American Mercury, July 28, 1818, p. 2.
85 “The People” wrote in the Register that the Congregationalists will find “their own moral good in being deprived of absolute power.” Columbian Register, December 29, 1818, p. 2.
For additional support for the concept of the Calvinist clergy being regarded as tyrannical see Nathan O. Hatch, The Democratization of American Christianity (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 170.
A writer named “Conscience” considered the clergy’s collection of taxes from non-religious persons to be a grave immorality. The Times, August 11, 1818, p. 2.
86 Croswell, A Sermon, 9-10.
religious zeal, agreed that religion was profitable for the improvement of morality in society but rejected the claim that an established church was the proper instrument to bring it about. Propagating the virtues of Christianity through revivals, compelling preaching, and missionary societies was superior to compulsion by the state.

Establishment, not the lack thereof, also jeopardized the spirituality of Connecticut’s future generations. Dissenters reasoned that individuals would reject religion if it was forced upon them. Consequently, children were more likely to leave the church once they reached adulthood because of the negative effects of establishment. Readers of the Republican newspapers undoubtedly agreed with the transcripts of Asa Wilcox’s support of the 1818 Baptist Petition in which the reverend lamented that coercion turned people away from Christianity, and that no one willingly paid money to support a doctrine with which they disagreed. The people of Connecticut would not respect religion so long as they were forced to support it.

In addition to preserving the virtues of American society and improving public perceptions of Christianity, Tolerationists argued that disestablishment had the extra benefit of protecting the Congregational denomination from self-destruction. They claimed that religious establishment was ultimately most harmful to the churches it proposed to support. The clergy of an established sect were prone to corruption and pride. Dissenters believed that laziness was another vice of the established clergy because they did not have to labor to gain members or raise money. Conversely, complete disestablishment would lead to greater piety and work ethic of the

87 Wilcox, A Plea for the Baptist Petition, 5, 11.
88 An unsigned letter in The Times, September 1, 1818, p. 2.
Congregational clergy.\textsuperscript{89} Therefore, establishment increased vice, not virtue, in the clergy, who were the ones most responsible for transmitting morality to the general public.

Most importantly, the minor sects viewed establishment as heterodox to the teaching of the Bible. An anonymous author in The Times wondered “Have we any precept or example in the New-Testament, either from Christ or his Apostles, to use compulsion?”\textsuperscript{90} Harry Croswell insisted that genuine devotion to God could only arise from a free-will offering of the heart. Conforming to tradition and supporting religion though taxation did not please a holy God.\textsuperscript{91} Most dissenters agreed with the editorial in the Mercury that the ecclesiastical laws were “inconsistent with the nature of Christ’s Kingdom, and the rights of man.”\textsuperscript{92} By appealing to both Christian theology and the “natural rights” of Enlightenment thought, dissenters essentially argued that the religious establishment violated two of America’s sacred texts, the Bible and the Declaration of Independence. America could only realize its claim as a Christian nation by rejecting religious compulsion and state-sponsorship of religion that other nations practiced. Both the success of the American experiment and the authentic practice of the Christian faith hinged upon the concept of religious disestablishment.

Harry Croswell, no stranger to caustic literature and combative political propaganda pieces, lashed out against purported attacks against Episcopalians in a pamphlet “A Sober Appeal to the Christian Public.” This piece was written in response

\textsuperscript{89} The opinion of “Conscience” in The Times, August 11, 1818, p. 2. See also Wilcox, A Plea for the Baptist Petition, 7.
\textsuperscript{90} The Times, August 11, 1818, p. 2
\textsuperscript{91} Croswell, A Sermon, 9.
\textsuperscript{92} American Mercury, August 4, 1818, p. 3.
to an earlier pamphlet entitled “A Serious Call,” which Croswell believed to be penned by a Congregational minister for the purpose of slandering the Episcopalians. In “Sober Appeal” Reverend Croswell took up the same sharp tone and combative spirit that he had displayed as editor of the Wasp over a decade earlier. He claimed that acting out of bitterness for the loss of the Standing Order, the Congregationalists were now seeking to destroy the Episcopalian church, of which “A Serious Call” was a prime example.  

Although attacking the author of a “Serious Call,” Croswell’s rebuttal claimed to offer a conciliatory spirit towards the Congregationalists, to whom he meant no ill-will. Croswell accused the “Serious Call” author of pushing a political agenda in the attacks against the Episcopalians. Speaking for his denomination, Croswell claimed that the Episcopalians identified themselves with neither Federalists nor Republicans, and that they did not “take advantage of the political commotion of the State.” Rather, the members merely sided with the party that they believed best represented the ideals of religious liberty and toleration. Therefore there was nothing about the Episcopalians’ political behavior that should draw the ire of the former Standing Order.

The irony that the man who once stood trial for libel had become an advocate for “sober appeals” and chided Congregationalists for divisive propaganda was not lost on the opposition. A Federalist response piece “A Candid Appeal to the Sober Appeal,” criticized Croswell’s work as disingenuous. For its claims towards ecumenicalism, the “Sober Appeal,” the author claimed, was a direct attack against the Congregational clergy. Further, the pamphlet was so divisive that the “Candid Appeal” author wondered,

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93 Croswell, A Sober Appeal to the Christian Public (New Haven, 1819), 17.
94 Ibid, 18.
“Is it possible that this can be the production of a minister?”95 This type of bickering and accusations between clergymen demonstrated that in the immediate aftermath of disestablishment the “steady habits” in Connecticut were anything but and that hard feelings lingered between the former Federalist allies in the Congregationalists and Episcopalians.

CONCLUSION

One week after the passage of the new state constitution an elderly minister, Andrew Lee, preached a sermon in which he warned his congregation that finding a successor for him in the pulpit would be a daunting task for his parish because of the loss of state support of Congregationalism. He feared that the parish would be unable to attract a competent minister without the prestige and honor bestowed to ministers in political affairs, and it would be unable to afford one without the ability to levy taxes upon the citizens of the parish. Lee worried that the Republicans in control of the government would suppress religion. He was not calloused towards ministers or members of the minor sects, reminding his congregation to “Bear with those who differ from us, but who appear to be sincere in God’s service.” His main concern was with the new political leaders in the state and their seemingly hostile stance towards religion “which will increase the difficulty of supporting the gospel.”96

95 A Candid Appeal to the Author of the “Sober Appeal to the Christian Public” Containing an Examination of the Charges Advanced in That Work against the Writer, Printer, and Abettors of the Serious Call (New-Haven, 1819), 11.
Similarly, Luther Hart of the Plymouth Congregational Church tailored his sermons at the close of 1818 toward faithful living in a time of suffering and persecution. Hart was a Yale graduate and a graduate of the first class at Andover Seminary in 1809. His sermons from the fall of 1818 have been lost, but his December sermon notes offer insight into how he perceived the future of Christianity without the church establishment. A sermon preached in early December reflected on Proverbs 3:5, “Trust in the Lord with all Thine heart.” He associated that scripture with the topic of why God allows suffering to befall the faithful. Clearly, sermons like this were meant to sustain a congregation in the perceived climate of looming persecution of religion and decline of religious activity.  

The fears of ministers like Lee and Hart were unfounded. In fact, even after the new constitution went into effect very little changed for the ecclesiastical system in Connecticut. Under the Toleration Party ecclesiastical taxation continued as a volunteer system for churches without much fanfare. In his report to the legislature on the tax system in the state, Oliver Wolcott observed how local communities used tax money for internal improvements, education, police, taking care of the poor, as well as supplementing the salaries of clergy. Wolcott noted that schools needed taxes for support because the School Fund alone was an inadequate source of income. He informed the General Assembly that without proper financial support from the state, schools will suffer, and the “glory of the state” will tarnish. In the same manner, some religious societies which were unable to adequately meet their expenses “defray parochial charges,

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by taxation. His mention of the ecclesiastical tax was buried in his report without any additional follow up, demonstrating the rather mundane nature of the issue to contemporaries. As long and as difficult the fight had been for dissenters to gain religious equality in Connecticut, in the end very little had changed under the new government with regards to the state’s belief in the importance of religion to society.

The Republicans, through the Toleration Party, ultimately won the day politically, but the lengthy battle that led to their victory was caused in part by the Standing Order’s continued efforts to fight for their conviction that Connecticut needed to support an ecclesiastical establishment in order to thrive socially, politically, and economically. With the continuation of the collection of parish taxes and the conservative religious sentiments of the region, the disestablishment reforms were not as sweeping as some dissenters had hoped. Neither was their victory the death knell of Christianity or social harmony as many in the Standing Order predicted. The Standing Order came to an end, but their ideas for America continued on, taking shape in different forms as the Jeffersonian era ended and the new dawn of the Age of Jackson peeked over the horizon.

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98 Oliver Wolcott, *To the Senate and House of Representatives of the State of Connecticut* (Hartford, 1819), 8.
CONCLUSION

By the spring of 1820, the tales of a New England sea serpent had disappeared from the pages of the Connecticut Courant. The accounts ended with no conclusive resolution, no decisive judgment. Apparently, the waters of the North Atlantic were again safe passage for merchant ships and whaling vessels. In many ways the battle in Connecticut over the ecclesiastical establishment mirrored the stories of a great leviathan. The sea serpent had its share of true believers as well as committed skeptics. Similarly, the Standing Order and their opponents each had their share of the true believers and doubters. Just as newspapers took up the case of the mysterious sea creature, so each side of the establishment debate used newspapers, pamphlets, and broadsides to convince New Englanders of the truth of their position.

Despite the fears of all those involved, perhaps, like the sea hydra, no real political monster ever existed to potentially destroy Connecticut. The Standing Order’s trepidation of the Republican serpent of religious liberty and equality leading towards atheism and anarchy never rose out of the social waters. The Toleration takeover of Connecticut, and the subsequent disestablishment of religion, did not plunge the state into irreligion and chaos. The dissenter concerns over the establishment’s serpent of a government that sponsored religion and an influential clergy did not resurface again. The new constitution did not completely end religious privilege or taxation in the state. The government at both the state and federal levels supported religion in a myriad of ways,
without creating an oligarchy or a state church. The social and political stability of Connecticut after 1818 proved more than anything else that the fears each side had about the future of the republic should their opponent prevail was more paranoia than reality.

THE AFTERMATH OF DISESTABLISHMENT

After 1817, the Federalists never regained control of the General Assembly. The citizens of Connecticut passed the constitution on October 5, 1818 by a mere 1554 votes. In the weeks after the document’s ratification the Federalists used their newspapers to berate it. To them, the new constitution was an affront to their heritage, an attack on the Congregational denomination, a detriment to the growth of religion, and a setback to social morality. The *Connecticut Courant* downplayed the constitution, dismissing it as a document that was ratified “with all its defects, by a very small majority. How long the people will remain quiet under such a constitution remains to be seen.”

Overall, the Tolerationists acted more subdued in their victory than the Standing Order did in its defeat. Nevertheless, there were those who enthusiastically praised the new constitution. “The People” exclaimed in the *Register*, “The hierarchy is overthrown! Let us all rejoice, for our deliverance from religious persecution!... Let us all rejoice. The cause of liberty has prevailed. Toleration reigns throughout the land – May it never perish.” An atheist using the pseudonym “Egoite” commended the new constitution because the rescinding of the certificate law meant that he no longer had to feign

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3 *Columbian Register*, December 29, 1818, p. 2.
membership in a minor sect in order to avoid paying the ecclesiastical tax.\textsuperscript{4} In addition to the removal of the certificates, dissenters were undoubtedly thrilled that there would no longer be government privilege for the Congregational church or Yale College. Their victory also appeared to confirm that the influence of the established clergy had diminished and that Republican political ideology had taken root in Connecticut.

At first, the reality of disestablishment initially greatly worried the clergy of the Standing Order. Congregationalists lamented over the decline of religion and morality in Connecticut as their influence waned.\textsuperscript{5} Famously, Lyman Beecher recounted in his autobiography that the state of organized religion after disestablishment “was a time of great depression and suffering… It was as dark a day as I ever saw. The odium thrown upon the ministry was inconceivable.”\textsuperscript{6} Reflecting upon the possibility of living as Christians in such a political climate, elderly minister Andrew Lee pessimistically told his congregation, “I tremble for the prospect before you.”\textsuperscript{7}

Even with the end of the Standing Order, the state-church relationship in Connecticut did not disappear overnight. In her 1905 work on the topic, historian M. Louise Greene observed that through the Connecticut constitution “politics and religion [were] torn asunder.”\textsuperscript{8} With respect to Greene’s analysis, the reality of the situation was different. The 1818 constitution did not prevent local churches from levying taxes upon

\textsuperscript{4} Connecticut Journal, December 8, 1818, p. 2.
\textsuperscript{7} Andrew Lee, Untitled Sermon, October 25, 1818.
their own parishes. Primarily, it did away with the certificate laws. As individuals no longer had to demonstrate that they did not belong to the state church, the entire certificate system became obsolete. What remained very much alive was the ability of churches, Congregational or otherwise, to levy taxes upon those who were registered to the ecclesiastical societies within their parishes.

Decades after disestablishment towns continued to enforce the collection of ecclesiastical taxes. For example, a warrant served to Amos Pettibone of Norfolk (Litchfield County) in 1821 authorized Pettibone to collect parish taxes, which were set at a rate of four and a half cents on the dollar, from the members of the Congregational church who had issued the tax upon themselves the previous year. To those persons who either could not, or would not, pay the tax, Pettibone was authorized to confiscate their property. To those refused to part with their property in order to pay the tax, Pettibone was ordered to take the delinquent party to the county jail, where they would remain until the tax was paid along with the expenses for being housed in the jail.9

Almost twenty years after disestablishment the practice of levying parish taxes was still in order in Connecticut. In March of 1836 the members of St. John’s Episcopal Church in the town of Washington met to impose a tax on themselves.10 These examples serve as reminders that the issue of taxation for the support of local churches was not “torn asunder” in October of 1818. The spiritual flock of churches such as Lyman

Beecher’s were perfectly able to tax their members in order to continue to collect revenue.

Contrary to the fears of the Standing Order, disestablishment in Connecticut and in the United States did not signal the end of either religion or the republic. Long after the ratification of the Bill of Rights, the federal government supported some Protestant causes in general without aiding one denomination in particular. Federal and state governments gave subsidies to missionary organizations for the conversion of Indians, as well as subsidies to Christian-based school and charitable organizations. Some states underwrote the costs of printing and distributing bibles and other liturgical materials for rural churches, as well as granting land donations to country parishes. Other means of federal support, such as tax exemption for religious organizations and token religious references such as “In God We Trust” printed on all U.S. currency continue to this day.¹¹

That the federal government continued to contribute to religious organizations was a testimony to the fact that many Christians from a multitude of denominations remained politically active after disestablishment, and they petitioned the federal government to support their causes. Some of these efforts, such as abolition and Indian removal policies, were not exclusively Christian causes. Others, such as the petition to end Sunday mail service and even the temperance movement were driven by Christian coalitions.

As in the vast majority of the nation, the Federalist Party in Connecticut had effectively run its course as a viable political organization. The “era of good feelings”

had come to dominate American politics, giving the Democratic-Republican Party a political monopoly.\textsuperscript{12} However, this did not end the careers of two of the main cogs in the Standing Order. With the Tolerationists in control of the state legislature, David Daggett was not reelected to the U.S. Senate when his term ended in 1819. He returned to private-practice law in years immediately following disestablishment. Nevertheless, the Republican-dominated General Assembly appointed him as a state judge in 1826, and then as Chief Justice of the state’s Supreme Court in 1832.\textsuperscript{13} Zephaniah Swift was removed from the Supreme Court in 1819, although he was elected to the state’s Lower House in 1820. Despite their return to political office, as members of a minority party neither wielded the political power that they had under the Standing Order.

Jeremiah Day, Timothy Dwight’s replacement at Yale, was a capable and competent college president. His efforts to make Yale an elite, powerful institution for both training clergy as well as training men in law and the sciences was only somewhat successful. Without the protection the school enjoyed under the Standing Order, Yale was no longer immune from scholastic competition as other groups were granted authority to charter colleges. This competition also weakened Yale’s hold over the teaching of religious doctrine in Connecticut. In 1823 Washington College was founded in Hartford, and by 1831 the Methodists established their own college in the state. These new schools of higher education in turn competed with the rise of specialized divinity schools created specifically for training ministers. As other professions formed their own

\textsuperscript{12} Oliver Wolcott ended up as the only governor elected on the Toleration ticket. By the time he left office in 1827, the Party had joined the fold of the Democratic-Republicans.

\textsuperscript{13} Daggett only had a brief stint as Chief Justice. Under state law, jurists were required to retire by age 70, forcing Daggett to resign in 1834.
specialized schools the need for ministers to have their own formal theological training centers became apparent. The ascent of seminaries, beginning with Andover in 1808, took much of the religious education out of the general curriculum at most schools.

Disestablishment also served as a catalyst for creating a specialized divinity school at Yale.\textsuperscript{14} Jeremiah Day established a formal divinity school at the college in 1822, in an effort to ensure that Yale remained grounded upon religious foundations. If the state would no longer support the Congregationalists by funding their schools, then the Congregationalists took it upon themselves to strengthen society through education. This included using traditional academies such as Yale as well as creating new Christian private schools. The growth of seminaries and divinity schools in the second decade of the nineteenth century such as the one at Yale had their inspiration, in part, as a response to the disestablishment of religion and the belief that Christian education was still important to the prosperity of society, even if the government refused to fund it.

Rather than declining as a result of disestablishment, religious interest and participation rose in the first decades of the nineteenth century. In the context of the Puritan idea of the spiritual covenant between God and America, it stood to reason that people should be engaged with improving their lives and their communities. If the government would not overtly support this providential relationship then Christians would honor it through their own religious devotion and social action. The outworking of this was marked most recognizably by the string of religious revivals known as the Second Great Awakening and the subsequent rise in reform movements.

New England clergymen and laypersons alike turned to the revivals of the so-called Second Great Awakening and the reform movements inspired by these revivals as ways in which to continue to exert influence in society. It was here in the antebellum era where the focus of Protestantism shifted from established, formalized ecclesiastical institutions to revivalism. Although primarily focused in the West and North of the United States, the effects of the revivals were felt throughout the country. The revivals initially encouraged by Congregationalists such as Timothy Dwight and Asahel Nettleton, along with the New Divinity ministers, sparked an interest in Christian spirituality that carried on well after the state-support of the church ended. By actively joining revivals, the Congregationalists implicitly signaled that the primary means through which morality and civic virtue would be achieved in a post-establishment society would be from personal salvation experiences rather than political control.

The idea that ordinary people were to be actively involved in bringing about personal and social transformation was the key to the revivals and the social reform movements that they produced. Americans were eager to reform themselves, their communities, and even their country. Ultimately, the clergy and the people of New England used the revivals in a progressive manner. They participated in revivals decades before disestablishment, and they eventually channeled the spirit of revival into social reform movements. Evangelical religion was successfully joined with social reform.

Churches, both Congregational and the (formerly) dissenter denominations, worried about the future of American society, especially the suspected moral decay of the nation’s growing urban centers. Regardless of their fervor, revivals alone seemed
incapable of promoting enough virtue and morality to make Americans inclined to be
good Christians and good citizens. As the nation seemingly became increasing full of
sinners rather than saints, evangelical Christians sought new avenues through which
morality could be instilled in the people. From this apparent deficiency denominations
gathered their resources and formed reform movements, charity societies and missionary
organizations. Reform movements redirected the energy of the revivals, shifting the
emphasis from reforming the soul to reforming the individual and society. Although
founded and supported by churches most benevolent societies for the most part operated
as independent organizations without strict denominational ties.\textsuperscript{15}

Before disestablishment Congregationalists were actively involved in creating and
participating in reform movements and voluntary associations, be they political, religious,
or social. Afterwards, many former adherents of the Standing Order continued to be at
the forefront in organizing new reform movements. They built organizations that
included members of other denominations, ultimately continuing their ideology that the
church should foster morality, piety, and virtue in society.\textsuperscript{16} On a local scale, the
churches in Connecticut and throughout New England became heavily involved in
creating schools for the disadvantaged or disabled, looking after the poor, and creating
new missionary societies. Nationally, they joined churches from all the states in forming
temperance and abolitionist movements. Local reform efforts coincided with their
political activism, such as by petitioning the federal government to end Sunday mails.

\textsuperscript{15} Huston, \textit{Church and State in America}, 171.
\textsuperscript{16} John L. Brooke, “Cultures of Nationalism, Movements of Reform, and the Composite-Federal
Disestablishment actually served to help grow religious reform movements in New England because it opened the door for different denominations to unite on social issues. Previously, as a part of the Standing Order, Congregationalists came across as competitors rather than collaborators with other denominations. Further, their ties to the government fostered resentment among other religious groups, making ecumenical endeavors difficult. Rather than expending resources against each other to run competing benevolent societies, after disestablishment Congregationalists and dissenters in Connecticut better recognized their similarities and united to create new charitable organizations and social interests groups.\(^\text{17}\) As Lyman Beecher recounted, although at the time disestablishment seemed to signal the defeat of the Christian ministry, it turned out that the end of the ecclesiastical establishment was “the best thing that ever happened to the State of Connecticut. It cut the churches loose from dependence on state support. It threw them wholly on their own resources and on God.”\(^\text{18}\) No longer able to accomplish their social and religious goals working in conjunction with the state, the previously established churches were more than willing to join with formerly competing denominations to achieve their objectives of fostering Christianity and morality throughout America.

Abel Flint was one of those prominent Congregationalists who led the way in leading ecumenical benevolent organizations after disestablishment. Flint was a Yale-trained clergyman who had previously helped to establish Congregational societies such


as the Connecticut Bible Society, the *Connecticut Evangelical Magazine*, and also the dissenter-hated Connecticut Missionary Society. Yet in 1819 Flint led the Hartford Sunday School society meeting at the city’s Baptist meeting house and reiterated their call to form new Sunday Schools throughout the area in order to provide adequate education for the poor. Additionally, Sunday Schools would work towards both the spiritual edification of individuals as well as make them “respectable members of the community.”19 Flint’s active participation with the Sunday School society demonstrated the degree to which volunteer societies had become ecumenical in such a short time span. Although Congregationalists participated in reform movements long before disestablishment, the end of the state support forced them to join with former dissenter churches in promoting such endeavors.

Ultimately, the new constitution changed very little of how the Congregational churches conducted themselves. In many parishes they continued to collect taxes for ministers’ salaries and their church buildings, and many clergymen still enjoyed a privileged social position in their communities.20 Consequently, it was no stretch of the truth for the members of the General Associations of the New England Presbyterians to declare in late 1818 that “in the bounds of the General Associations of Connecticut…nothing has occurred of special importance since the last report.”21

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19 Abel Flint, *An Address Delivered at the Baptist Meeting House in Hartford*, April 27, 1819 (Hartford, 1819), 7.
CONCLUSION

With their political power vanquished, former adherents of the Standing Order turned towards activities that could shape society without involvement from the government. Such endeavors included heightened interests in the publication of pamphlets, newspapers, and journals, as well as participation in reform movements. Congregationalists were able to seamlessly transition to supporting reform movements and benevolent societies because the Edwardsean theology so prevalent in their ranks stressed an ethic of disinterested benevolence. The idea of disinterested benevolence as both a theological construct and as a part of the sense of American virtue influenced the ideology of the Congregationalists. The Puritan doctrine of evidences of the elect and the classical republican ideals of serving the interests of the nation above the self were catalysts for Congregational involvement in reform movements. Volunteer associations provided the perfect outlet for the Congregationalists to demonstrate their capacity to work for the good of others.\(^{22}\) With theological and social ethics that emphasized the importance of good works, being a good citizen, and improving one’s community, it should be no surprise that the supporters of the Standing Order would be eager activists in reform movements. It should also tamper arguments that their involvement in reform societies was somehow insincere or a ploy to enact social control over the lower classes.

The reformed-Protestant theology of the total depravity of humanity that pervaded the thinking of many of the established clergy fostered in them a need to ensure that a republican society would remain stable and prosperous. To them, Christian morality

provided the vehicle through which the American people and its leaders would become virtuous. Religious institutions, supported by the state, could instill virtue among the people which would help provide order. Further, religious institutions and Christian virtue could support the integrity, wisdom, and laws of the nation.

The waning of Yale as a wellspring for training Congregational ministers and instilling Calvinist doctrine in its students did not hinge upon the establishment issue alone. Nor was it based upon a refusal by university’s leaders to modernize. In fact, it may have come as the result of modernization efforts. By the start of the nineteenth century Yale had already become a school that produced more lawyers than ministers. Timothy Dwight and Jeremiah Day took innovative steps to make Yale a prominent academic institution in medicine and science. The twenty thousand dollars the state gave to Yale as part of the Phoenix bank bonus went towards this vision by funding a medical school at the college, even sending potential professors overseas in order to train in European medical schools. Thus, the controversy of the Phoenix Bonus showed Dwight’s remarkable foresight and progressive impulse for change and growth as he used the money towards very progressive ends – vaulting Yale into a cutting-edge college for the sciences, and not just a school to train ministers and lawyers.

Although Yale received state support, it received significantly less funds compared with schools in other states. Finally, although Congregationalists comprised a majority of the Yale Corporation and Calvinist doctrine was taught at the school, these factors did not do much to grow the power of the clergy as most of the graduates left the college prepared for a career other than the ministry. Past presidents Naphtali Daggett,
Ezra Stiles, and Timothy Dwight may have taught Congregational theology to their students during the Revolutionary and early national periods, but that did not necessarily mean that dissent within the student body was non-existent. The religious studies at Yale could not have been irresistibly impressionable upon the students’ young minds if the school was able to produce Republicans and heterodox Christians such as Abraham Bishop, David McClure, David Daggett, and Zephaniah Swift.

The thesis that the Standing Order was held together in a cynical effort to retain an aristocracy of a powerful elite loses luster when faced with the reality that the political fortunes of Connecticut’s most influential leaders did not hinge on the Standing Order. David Daggett and Zephaniah Swift were both weary of the influence of the established clergy. They were members of the Stelligeri, a group committed to breaking the Congregationalists’ control of Yale. Swift was first elected to the legislature due in part to support from a contingent of Republicans. He had also attained a level of notoriety for his writings on the law. Timothy Dwight could have followed other family members in joining the Republican Party and suffer no loss of prestige for it. These men chose to side with the Standing Order because their vision for a safe, prosperous, moral republic required virtuous institutions which would foster a virtuous citizenry. Ideology, not political or social control, drove people away from the Standing Order as well. Oliver Wolcott and Harry Croswell were dedicated Federalists with prolific careers who switched allegiances to the Tolerationists primarily over the issue of religious toleration and the church establishment.
Many of the Standing Order clergymen took progressive social positions, especially with regard to slavery and women. In just one generation the followers of Jonathan Edwards, himself a passionate defender of the peculiar institution, openly condemned the practice. Several of them even founded a society, the Connecticut Society for the Promotion of Freedom and the Relief of Persons Unlawfully Holden in Bondage, for the abolition of slavery and the education of slaves and emancipated freepersons. With regard to women, Timothy Dwight’s Greenfield academy held the distinction of being one of the first schools of American higher education to admit women to its ranks. Further, the religious revivals in Connecticut during the Second Great Awakening depended upon the lay leadership of women in organizing the meetings and arranging the travel of the ministers.

In some areas the Standing Order was indeed out of step with the changing social and political times in America, especially with regard to deference, the importance of fostering an elite ruling class, and even their view that personal interpretation of Christianity carried the same weight as doctrine transmitted by a member of the educated clergy. Nevertheless, in other ways their views on the role of Christianity in America coincided with popular opinion. Like most Americans, they believed that religion was important, that the government should not interfere with the free exercise of worship, and that the government should promote Christianity in general. Just as most ordinary Americans considered the United States to be a Christian nation, so the Standing Order viewed Connecticut as a state that emphasized this connection with religion by giving direct support to churches and other religious institutions.
The Standing Order also marched out of step with the larger culture with regard to their ideology and sense of virtue grounded in the ideals of classical republicanism. It was imperative for a stable and prosperous nation that the government fostered a virtuous citizenry which would be inclined to elect virtuous leaders. These benevolent rulers would in turn promote institutions such as churches that would instill Christian morality and virtue in the people. This ideology, which emphasized the duty of the individual to the community, worked well in a traditional New England environment where power was rooted at the local level. In the early republic, as emigration and transience become more pronounced, the liberal ideology grounded in the model of the independent person motivated by self-interest became more appealing. In this case, although the Standing Order did hold to an ideology that became outdated, their vision for the future was nonetheless based on a system that had served the community well for over one hundred years. They were reluctant to alter such a proven model for success.

Retaining an ecclesiastical establishment appeared to be one of the traditional aspects of community that the nation should keep when compared with the chaos surrounding the latter years of the French Revolution. Federalists and their Congregational advocates blamed the violence of the “Reign of Terror” on the overt secularism of the republic and its leaders. The bloodshed in France was regarded as a model for what would happen in America should Jacobinism take root and spread both radical political ideology and irreligion. For the Standing Order, the government of the young United States was enough of an uncertain experiment that it did not need to include a French-style removal of a church-state relationship. In the example of the
French Revolution the Federalists and the established clergy had a justification for their fears of the consequences of a nation that refused to support Christianity.

The General Assembly had reduced the effects of the Congregational establishment for decades in the form of widening the number of denominations able to levy their own taxes, weakening the requirements in the certificate laws, and admitting laypersons to the Yale Corporation. Nevertheless, dissenters still considered themselves to be in an inferior social and ecclesiastical position and consequently they championed the Toleration Party and a new state constitution. Defenders of the establishment reasoned that other institutions that were profitable for society, such as schools and the military, were supported by compulsory taxes regardless as to how individuals felt about their merits. Staying true to their core conviction that religion was important for the health of a community, a state, and a nation, the Standing Order made a last minute, futile attempt to keep a church establishment under the condition that the state church need not necessarily be Congregational.

Ultimately, Connecticut’s Standing Order found itself at a crossroads in American culture with regards to religion, politics, and community. This alternate vision embraced by Connecticut’s dissenters and most Americans at large stressed the social virtues of individualism over community, egalitarianism over deference, mobility over stability, and faith in the inherent goodness of people over the total depravity of man. Politically, the Jeffersonian vision was incongruent with the Standing Order by valuing secularism over religious establishment and a limited government as opposed to a political class that domineered over the citizenry. It was this Jeffersonian ideal that carried the day in
America, but the victory was not won because the Standing Order lacked a coherent vision for the future. No matter how sincere their convictions, how certain they were that a prosperous republic required a strong Christian foundation, the Standing Order could not resist the social, religious, and political currents that swept against them. Their adherence to the merits of classical republicanism as the foundation for New England’s role as the vanguard of morality, Christianity, and prosperity in the young nation ran the opposite direction from the popularity of Jeffersonian democracy.

Reverend Croswell’s plea during his 1818 election sermon for ecumenicalism so that “the historian” could not accuse those in the establishment debate of “descending from our high calling” was conveniently timed in that the call for civility came after his side had won the issue. In the first decades of the nineteenth century, the demagoguery, vitriol, and accusations the established Congregationalists and dissenters lobbied at each other did little to support Croswell’s appeal. However, the contentiousness over the establishment issue was not due to the “offspring of human pride and passion” such as selfish ambition or access to power, but rather because each side believed in the high stakes of the outcome for their country. For them, the fate of Connecticut society and perhaps the American republic itself hinged on the issue of the government support of religious institutions.

In the end, the greatest mistake made by the Federal component of the Standing Order was not that they supported Christianity, as most Americans would have agreed with that position. Rather, it was in showing favoritism to the Congregational church in
particular. Had money been distributed equally among all sects, had the Episcopalians been given their share of the Phoenix Bonus, had the certificate system been scrapped in favor of requiring a general tax for religious institutions, perhaps the state support of religion would have survived several more decades in Connecticut.

As for the Congregationalists, their fatal flaw was in backing the political party in decline. Ultimately they had little choice but to go down with the state’s Federalists as they shared many of the same ideological and theological beliefs. Had they shown the foresight to lobby Republicans for the continuation of the state support for ecclesiastical institutions, perhaps the incoming party would not have been so quick to dissociate the government from religious organizations.

Throughout the transition from being the state church to entering the unregulated marketplace of religious organizations the established Congregationalists showed themselves to be both innovative and adaptable. Long before the end of the Standing Order they led revivals, created charitable and missionary organizations, and expanded the academic prestige of the university. After disestablishment they joined other denominations in building ecumenical revivals and reform movements. The source from which this activity flowed was a political ideology that held Christianity as a vital component for making people good, liberty-loving citizens. Because of this vital benefit the state had an obligation to support Christian institutions. As John Treadwell argued at the convention of 1818, government support for religion was necessary regardless of whether or not it was the Congregationalists who received it.
By 1819, Connecticut had a Republican government, passed a new constitution, separated the church-state relationship, and had removed Zephaniah Swift from the judiciary. But society did not collapse after Jeffersonian Republicanism took over the state. The Standing Order faded into history, but their ideas as to the proper role of religion in America have lived on as Americans continue to debate the merits of religion in politics and society. Government support of faith-based organizations is still contested today. Public school administrators wrestle with the permissibility of religious speech on their campuses. Offering prayers at the start of government meetings is a source of contention for some. The winter holiday season is often accompanied by media stories of protests over religious displays upon government property. These arguments are not unique to the twenty-first century. Rather, their origins are found in the aftermath of the nineteenth century contests over the meaning of virtue and its application, the nature of religious participation in politics, and the government support of religious institutions. It is these ideas that Americans still grapple with today that constitute the continued legacy of the Standing Order.
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