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JUSTIFYING REVOLUTION:  
THE AMERICAN CLERGY'S ARGUMENT  
FOR POLITICAL RESISTANCE, 1763-1783

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by  
Gary Lee Steward  
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**APPROVAL SHEET**

JUSTIFYING REVOLUTION:  
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FOR POLITICAL RESISTANCE, 1763-1783

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For Amy, Anna, Katie, and Joshua

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## PREFACE

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## CHAPTER 1

### JONATHAN MAYHEW AND THE EARLY EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY DOCTRINE OF POLITICAL RESISTANCE

The American clergy played a leading role in fomenting the American Revolution. They repeatedly urged American colonists to resist British authority in the 1760s and 1770s, and they justified such resistance by appeals to the Bible. They did not need to develop innovative interpretations of Scripture, nor did they derive their insights under the spell of Enlightenment notions of freedom. They instead relied upon a long tradition of Protestant biblical interpretation and Protestant resistance thought in justifying resistance.

Historians have widely interpreted the American clergy's support of the American Revolution as an accommodation of biblical doctrine to secular Enlightenment thought. These historians have argued that the American clergy developed their resistance doctrine on the basis of beliefs and philosophies that were sharply divergent from their inherited theological tradition, thus forming a distinct form of American religious thought. In arguing this, these historians have not fully appreciated or rightly understood the historical context that laid the groundwork for the American clergy's arguments for a right of resistance in the Revolutionary period.

Well before American colonists began to openly resist British authority in the 1760s, they widely believed that resistance to civil authorities was sometimes justified. By 1760 the American clergy in particular had popularized the arguments that patriots used to justify their resistance to the British. John Adams acknowledged the role the clergy played in the conflict with Britain and noted in 1818 that "if the orators on the fourth of July really wish to investigate the principles and feelings which produced the

Revolution, they ought to study . . . Dr. [Jonathan] Mayhew's [1750] sermon on passive obedience and non-resistance."<sup>1</sup> Mayhew was not the first or only American clergyman to argue for the legitimacy of political resistance, but his 1750 sermon opened the Revolutionary era by captivating the attention of future Revolutionary figures like Adams. Adams sent Thomas Jefferson a copy of Mayhew's sermon in 1818, noting that it had been a kind of "catechism" to him when he was a boy: "This discourse was printed, a year before I entered Harvard College and I read it, till the substance of it was incorporated into my nature and indelibly engraved on my memory."<sup>2</sup> According to Adams, Mayhew "had great influence on the commencement of the Revolution" and his famed sermon was "read by everyone."<sup>3</sup>

Jonathan Mayhew gained considerable fame for "his momentous [1750] sermon justifying Revolution," entitled *A Discourse concerning Unlimited Submission and Non-Resistance to the Higher Powers*.<sup>4</sup> Mayhew's theology was heterodox, and thus some historians have asserted that Mayhew's argument for resistance grew out of his

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<sup>1</sup>John Adams to William Tudor, April 5, 1818, in *The Works of John Adams*, ed. Charles Francis Adams (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1856), 10:301. Slight changes in capitalization, spelling, and punctuation have been made from original quotations throughout in order to conform with modern usage.

<sup>2</sup>John Adams to Thomas Jefferson, July 18, 1818, in *The Adams-Jefferson Letters*, ed. Lester J. Cappon (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1959), 527.

<sup>3</sup>John Adams to H. Niles, February 13, 1818, in Adams, *Works*, 10:287-88. Mayhew's sermon was re-printed in Ireland in 1775 under the title *A Mysterious Doctrine Unriddled* (Newry, Ireland: Daniel Carpenter and J. Gordon, 1775) and made widely available. He was quoted by early advocates of resistance to the British, including Samuel Adams and James Otis. John Adams stated that "the characters, the most conspicuous, the most ardent, and the most influential, in the early time of the dispute with England were James Otis, Oxenbridge Thacher, Samuel Adams, John Hancock, Rev. Dr. Mayhew, and Dr. Cooper" (quoted in Alden Bradford, *Memoir of the Life and Writings of Rev. Jonathan Mayhew, D. D.* [Boston: C. C. Little, 1838], 118-19).

<sup>4</sup>Gregg L. Frazer, *The Religious Beliefs of America's Founders: Reason, Revelation, and Revolution* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2012), 66. Robert Treat Paine referred to Mayhew as "the father of civil and religious liberty in Massachusetts and America" (*ibid.*, 59). In 1860 John Wingate Thornton referred to his famed sermon as "the morning gun of the Revolution" (John Wingate Thornton, ed., *The Pulpit of the American Revolution* [Boston: Gould and Lincoln, 1860], 43). Mayhew's other political sermons include *A Sermon Preach at Boston* (Boston: Richard Draper, 1751); *A Sermon Preach'd in the Audience of His Excellency William Shirley* (Boston: Samuel Kneeland, 1764); *A Discourse Occasioned by the Death of King George II* (Boston: Edes and Gill, 1761); and *The Snare broken* (Boston: R. & S. Draper, 1766).

liberal theological views, which could be characterized as a kind of Lockean rationalism. Gregg Frazer, for example, has argued that Mayhew relied upon Locke's rationalism to overthrow "the biblical prohibition of revolution."<sup>5</sup> According to Frazer, "[Mayhew] applied his admittedly Lockean presuppositions to the classic biblical text enjoining submission to political authorities (Romans 13), and the result was a justification of rebellion in place of a prohibition of rebellion."<sup>6</sup>

Other historians have applied a similar charge of Enlightenment accommodation to other Revolutionary-era clergy regarding their support for political resistance. Mark Noll, George Marsden, and Nathan Hatch have stated that Revolutionary-era clergyman John Witherspoon "did not derive his politics from the Bible. He did not think that the Christian God had a specific role to play in public life, where the rule of nature prevailed. And he did not worry about assuming an Enlightenment perspective on political matters."<sup>7</sup> Applying this criticism more generally, Daryl Cornett has written that "those Christians who supported physical resistance against the tyranny of Britain generally turned to Enlightenment rhetoric for validation, propped up by poor exegesis and application of the Bible."<sup>8</sup>

Historians like Noll, Frazer, and Cornett have deemed Mayhew's understanding of political resistance as an expression of his "radical politics," and have sought to find explanations for the American clergy's resistance thought in sources

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<sup>5</sup>Frazer, *Religious Beliefs of America's Founders*, 60.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., 66. Frazer understands Mayhew's "creative interpretation" of Rom 13 as "making the case for rebellion rather than prohibiting it" (ibid., 67). Frazer says that in making this rationalist argument, "Mayhew's service to the Revolutionary cause was immeasurable" (ibid., 68).

<sup>7</sup>Mark A. Noll, Nathan O. Hatch, and George M. Marsden, *The Search for Christian America* (Westchester, IL: Crossway, 1983), 90-91. These authors assert that the American Revolution was driven largely by secular philosophies and that it was not a "just war" . . . worthy of unqualified Christian support" (ibid., 70-106).

<sup>8</sup>Daryl C. Cornett, "America Partly Christian," in *Christian America? Perspectives on Our Religious Heritage*, ed. Daryl C. Cornett (Nashville: B&H, 2011), 285.

outside of traditional Protestantism.<sup>9</sup> In particular, Noll has adopted the interpretation of the American Revolution popularized by Bernard Bailyn and his so-called neo-Whig school of interpretation.<sup>10</sup> In this view, the Revolutionary-era arguments used by the clergy were imported from the English radicalism of the seventeenth century, mediated by eighteenth-century libertarians. Bailyn argued that “the ultimate origins of this distinctive ideological strain lay in the radical social and political thought of the English Civil War and of the Commonwealth period. . . . To the colonists the most important . . . publicists and intellectual middlemen were those spokesmen for extreme libertarianism, John Trenchard (1662-1723) and Thomas Gordon (d. 1750).”<sup>11</sup> By adopting the perspective of Bailyn and his student Gordon Wood, Noll understands the American clergy of the Revolutionary period as generally co-opted by political radicalism.<sup>12</sup>

But were Mayhew and the clergy like him caught up in the thought and philosophy of political radicals? Did the American clergy lurch suddenly toward Enlightenment rationalism during the Revolutionary period? Mayhew certainly preached a rationalist, liberal Christianity and discarded many orthodox doctrines.<sup>13</sup> Some historians have sought to link Mayhew’s heterodoxy with his doctrine of political resistance.<sup>14</sup> To label his doctrine of political resistance as heterodox, however, fails to

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<sup>9</sup>Mark A. Noll, *America’s God: From Jonathan Edwards to Abraham Lincoln* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 80.

<sup>10</sup>In Noll’s words, “I have followed Bernard Bailyn’s *Ideological Origins of the American Revolution* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of the Harvard University Press, 1967) in my description of the thinking underlying the revolt. This lucid, solidly documented work is an indispensable guide to the ideas which led to independence” (Mark A. Noll, *Christians in the American Revolution* [Washington, DC: Christian College Consortium, 1977], 182).

<sup>11</sup>Bernard Bailyn, *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990), 34-35.

<sup>12</sup>See Gordon S. Wood, *The Radicalism of the American Revolution* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1992).

<sup>13</sup>Frazer, *Religious Beliefs of America’s Founders*, 62-66.

<sup>14</sup>Jonathan Clark argues for this connection in J. C. D. Clark, *The Language of Liberty, 1660–1832: Political Discourses and Social Dynamics in Anglo-American World* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 364-70.

appreciate fully the historical context of the political resistance debate as it stood in the early eighteenth century. Many orthodox clergy of the eighteenth century, both in Britain and in North America, shared Mayhew's doctrine of political resistance. Mayhew's arguments for political resistance were not expressions of heterodox thought or even of distinctly American thought. Such arguments were a common response of a broad range of English-speaking clergy to the perceived threat of political and ecclesiastical absolutism.

### **Mayhew's Argument for Political Resistance**

Despite assertions to the contrary, Mayhew's argument for political resistance was not an expression of radical politics. It was in perfect continuity with previous Protestant responses to political absolutism. A party of High Church Episcopalians continued to promote a type of political absolutism throughout the eighteenth century. With the restoration of Charles II to the throne in 1660, "the divine right of kings" doctrine of absolute submission gained renewed prominence among Church of England clergy, becoming a type of "orthodoxy" in certain circles, and it persisted long after the Glorious Revolution.<sup>15</sup> Mayhew recorded in his own day that as the centennial anniversary of Charles I's execution approached,

The Episcopal clergy here are often seized with a strange sort of frenzy . . . preaching passive obedience, worshipping King Charles I, and cursing the Dissenters and Puritans for murdering him. . . . [they] assert the divine, hereditary, and indefeasible right of kings, in direct, manifest opposition to the principles of the Revolution [of 1688], almost deifying Archbishop Laud, as well as Charles I, calumniating Nonconformists as schismatics, fanatics, persons of republican, rebellious principles, and imitating, as far as they were able, the manner and style of the keenest, severest sermons ever published in England on the same occasion.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup>Andrew Lacey, citing the work of J. J. Sack, Linda Colley, Jonathan Clark, and Peter Nockles, concludes that "theories of divine right did not disappear in 1688, 1714, or even 1789, but persisted well into the nineteenth century" (Andrew Lacey, *The Cult of King Charles the Martyr* [Woodbridge, UK: Boydell, 2003], 247). In 1683, the University of Oxford declared "submission and obedience, clear absolute, and without exception to be the badge and character of the Church of England" (quoted in Thornton, *Pulpit of the American Revolution*, 48).

<sup>16</sup>Jonathan Mayhew to Benjamin Avery, c. 1750, quoted in Bradford, *Life and Writings of Rev.*

In the preface to his 1750 sermon, Mayhew stated that “it was the near approach of the thirtieth of January, that turned my thoughts to this subject, on which solemnity the slavish doctrine of passive obedience and non-resistance is often warmly asserted, and the dissenters from the established church represented, not only as schismatics . . . but also as persons of seditious, traitorous and rebellious principles.”<sup>17</sup> Mayhew framed his argument for political resistance specifically against “the hereditary, indefeasible, divine right of kings and the doctrine of non-resistance, which is built upon the foundation of such a right.”<sup>18</sup> At the end of his discourse he penned an extended defense of the Puritan parliament’s actions in deposing and executing Charles I in 1649, a defense that was offered to counter the perceived absolutist threat to civil and religious liberty that continued to exist in his own day: “This is a point which I should not have concerned myself about, were it not that some men continue to speak of it, even to this day, with a great deal of warmth and zeal, and in such a manner as to undermine all the principles of liberty, whether civil or religious, and to introduce the most abject slavery both in church and state.”<sup>19</sup>

Mayhew stated that his interest in arguing against political absolutism grew out of his spiritual and pastoral concerns for his people. He believed that it was not only appropriate but necessary to discuss the nature and extent of political submission since it was a duty given by God to his people in Scripture. In Mayhew’s words, “should not those parts of Scripture which relate to civil government, be examined and explained from the desk, as well as others? Obedience to the civil magistrate is a Christian duty: and if so, why should not the nature, grounds and extent of it be considered in a Christian

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*Jonathan Mayhew*, 94.

<sup>17</sup>Jonathan Mayhew, *A Discourse concerning Unlimited Submission and Non-Resistance to the Higher Powers* (Boston: D. Fowle, 1750), iii-iv.

<sup>18</sup>*Ibid.*, 35.

<sup>19</sup>*Ibid.*, 40.

assembly?”<sup>20</sup> Christian ministers have a duty to address the nature and extent of the Christian duty of submission to civil authorities, especially given the church’s ongoing battle against the forces of the “the kingdom of Antichrist.” This corrupting power had taken root in Rome beginning in the days of the apostles and had spread “tyranny, priest-craft, and nonsense” over “the greatest part of Christendom,” bringing enslavement, degradation, ignorance and brutality with it. This spiritual enemy had crept into the Church of England as well, where it remained as a threat to God’s people. Mayhew argued against political absolutism in part because of its connection with “ecclesiastical tyranny” and the “imperious bishops and other clergymen who love to ‘lord it over God’s heritage.’”<sup>21</sup> Those who were calling for absolute submission in the political realm were also calling for it in the ecclesiastical realm, and Mayhew viewed both expressions of absolutism as originating with the Antichrist. Mayhew used the centennial anniversary of the execution of Charles I to offer his “part in opposing [the] hateful monster [of the Antichrist].” In his words, “It was a desire to contribute a mite towards carrying on a war against this common enemy, that produced [this 1750] discourse.”<sup>22</sup>

Mayhew based his argument for political resistance on his understanding that legitimate government comes through the consent and acknowledgement of the governed. He argued that while political power is derived from God, human agency is involved in the endowment of that authority: “Rulers derive their authority immediately, not from God, but from men.”<sup>23</sup> It is therefore through the choice and consent of the governed that legitimate political authority is established: “God has not determined this matter [who the

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<sup>20</sup>Mayhew, *Discourse concerning Unlimited Submission*, i.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid., iii. See also *ibid.*, 37-38.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid., ii-iv. In elaborating on the right of resisting civil authorities, Mayhew believed that the right of resisting ecclesiastical authorities stood in a similar vein. The commands to support and submit to the clergy were neither absolute nor binding as well, with respect to the clergy that “act directly counter to the sole end and design of their office” (*ibid.*, 22).

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., 17.

persons are who are to be obeyed]. It must of course, be determined by men.”<sup>24</sup> With this argument, Mayhew rejected the notion of a divinely established principle of hereditary succession asserted by Stuart absolutists.

Mayhew framed his doctrine of political resistance in a way that was consistent with the broader Christian duty of submission to political authorities. Using Romans 13:1-7 as his primary text, Mayhew argued that Christians do indeed have a general duty to submit to their civil authorities. Paul’s intention in this passage was to correct those who believed “that civil government in general was not to be regarded by them” because of their devotion to Christ and his eternal kingdom.<sup>25</sup> All Christians, however, do have a duty to submit to their governing authorities, and even though the civil authorities be “heathen [and] implacable enemies to Christianity,” there is still a Christian duty “to pay all dutiful submission to those who are vested with any civil office.”<sup>26</sup> Mayhew even pressed the implication of Romans 13 upon those who were smuggling goods so as to avoid paying duties. In his words, Romans 13:7 in particular “deserves to be seriously considered by all Christians concerned in that common practice of illicit trade and running of goods.”<sup>27</sup>

Even while affirming the Christian duty to submit to the civil authorities, Mayhew argued that this duty is not absolute. There are times when it may be “warrantable and glorious to disobey the civil powers,” especially during times “of very great and general oppression, when humble remonstrances fail of having any effect and when the public welfare cannot be otherwise provided for and secured.” During such times, it may be warranted for the people “to rise unanimously even against the sovereign

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<sup>24</sup>Mayhew, *Discourse concerning Unlimited Submission*, 12.

<sup>25</sup>*Ibid.*, 19.

<sup>26</sup>*Ibid.*, 5, 7.

<sup>27</sup>*Ibid.*, 9.

himself in order to redress their grievances, to vindicate their natural and legal rights, to break the yoke of tyranny, and free themselves and posterity from inglorious servitude and ruin.”<sup>28</sup> The duty of submission to one’s authorities in Romans 13 should not be taken in an absolute or unlimited sense, Mayhew argued, even though it “is delivered in absolute terms.” Many “expressions of the same nature frequently occur in Scripture, upon which it is confessed on all hands, that no such absolute and unlimited sense ought to be put.”<sup>29</sup> While the duty of “patience and submission under private injuries” is given in “much more peremptory and absolute terms” in places like Matthew 5:39-41, Mayhew saw a distinction between the duty to endure private wrongs and one’s duty in the face of injustice and oppression from civil rulers.<sup>30</sup>

Mayhew argued that the reasons given for submission in Romans 13 put a limit on the extent of a Christian’s duty to submit. As Paul describes in Romans 13, those to whom Christians owe submission are those that are actually carrying out their civil responsibilities for the sake of the public good. Such leaders are described as ones who are “not a terror to good works but to evil” and are “God’s ministers for good, revengers to execute wrath upon him that doth evil” who “attend continually upon this very thing.”<sup>31</sup> Only these, according to Mayhew, can be said to be “ordained of God” and deserving of submission. On the other hand,

if, instead of attending continually upon the good work of advancing the public

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<sup>28</sup>Mayhew, *Discourse concerning Unlimited Submission*, 12. Mayhew notes that “it is upon this principle that many royal oppressors have been driven from their thrones into banishment and many slain by the hands of their subjects. It was upon this principle that Tarquin was expelled from Rome, and Julius Caesar . . . cut off in the Senate house. It was upon this principle that king Charles I was beheaded before his own banqueting house. It was upon this principle that king James II was made to fly that country which he aimed at enslaving. And upon this principle was that revolution brought about, which has been so fruitful of happy consequence to Great Britain” (ibid., 12-13).

<sup>29</sup>Ibid., 14. Mayhew cites these commands as examples: “Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world” (1 John 2:15), “Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth” (Matt 6:19), and “Take therefore no thought for the morrow” (Matt 6:34).

<sup>30</sup>Ibid., 15.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid., 20. Mayhew is here quoting Rom 13:3-6.

welfare, they attend only upon the gratification of their own lust and pride and ambition, to the destruction of the public welfare; if this be the case, it is plain that the apostle's argument for submission does not reach them. They are not the same but different persons from those whom he characterizes.<sup>32</sup>

Some who have a title of authority may in fact be usurpers and counterfeits:

It is blasphemy to call tyrants and oppressors, God's ministers. They are more properly the messengers of Satan to buffet us. No rulers are properly God's ministers, but such as are just, ruling in the fear of God. When once magistrates act contrary to their office . . . they immediately cease to be the ordinance and ministers of God and no more deserve that glorious character than common pirates and highwaymen.<sup>33</sup>

If a civil authority abandons his duty to seek the public good and his role as a minister of God, he is no longer to be treated as such; rather, he is to be resisted.

If it be our duty . . . to obey our king, merely for this reason, that he rules for the public welfare, (which is the only argument the apostle makes use of), it follows, by parity of reason, that when he turns tyrant, and makes his subjects his prey to devour and to destroy, instead of his charge to defend and cherish, we are bound to throw off our allegiance to him and resist, and that according to the tenor of the apostle's argument in this passage. Not to discontinue our allegiance, in this case, would be to join with the sovereign in promoting the slavery and misery of that society, the welfare of which, we ourselves, as well as our sovereign, are indispensably obliged to secure and promote, as far as in us lies.<sup>34</sup>

In sum, Mayhew concludes that "it is plain he [Paul] implicitly authorizes, and even requires us to make resistance, whenever this shall be necessary to the public safety and happiness."<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>32</sup>Mayhew, *Discourse concerning Unlimited Submission*, 21.

<sup>33</sup>*Ibid.*, 24. Mayhew qualifies this later: "This does not intend, their acting so in a few particular instances, which the best of rulers may do through mistake . . . but their acting so habitually and in a manner which plainly shows that they aim at making themselves great by the ruin of their subjects (*ibid.*, 29).

<sup>34</sup>*Ibid.*, 29-30.

<sup>35</sup>*Ibid.*, 30. According to Mayhew, "No government is to be submitted to at the expense of that which is the sole end of all government—the common good and safety of society. Because, to submit in this case, if it should ever happen, would evidently be to set up the means as more valuable and above the end, than which there cannot be a greater solecism and contradiction. . . . If therefore, in any case, the common safety and utility would not be promoted by submission to government, but the contrary, there is no ground or motive for obedience and submission, but for the contrary" (*ibid.*, 38).

As seen above, Mayhew's argument for the right of resistance is thoroughly moderate in tone, with any "radical" elements kept at a minimum.<sup>36</sup> Mayhew's concluding paragraph demonstrates his overall moderation:

Let us all learn to be free and to be loyal. Let us not profess ourselves vassals to the lawless pleasure of any man on earth. But let us remember, at the same time, government is sacred, and not to be trifled with. . . . It becomes us, therefore, to be contented and dutiful subjects. Let us prize our freedom, but not use our liberty for a cloak of maliciousness. There are men who strike at liberty under the term licentiousness. There are others who aim at popularity under the disguise of patriotism. Be aware of both. Extremes are dangerous. There is at present amongst us, perhaps, more danger of the latter, than of the former. For which reason I would exhort you to pay all due regard to the government over us; to the king and all in authority, and to lead a quiet and peaceable life.

Mayhew did not promote rebellion or political "radicalism." He affirmed the overall duty of submission to political authorities and only allowed for resistance in very limited circumstances. His aim was simply to refute those asserting political and ecclesiastical absolutism in his day.

### **The Eighteenth-Century Background of Mayhew's Doctrine of Resistance**

Mayhew's arguments for resistance were not original. He merely re-articulated early eighteenth-century views held by many other English-speaking clergy. In developing his own doctrine of resistance, Jonathan Mayhew was dependent upon the writings of Bishop Benjamin Hoadly (1676-1761). A writer in the *Boston Evening-Post* in 1750 even charged Mayhew with plagiarizing Hoadly's ideas.<sup>37</sup> Almost fifty years prior to Mayhew's sermon, Hoadly developed the same arguments that Mayhew used. Mayhew even acknowledged his indebtedness to Hoadly. Immediately after Mayhew's

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<sup>36</sup>The only "radical" element in Mayhew's discourse is the suggestion that the Bible condones no particular form of government and that "no form of government seems so unlikely to accomplish [the end of making and executing laws for the common good] as absolute monarchy." Monarchy was introduced in Scripture, according to Mayhew, "as a curse upon [the commonwealth of Israel] for their folly and wickedness, particularly in desiring such a government" (Mayhew, *Discourse concerning Unlimited Submission*, 32-33).

<sup>37</sup>Charles Akers, *Called unto Liberty: A Life of Jonathan Mayhew, 1720-1766* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1964), 91.

*Discourse concerning Unlimited Submission* was published, Mayhew sent Hoadly a copy. “You have an undoubted right to a copy of it,” he said, since “the great part of it was stolen from your Lordship’s original.”<sup>38</sup>

Benjamin Hoadly was a leading proponent of political resistance thought among British clergy in the early eighteenth century. His personal views on political resistance, according to one contemporary critic, were “the received and celebrated opinion of [his Whig-leaning] party.”<sup>39</sup> Hoadly asserted the right of resistance, in part, to defend the Glorious Revolution and the claims of the Protestant monarchy in the face of absolutist assertions made by nonjuring clergy, High Church Tories, and Jacobin supporters of the Stuarts. Without rightful resistance, Hoadly argued, “the late Revolution, which . . . saved us from utter ruin, and the Protestant settlement, which . . . can only for the future preserve us from the same ruin, had been both impossible.”<sup>40</sup> As the rector of St. Peter-le-Poer in London, Hoadly preached a sermon in 1705 on Romans 13:1 justifying political resistance. This sermon also defended the people’s resistance and rejection of the authority of James II, which led to the 1688 revolution. Many of the High Church party within the Church of England condemned the sermon. The Lower House of Convocation of bishops voted to denounce Hoadly’s discourse “a scandal” and a “grave dishonor.”<sup>41</sup> This provoked Hoadly to publish a lengthy defense and elaboration of his views in 1706 entitled, *The Measures of Submission to the Civil Magistrate*

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<sup>38</sup>Akers, *Called unto Liberty*, 92.

<sup>39</sup>[John Broughton], *The Vindication and Advancement of our National Constitution* (London: Jonah Bowyer, 1710), 15. According to G. V. Bennett, Hoadly was “easily pre-eminent” among the early eighteenth-century Whig clergy (G. V. Bennett, *The Tory Crisis in Church and State, 1688-1730* [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975], 105).

<sup>40</sup>Benjamin Hoadly, *The Measures of Submission to the Civil Magistrate Consider’d in a Defense of the Doctrine* (London: James Knapton, 1718), 66. According to Hoadly, “This doctrine [of political resistance] justifies the late Revolution, which was an opposition to a prince acting contrary to the end of his institution” (ibid., 67). The Revolution was “begun upon this doctrine” (ibid., 79).

<sup>41</sup>Bennett, *Tory Crisis in Church and State*, 106.

*Considered*.<sup>42</sup> In this work Hoadly argued, like Mayhew, that Romans 13 asserted a general injunction for Christians to submit to political authorities, but it was not absolute. “Although [Paul] does at first press upon them [their duty to submit to civil authorities] in unlimited words . . . he manifestly afterwards limits this obedience to such rulers as truly answer the end of their institution.” It is therefore “the indispensable duty of subjects to submit themselves to such governors as answer the good end of their institution, to such rulers as he here describes.”<sup>43</sup> In cases where “governors act contrary to the end of the institution, invade the rights of their subjects, and attempt the ruin of that society over which they are placed, it is lawful and glorious for these subjects to consult the happiness of the public and of their posterity after them by opposing and resisting such governors.”<sup>44</sup> Since God’s design in appointing civil authorities is for the well-being of society, it is against God’s will to offer “passive non-resistance” to those who seek the “ruin and misery of mankind.”<sup>45</sup>

Hoadly framed his doctrine of resistance against Tory arguments for a strong monarchy and a weak parliament. They appealed to arguments for the legitimacy of the Stuart claims to the throne. When the people restored Charles II to the throne in 1660, he and many Church of England clergy advanced a platform emphasizing the divine right of kings, hereditary succession, and absolute submission to the king’s authority.<sup>46</sup> One of

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<sup>42</sup>Stephen Taylor, “Hoadly, Benjamin,” in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, ed. H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 27:342. The work to which Hoadly responded in writings was entitled *The Plea of Public Good not Sufficient to Justify the Taking up Arms against our Right and Lawful Sovereigns*. See Hoadly, *Measures of Submission*, v.

<sup>43</sup>Hoadly, *Measures of Submission*, 6.

<sup>44</sup>*Ibid.*, 39-40.

<sup>45</sup>*Ibid.*, 8. Hoadly elaborates on this point, saying, “For whilst he commands submission, he puts no case of princes acting contrary to the purpose of their institution, and the sole business of their office, much less of princes who make an express contract with their people and solemn oaths to preserve their rights and liberties and afterwards break through all these ties to invade their happiness. Nor does he mention any thing of a passive submission in such cases but plainly leaves nations to the dictates of common sense and the powerful law of self-preservation” (*ibid.*, 9).

<sup>46</sup>Bennett, *Tory Crisis in Church and State*, 5. According to Bennett, “The divines [of the Restoration establishment] accepted without hesitation their role as servants of a regime of personal monarchy and as advocates of an authoritarian view of society. The national Church was cherished as a

the most widely-read devotional manuals of Hoadly's day, *The Whole Duty of Man*, originated from the early Restoration period and articulated the doctrine of non-resistance that remained prevalent in High Church circles well throughout the eighteenth century. It summarized the political duty of Christians as forbidding resistance to civil authority:

Whenever the magistrate commands something which is not contrary to some command of God, we are then bound to act according to that command of the magistrate, to do the thing he requires. But when he enjoins anything contrary to what God hath commanded, we are not then to pay him this active obedience; we may, nay, we must refuse thus to act, (yet here we must be very well assured that the thing is so contrary and not pretend conscience for a cloak of stubbornness) we are in that case to obey God rather than man. But even this is a season for the passive obedience we must patiently suffer what he inflicts on us for such refusal and not, to secure ourselves, rise up against him.<sup>47</sup>

The king's authority was absolute.

During the reign of the last of the Stuart monarchs, Queen Anne (r. 1702-1714), many Church of England clergy sought to reassert the doctrines of hierarchicalism, divine right, and passive obedience once again in order to obtain favor with the court and secure their place in British society.<sup>48</sup> In 1715, one year after the death of Queen Anne, Anne's half-brother, James Francis Edward Stuart, sought to reclaim the throne of England. James's supporters took control of a large section of central Scotland, and Hoadly preached a sermon denouncing this "Jacobite" uprising.<sup>49</sup> Hoadly also published *A Preservative Against the Principles and Practices of the Nonjurors* the following year, responding to the arguments made by pro-Stuart clergy like Charles Leslie and George Hickes.<sup>50</sup> The unqualified arguments made by the nonjurors in favor

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bulwark against civil strife and religious anarchy. As a class the clergy became committed to a high religious theory of kingship. . . . The pulpits thundered forth the doctrines of the divine hereditary right of kings and the utter sinfulness of resistance to their commands" (ibid., 5).

<sup>47</sup>*The Whole Duty of Man* (London: W. Norton, 1704), 290; Bennett, *Tory Crisis in Church and State*, 103.

<sup>48</sup>Bennett, *Tory Crisis in Church and State*, 20.

<sup>49</sup>Taylor, "Hoadly, Benjamin," 343.

<sup>50</sup>Ibid., 344. Leslie, one of the leading nonjuring clergy, sought to popularize Robert Filmer's argument in *Patriarcha* for monarchical hereditary succession and divine right, based upon lineal succession from Adam (the first patriarch-king) down through the sons of Noah. In his *Unlimited*

of the Stuarts gradually made the defense of passive obedience synonymous with a rejection of the Revolution of 1688.<sup>51</sup> Hoadly's leading antagonist on these issues was Bishop Francis Atterbury, who was eventually banished from Britain in 1722 for being a Jacobite supporter of James Francis Edward Stuart, the so-called "Old Pretender."<sup>52</sup> James's son, Charles Edward Louis, or "Bonnie Prince Charlie," kept the issue of monarchical succession and legitimacy alive with another invasion and uprising in 1745. With the Stuart heirs and their allies continuing to denounce the Glorious Revolution and assert their claim to the throne, the issue of political resistance remained a much discussed topic in Britain well throughout the first half of the eighteenth century.<sup>53</sup>

Bishop Hoadly defended political resistance in the face of numerous opponents, who published extensively in favor of political and ecclesiastical absolutism in the early eighteenth century.<sup>54</sup> One of the most famous defenses of absolutism and

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*Submission*, Mayhew alludes to Leslie twice, denouncing his ecclesiastical authoritarianism and abuses (Thornton, *Pulpit of the American Revolution*, 72).

<sup>51</sup>Bennett, *Tory Crisis in Church and State*, 109.

<sup>52</sup>*Ibid.*, 205-94.

<sup>53</sup>See William King, *The State of Protestants under the Late King James's Government* (N.p.: R. Amey, 1745). Clergymen in America were also concerned with justifying the resistance to Stuart absolutism and the legitimacy of the Glorious Revolution in response to the Jacobin uprisings. See Benjamin Colman, *A Sermon Preach'd at Boston in New-England . . . Being the Day of Publick Thanksgiving, For the Suppression of the late Vile and Traiterous Rebellion in Great Britain* (Boston: I. Fleet and I. Trump, 1716); Petrus Van Driessen, *The Adorable Ways of God in His Sovereign Government* (New York: John Peter Zenger, 1726); Benjamin Colman, *Fidelity to Christ And to the Protestant Succession* (Boston: T. Fleet, 1727); Thomas Prince, *A Sermon Delivered At the South Church in Boston . . . Being the Day of General Thanksgiving for The Great Deliverance of the British Nations by The glorious and happy Victory near Culloden* (Boston: D. Henchman, 1746); George Whitefield, *Britain's Mercies, and Britain's Duty; Represented in a Sermon . . . Occasioned by the Suppression of the late Unnatural Rebellion* (Boston: S. Kneeland and T. Green, 1746); and Hull Abbot, *A Sermon on Occasion of the Rebellion in Scotland Rais'd in Favour of a Popish Pretender* (Boston: Rogers & Fowle, 1746). John Witherspoon tried to take an active part in the fight against Bonnie Prince Charlie and was captured and temporarily imprisoned as a combatant shortly after the Battle of Falkirk in 1746 (Varnum Lansing Collins, *President Witherspoon: A Biography* [New York: Arno, 1969], 1:22).

<sup>54</sup>The doctrine of passive obedience—the doctrine that subjects are either to obey or to suffer passively the consequences when non-obedience is demanded by the teachings of Christ—was widely held by Church of England clergy and adherents in the early eighteenth century, with one contemporary writer arguing that “the doctrine of passive-obedience [is] the distinguishing character of the Church of England” (*The Opinion of the Pious and Learned Mrs. Eyre . . . Concerning the Doctrine of Passive Obedience* [London, 1710], title page). Publications arguing for political absolutism in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century include Arthur Beford, *The Doctrine of Obedience and Non-Resistance due to the Higher Powers* (London: Henry Hammond, 1717); George Berkeley, *Passive Obedience, or The Christian Doctrine of Not Resisting the Supreme Powers* (Dublin: Francis Dickson, 1712); Benjamin Calamy,

“passive obedience” was a fiery sermon by Henry Sacheverell entitled *The Perils of False Brethren*, preached in St. Paul’s Cathedral on November 5, 1709. This sermon vilified dissenters and attacked the act of toleration as destructive to British society, implicitly impugned the Glorious Revolution and its settlement of the crown, and argued for the divine right of kings and political absolutism.<sup>55</sup> Sacheverell stated that “the grand security of our government and the very pillar upon which it stands is founded upon the steady belief of the subject’s obligation to an absolute and unconditional obedience to the supreme power, in all things lawful, and the utter illegality of resistance upon any pretense whatsoever.”<sup>56</sup> He denounced the execution of Charles I and railed against those who would “cancel their allegiance at pleasure and call their sovereign to account for high treason against his supreme subjects . . . and murder him for a criminal as they did the royal martyr by a judiciary sentence.”<sup>57</sup> Sacheverell’s sermons caused him to be tried before both houses of British Parliament. Both during the trial and after, mobs

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*Passive Obedience, the Doctrine of the Church of England* (London: John Morphew, 1710); Charles Leslie, *The Good Old Cause* (London, 1710); Matthias Earbery, *Passive Obedience Proved to be the Doctrine of the Church of England* (London: J. Morphew, 1717); Benjamin Gatton, *The Doctrine of Non-Resistance Stated and Vindicated* (London: Richard Wilkin, 1711); White Kennet, *An Argument in Defense of Passive Obedience* (London: John Morphew, 1711); Luke Milbourne, *The Measures of Resistance to the Higher Powers* (London: George Sawbridge, 1710); Luke Milbourne, *The Royal Martyr Lamented in Fourteen Sermons* (London: J. Milford, [1720?]); Wilowby Miners, *True Loyalty; Or, Non-Resistance the only Support of Monarchy* (London: J. Murphew, 1716); Charles Palmer, *A Defense of Passive Obedience and Non-Resistance* (London: J. Ward, 1710); *The Primitive Doctrine of the Church of England Vindicated* (London: J. Baker, 1711); William Sherlock, *The Case of Allegiance due to Sovereign Powers* (London: W. Rogers, 1691); William Sherlock, *The Case of Resistance of the Supreme Powers Stated and Resolved* (London: Fincham Gardiner, 1684); [Abednego Seller], *A Defense of Dr. Sacheverell, or, Passive Obedience Proved to be the Doctrine of the Church of England* (London, 1710); [Jonathan Smedley], *The Doctrine of Passive Obedience and Non-Resistance Stated* (London: John Morphew, 1710); R. T., *St. Paul’s Doctrine of Passive Obedience* (London: John Morphew, 1713); [Seth Ward], *Against Resistance of Lawful Powers* (London: n.p., [1710]); *The History of Passive Obedience Since the Reformation* (Amsterdam: Theodore Johnson, 1689); and *A Continuation of the History of Passive Obedience Since the Reformation* (Amsterdam: Theodore Johnson, 1690). See also James Tyrrell, *Bibliotheca Politica* (London: D. Browne, 1718).

<sup>55</sup>Scott Breuninger, *Recovering Bishop Berkeley: Virtue and Society in the Anglo-Irish Context* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 26. Bennett judges that the arguments contained in Sacheverell’s discourse were “a carelessly phrased rehash of [Francis] Atterbury’s arguments” (Bennett, *Tory Crisis in the Church and State*, 110).

<sup>56</sup>Henry Sacheverell, *The Perils of False Brethren* (London, 1709), 8.

<sup>57</sup>*Ibid.*, 9. Sacheverell suggested here that the Protestant “anti-monarchical schemes” came from Geneva (*ibid.*).

sympathetic to Sacheverell attacked and destroyed at least six dissenting chapels in London, with threats being made to a number of other locations as well.<sup>58</sup> During his trial, Sacheverell sought to defend the outcome of the Glorious Revolution, all the while denying the right of resistance.<sup>59</sup> In the midst of the Sacheverell trial, Hoadly published his massive work on government, *The Original and Institution of Civil Government*. This, in part, caused the British House of Commons to vote “that the Reverend Mr. Benjamin Hoadly . . . for having often strenuously justified the principles on which Her Majesty and the Nation proceeded in the late happy Revolution, hath justly merited the favor and recommendation of this House.”<sup>60</sup> As for Sacheverell, he was found guilty of libel and his sermons ordered burned.<sup>61</sup>

Other British clergymen in the early eighteenth century joined Bishop Hoadly in seeking to justify the right of resistance and the right of religious dissent. While Hoadly shared Mayhew’s attraction toward a more heterodox theology, other more orthodox and conservative clergy made the same arguments regarding Romans 13 and resistance. One such clergyman was Thomas Bradbury (1677-1759). As a prominent dissenting minister in London, Bradbury’s meeting house had been destroyed during the Sacheverell riots.<sup>62</sup> Theologically, Bradbury was an orthodox Calvinist, and a fierce polemicist against heterodoxy and the anti-Trinitarianism spreading among the dissenting clergy.<sup>63</sup> Bradbury preached and published numerous November 5th sermons to

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<sup>58</sup>David Hughson, *London* (London: J. Statford, 1805), 1:321.

<sup>59</sup>*The Answer of Henry Sacheverell, D. D. to the Articles of Impeachment* (n.p., 1710). See also *The Speech of Henry Sacheverell, D. D.* (London: J. Baker, 1710). For the fullest statement of Sacheverell’s doctrine of political non-resistance, see Henry Sacheverell, *False Notions of Liberty in Religion and Government Destructive to Both* (London: Henry Clements, 1713).

<sup>60</sup>Bennett, *Tory Crisis in Church and State*, 112.

<sup>61</sup>W. A. Speck, “Sacheverell, Henry,” in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, ed. H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 48:520-23.

<sup>62</sup>Hughson, *London*, 1:321.

<sup>63</sup>For Bradbury’s involvement in the Salter’s Hall controversy, see John Handby Thompson, “Bradbury, Thomas,” in *The Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, ed. H. C. G. Matthew and Brian

commemorate the Glorious Revolution and provide justification for the overthrow of James II.<sup>64</sup> These sermons justified the political resistance of 1688, largely with conclusion drawn from the political history of Old Testament Israel. For example, Bradbury argued that the resistance of David and his mighty men to Saul in 1 Chronicles 12 was justification for “revolutions in government [that] make for the common advantage and peace.”<sup>65</sup> He also argued that the history of the Old Testament judges rendered the idea of passive obedience absurd:

Suppose now, anyone had in those wretched days told them that it was unlawful to use the necessary means of their liberty, that to resist the arbitrary power they were under was to incur damnation (for it is plain those powers were of God) and if they could not obey the decrees of idolatry they were bound to be passive, that God’s selling them gave all those tyrants a divine right to rule them.<sup>66</sup>

Bradbury further argued from the kingships of Saul, David, and Solomon that political authority was granted to them only with and through the approbation and consent of the assembled people.<sup>67</sup> All of these arguments were used by Bradbury to argue for the right of political resistance and the parallel right of religious dissent.

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Harrison (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 7:165-66. Bradbury’s defense of the orthodox view of justification can be found in his *Doctrine of Justification* (London: J. Darby, 1716). For a full statement of Bradbury’s faith, as presented by him at his ordination, see Thomas Bradbury, *A Confession of Faith* (London: B. Mills, 1707). Bradbury’s anti-Arian works include *An Answer to the Reproaches Cast on Those Dissenting Ministers who Subscribed their Belief of the Eternal Trinity* (London: R. Cruttenden, 1719); and *The Power of Christ* (London: John Clark and Richard Hett, 1724).

<sup>64</sup>E.g., Thomas Bradbury, *Five Anniversary Sermons upon the Fifth of November* (London: Richard Burrough, 1705); *The Welfare of Israel* (London: Richard Burrough, 1707); *The Divine Right of the Revolution* (London: T. Ilive, 1709); *Theocracy, Or, The Government of the Judges Considered and Applied to the Revolution* (London: Nat. Cliff & Dan. Jackson, 1712); *The Ass: or, the Serpent* (London, 1712); *The Lawfulness of Resisting Tyrants* (London: S. Keimer, 1714); *True Happiness of a Good Government* (London: John Clark, 1714); *Non-Resistance without Priestcraft* (London: J. Darby, 1715); *The Primitive Tories* (London: R. Cruttenden, 1718); *The Divine Right of Kings* (London: R. Cruttenden, 1718); and *Public Deliverances the Cause of Christ* (London: John Marshall, 1732).

<sup>65</sup>Bradbury, *Divine Right of Revolution*, 14. Bradbury elaborates and answers objections to his argument in this passage in his *The Lawfulness of Resisting Tyrants*.

<sup>66</sup>Bradbury, *Theocracy*, 8.

<sup>67</sup>Bradbury, *Divine Right of Kings*, 11-12; Thomas Bradbury, *The Establishment of the Kingdom in the Hand of Solomon*, 2nd ed. (London: S. Cruttenden, 1716), 21-22.

Hoadly and Bradbury were joined by many others in Britain in the early eighteenth century who argued for the legitimacy of resistance and against the notion of political absolutism and passive obedience.<sup>68</sup> While these writers were varied in their theological and religious commitments, they were united in their opposition to the resurgence of political absolutism in the eighteenth century which threatened the standing order and challenged the newly established toleration of religious dissent.

### **The Roots of Eighteenth-Century Resistance Doctrine**

The arguments for political resistance adopted by Mayhew in 1750 did not actually originate with Hoadly and his clerical contemporaries but can be traced back to Protestant theologians of the sixteenth century. Those who opposed the doctrine of resistance in early eighteenth-century Britain certainly did not view Hoadly or Bradbury as originators of this position. In a response to Hoadly's doctrine of political resistance stated in his *Measures of Submission*, one writer asserted that "neither is this any new discovery of his [i.e., Hoadly's] own, but what Junius Brutus and Doleman and Buchanan and Milton and Sa[muel] Johnson and other advocates for rebellion . . . have taught before him."<sup>69</sup> Similarly, the Anglican clergyman John Walker in his 1714 *Attempt*

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<sup>68</sup>*An Answer to the High-Church Standers, Or, A New Passive Obedience* (n.p., 1711); Thomas Burnett, *An Essay upon Government* (London: J. Baker and T. Warner, 1716); [Daniel Defoe], *A Defense of Mr. Wither's History of Resistance* (London: R. Tookey, 1715); [Dunton], *The Mob War* (London: n.p., [1715]); John Edwards, *A Resolution of this Query, Whether the Doctrine of Non-Resistance and Passive Obedience Is to Be Understood without Any Limitation and Restriction* (London: n.p., 1730); *The Fallacy of Absolute Non-Resistance Fully Detected* (London: S. Popping, 1710); *Hibernia's Passive Obedience* (Dublin: E Waters, 1720); *The Judgment of Whole Kingdoms and Nations* (London: T. Harrison, 1713); [George Ridpath], *Parliamentary Right Maintained, Or, The Hanoverian Succession Justified* (n.p., 1714); *Solomon against Welton* ([London]: John Baker, [c. 1711]); *Some Thoughts Concerning Government* (London: A. Baldwin, 1713); *St. Paul and Her Majesty Vindicated* (London: A. Baldwin, 1710); Richard Steele, *The Crisis* (London: Samuel Keimer, 1725); *The Free State of the People of England Maintained* (London: A. Baldwin, 1702); [Matthew Tindal], *Four Discourses* (London, 1709); *True Passive Obedience Restored in 1710* (London: S. Popping, 1710); *Vox Populi, Vox Dei* (London, 1709); John Withers, *The History of Resistance* (Exon: Joseph Bliss, 1710); *The British Constitution Vindicated* (London: J. Baker and T. Warner, 1716); and *The Revolution and the Present Establishment Vindicated* (London: R. Burleigh, 1715).

<sup>69</sup>*Mr. Hoadly's Measures of Submission to the Civil Magistrate Enquired into and Disproved* (London: R. Smith, 1711), [iii]. Junius Brutus was the penname for the author of the Huguenot resistance treatise, *Vindiciae contra Tyrannos* (London: Matthew Symmons, 1647). Robert Doleman was the penname used by the author of *A Conference about the Next Succession to the Crown of England* (1594), traditionally ascribed to the Roman Catholic Robert Persons. See J. W. Allen, *A History of Political*

toward *Recovering an Account of the Numbers and Sufferings of the Clergy of the Church of England* asserted that the arguments used by Hoadly and others for political resistance were identical to those used during the English Civil War by the opponents of Charles I:

All the principles of 1641 (and even those of 1648) have been plainly and openly revived . . . and I have often questioned with myself whether the reasonings of the most celebrated author on this subject [in his day] might not with little trouble (would any undertake it) be paralleled paragraph by paragraph and shown out of the books and pamphlets of those times to be the very same on which the Grand Rebellion and the murder of the king had been defended.<sup>70</sup>

John Lindsay in his 1731 *The Short History of Regal Succession* also lumped the contemporaries of his day who argued for a right of resistance together with the following list: “Calvin, Beza, Knox, Goodman, Suarez, Mariana, Parsons, Penry, Buchanan, Leighton, Burton, Calamy, Marshall, Bradshaw, Milton, Goodwin, Ashcam, Harrington, Hobbes, Ludlow, Baxter, Owen, Locke, Sydney, Hunt, Johnson, Tutchin, and others.”<sup>71</sup>

John Lindsay’s 1731 list, while by no means complete, rightly suggests the wide breadth of theological support that the doctrine of political resistance had enjoyed prior to the eighteenth century. Lindsay put John Calvin at the head of his list of resistance writers, perhaps because Calvin was the foremost theologian of the Reformed tradition, a tradition in which political resistance doctrine became commonplace and widely disseminated.<sup>72</sup> Calvin, however, was by no means the originator of resistance

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*Thought in the 16th Century*, rev. ed. (London: Methuen & Co, 1960), 260-62; and Rebecca Lemon, *Treason by Words: Literature, Law, and Rebellion in Shakespeare’s England* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2006), 174.

<sup>70</sup>John Walker, *An Attempt towards Recovering an Account of the Numbers and Sufferings of the Clergy of the Church of England* (London: W. S., 1714), xi.

<sup>71</sup>John Lindsay, *The Short History of Regal Succession and the Rights of the Several Kings Recorded in the Holy Scriptures* (London, 1731), 6.

<sup>72</sup>Many scholars have seen the link between Calvin’s thought and the arguments used during the American Revolution. American historian George Bancroft praised Calvin for making Geneva “the impregnable fortress of popular liberty, the fertile seed-plot of democracy” and for leaving to the world “a republican spirit in religion, with the kindred principles of republican liberty” (George Bancroft, *Literary and Historical Miscellanies* [New York: Harper, 1855], 406-7). According to Bancroft, “He that will not . . . respect the influence of Calvin knows but little of the origin of American liberty” (ibid., 406). American legal scholar Rufus Choate attributed to Geneva “the great English Civil War, the republican constitution,

thought in the Reformed tradition. The Reformed theologian Peter Viret wrote against monarchical absolutism and supported a right of resistance for lesser magistrates with scriptural and theological arguments in his *Remonstrances aux Fideles* (1547) and *Le Monde a L'Empire et Le Monde Demoniale* (1561).<sup>73</sup> Prior to Viret, Martin Bucer's 1530 edition of his *Explications of the Four Gospels* and his later *Commentaries on the Book of Judges* asserted that lesser magistrates had a duty to resist their political superiors on behalf of the people. "If a superior power falls to extortion or causes any other kind of external injury," Bucer explained, the lesser magistrates "must attempt to remove him by force of arms."<sup>74</sup>

Lutheran theologians predated Calvin and the Reformed theologians in asserting the legitimacy of political resistance in certain circumstances. The Lutheran theologian Andreas Osiander expressed the view in 1529 that Romans 13 refers not to wicked magistrates but only to civil rulers who perform their office properly. Those who do not can be lawfully resisted by the lesser magistrates.<sup>75</sup> By 1530 the leading Lutheran theologians Philipp Melancthon, Justus Jonas, and George Spalatin and even Luther himself had embraced a position that justified political resistance based on the Saxon jurist Gregory Brück's adaptation of laws related to self-defense that held individuals

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elaborated upon in the cabin of the *Mayflower*, . . . the battle of Bunker Hill, and the independence of America" (Rufus Choate, *The Works of Rufus Choate*, ed. Samuel Gilman Brown [Boston: Little, Brown, 1862], 378). Abraham Kuyper saw Calvinism to be at the heart of the American Revolution (Abraham Kuyper, *Lectures on Calvinism* [Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2008], 72-74). German historian Leopold von Ranke boldly stated that "John Calvin was virtually the founder of America" (quoted in Emile Doumergue, "Calvin a Source of Democracy," in *Calvin and Calvinism: Sources of Democracy?*, ed. Robert M. Kingdon and Robert D. Linder [Lexington, MA: D. C. Heath, 1970], 7). For recent works that argue the same point, see David W. Hall, *The Genevan Reformation and the American Founding* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2005); David W. Hall, *Calvin in the Public Square: Liberal Democracies, Rights, and Civil Liberties* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 2009); and Douglas F. Kelly, *The Emergence of Liberty in the Modern World*. For a recent essay rejecting the connection between Calvin and America's founding, see D. G. Hart, "Implausible: Calvinism and American Politics," in *John Calvin's American Legacy*, ed. Thomas J. Davis (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 65-88.

<sup>73</sup>See Hall, *Genevan Reformation and the American Founding*, 162-67; and Quentin Skinner, *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1978), 2:209.

<sup>74</sup>Quoted in Skinner, *Foundations of Modern Political Thought*, 2:206.

<sup>75</sup>*Ibid.*, 2:204-5.

innocent when using violence to protect themselves in certain circumstances.<sup>76</sup> As Emperor Charles V threatened German Protestants, Luther modified his original position of non-resistance. He stated in his so-called Torgau Declaration of 1530 that “we certainly are in those situations in which . . . one may resist the governing authority.”<sup>77</sup>

Luther further asserted in his 1531 *Warning to His Dear German People* that

if war breaks out . . . I will not reprove those who defend themselves against the murderous and bloodthirsty papists, nor let anyone else rebuke them as being seditious, but I will accept their action and let it pass as self-defense. I will direct them in this matter to the law and to the jurists. . . . when the murderers and bloodhounds wish to wage war and to murder, it is in truth no insurrection to rise against them and defend oneself.<sup>78</sup>

The early Lutheran doctrine of political resistance received a confessional endorsement as well with the 1550 Magdeburg Confession, which emphasized the right of lesser magistrates to resist tyrannical superiors.<sup>79</sup>

John Calvin asserted that lesser magistrates not only have a right but a duty to resist oppressive civil rulers. The role of magistrates, Calvin argued, was to serve as “guardians” of “freedom” by regulating and moderating society, protecting individuals from anarchy on the one hand and tyranny on the other.<sup>80</sup> Calvin emphasized the duty to

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<sup>76</sup>Skinner, *Foundations of Modern Political Thought*, 2:197-99. Skinner argues that the Lutherans more quickly embraced a doctrine of political resistance than the Reformed and assembled “a considerable stock of radical arguments about the justifiability of political violence” in the early 1530s (ibid., 194). According to Skinner, “It was Luther, not Calvin, who first introduced the concept of active resistance into the political theory of the ‘magisterial’ Reformation. . . . [The Calvinists simply] took over and reiterated the arguments in favour of forcible resistance which the Lutherans had already developed in the 1530s” (ibid., 206-7).

<sup>77</sup>Ibid., 199-200. After hearing the opinion of “doctors of the law” like Brück, Luther stated the reason for his shift as follows: “Until now we have taught absolutely not to resist the governing authority” since “we did not know that the governing authority’s law itself grants the right of armed resistance.” Since “this law must be obeyed,” it may be at times “necessary to fight back, even if the Emperor himself attacks us” (Martin Luther, *Letters, II*, vol. 49 in *Luther’s Works*, ed. Gottfried G. Krodel [Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1972], 431-33).

<sup>78</sup>Martin Luther, *Dr. Martin Luther’s Warning to His Dear German People*, in *The Christian in Society IV*, vol. 47 in *Luther’s Works*, ed. Franklin Sherman (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1971), 19. Franklin Sherman refers to Luther’s “new position” as “significant alteration” from his previous assertions of non-resistance (ibid., 6).

<sup>79</sup>Skinner, *Foundations of Modern Political Thought*, 2:207-10. For more on the Magdeburg Confession, see David M. Whitford, *Tyranny and Resistance: The Magdeburg Confession and the Lutheran Tradition* (St. Louis: CPH, 2001).

<sup>80</sup>John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. James T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis

submit to political authorities, so strongly that one interpreter of Calvin has stated that “Calvin taught a doctrine of absolute non-resistance, qualified only, as it was qualified by everyone in the sixteenth century, by an obligation in some cases to a passive disobedience.”<sup>81</sup> This statement fails, however, to note Calvin’s other qualifications and the importance of these in the development of Protestant resistance doctrine.<sup>82</sup> From the initial 1536 to his 1559 edition of his *Institutes*, Calvin indeed asserted a right of resistance, even holding it as a duty for lesser magistrates:

If there are now any magistrates of the people, appointed to restrain the willfulness of kings (as . . . perhaps, as things now are, such power as the three estates exercise in every realm when they hold their chief assemblies), I am so far from forbidding them to withstand, in accordance with their duty, the fierce licentiousness of kings, that, if they wink at kings who violently fall upon and assault the lowly common folk, I declare that their dissimulation involves nefarious perfidy, because they dishonestly betray the freedom of the people, of which they know that they have been appointed protectors by God’s ordinance.<sup>83</sup>

Calvin also argued that in times of oppression, God may sometimes raise up “open avengers from among his servants . . . with his command to punish the wicked government and deliver his people, oppressed in unjust ways, from miserable calamity.”<sup>84</sup>

Quentin Skinner sees even the seedbed of popular resistance thought in Calvin, noting how Calvin “canvasses the possibility of popular magistrates resisting in the name of the

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Battles (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), 2:1494.

<sup>81</sup>Allen, *Political Thought in the Sixteenth Century*, 58.

<sup>82</sup>Skinner, *Foundations of Modern Political Thought*, 2:192-94.

<sup>83</sup>Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 2:1519. For a helpful discussion of this sentence, see McNeil’s extended footnote *ad loc.* McNeil says that the influence of this sentence “can be traced in John Ponet’s *Shorte Treatise of Politick Power* (1556) . . . , in George Buchanan’s *De Jure Regni Apud Scotos* (1579) . . . , and in the *Lex Rex* of Samuel Rutherford (1644).” Calvin’s statement as it appears in the 1559 edition of the *Institutes* is carried over verbatim from his original 1536 edition. See John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion . . . 1536*, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1975), 225. For statements of Calvin’s political views scattered throughout his commentaries, see Hall, *Calvin in the Public Square*, 82-97.

<sup>84</sup>Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 2:1517. It is probably on account of this statement that Robert Filmer, the foil for Locke’s *Two Treatises of Government*, says that Calvin furtively suggests or “looks askint” at the idea of a popular revolution (Robert Filmer, *Patriarcha: Or the Natural Power of Kings* [London: Walter Davis, 1680], 4).

people.”<sup>85</sup> A justification for popular resistance could perhaps be fairly made from Calvin’s commentary on Daniel 6:22, where he states that “early princes lay aside all their power when they rise up against God and are unworthy of being reckoned in the number of mankind. We ought rather utterly to defy than to obey them whenever they are so restive and wish to spoil God of his rights.”<sup>86</sup> However one understands the historical development or consistency of Calvin’s political views, it can be rightly said that Calvin’s position of “qualified absolutism” further encouraged the development of political resistance thought within his own theological tradition.<sup>87</sup>

British theologians in the sixteenth century further developed arguments for resistance that not only justified the right of resistance for lesser magistrates but the right of popular resistance as well. This development took place in close conversation with the theologians in continental Europe. In 1553, Bishop John Ponet fled England with a wave of other Marian exiles and settled in Strasbourg. In 1556, shortly before his death, Ponet published *A Shorte Treatise of Politick Power*, which asserted a clear right of revolution, the need for limited government, and the need for a system of checks and balances, with political power distributed to different spheres.<sup>88</sup> This work argued that political resistance to tyrants is justified because a tyrant’s unlawful activities cause him to forfeit the prerogatives due to his office.<sup>89</sup> Ponet further argued that some who claim to possess civil authority are actually illegitimate in the sight of God and that one claiming to be “a

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<sup>85</sup>Skinner, *Foundations of Modern Political Thought*, 2:192.

<sup>86</sup>John Calvin, *Calvin’s Commentaries* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1979), 12:382.

<sup>87</sup>Hall, *Calvin in the Public Square*, 81. For a variety of interpretations of Calvin’s political philosophy, see George L. Mosse, *Calvinism: Authoritarian or Democratic?* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1965).

<sup>88</sup>Hall, *Genevan Reformation and the American Founding*, 181-85. This work was reprinted in Geneva before Calvin’s death and again in London before 1642. For more on Ponet, see Lowell H. Zuck, *Christianity and Revolution: Radical Christian Testimonies, 1520-1650* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1975), 145-49.

<sup>89</sup>Skinner, *Foundations of Modern Political Thought*, 223.

prince or judge is not always ordained by God.”<sup>90</sup> Another Marian exile and friend of John Knox, Christopher Goodman, published a similar work entitled *How Superior Powers Ought to Be Obeyed* just a few years later from Geneva in 1558.<sup>91</sup> This work argued for a right of popular resistance based on biblical precedents and on a clear distinction between the office and the person of the magistrate.<sup>92</sup> According to Goodman, “if without fear [princes and magistrates] transgress God’s laws themselves and command others to do the like, then have they lost that honor and obedience which otherwise their subjects did owe them, and ought no more to be taken for magistrates.”<sup>93</sup> Again, if rulers become tyrants, “then are they no more public persons, condemning their public authority in using it against the laws, but are to be taken of all men as private persons, and so examined and punished.”<sup>94</sup> While the distinctions made by Ponet and Goodman did not originate with them, they were the first in the Protestant tradition to explicitly argue for the lawfulness of individual citizens (as opposed to only other magistrates) to engage in violent acts of political resistance.<sup>95</sup> When magistrates cease to do their duty, according to Goodman, the people “are, as it were without officers” and God “gives the sword [back] into the people’s hand.”<sup>96</sup> Goodman also argued for popular resistance from the concept of a national covenant, by which every individual was

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<sup>90</sup>Quoted in Skinner, *Foundations of Modern Political Thought*, 227.

<sup>91</sup>Christopher Goodman, *How Superior Powers Ought to be Obeyed* (Geneva: John Crispin, 1585). See Hall, *Genevan Reformation and the American Founding*, 240-43. For an extract of Goodman’s *How Superior Powers Ought to be Obeyed*, see Edmund S. Morgan, ed., *Puritan Political Ideas, 1558-1794* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1965), 1-14.

<sup>92</sup>Skinner, *Foundations of Modern Political Thought*, 223.

<sup>93</sup>Goodman, *How Superior Powers Ought to be Obeyed*, 118-19.

<sup>94</sup>*Ibid.*, 187-88, cf. 139-40.

<sup>95</sup>Skinner, *Foundations of Modern Political Thought*, 2:234-36.

<sup>96</sup>Goodman, *How Superior Powers Ought to be Obeyed*, 185.

religiously bound to resist ungodly rulers. While this argument was not employed by Ponet, it became very important in Knox's argument for popular resistance.<sup>97</sup>

The argument for political resistance continued to develop within the Reformed tradition in Europe after Calvin, especially after the St. Bartholomew's Day massacre in 1572. In 1573 Francis Hotman, a French lawyer and former secretary to Calvin, published *Franco-Gallia*, a Huguenot repudiation of monarchical absolutism.<sup>98</sup> Hotman's arguments were largely constitutional in nature, taken from his understanding of how political power had been distributed in France historically.<sup>99</sup> That same year, an anonymous work entitled *The Alarm-clock of Frenchmen and Their Neighbors* appeared, arguing from the Old Testament that "the people may free itself from its tyrants" who rule against the will of God.<sup>100</sup> In 1575 Theodore Beza published *Of the Rights of Magistrates upon Their Subjects*, which advanced a "right of revolution" position more strongly than Calvin's writings on the subject. Beza argued, in the words of David W. Hall, that "magistrates may exact submission from their subjects only in the measure in which the magistrates keep the law of God" and that "'manifest' tyrants ought to be punished" by the aristocratic element of society [e.g., the Estates General in France].<sup>101</sup>

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<sup>97</sup>Skinner, *Foundations of Modern Political Thought*: 2:235-38.

<sup>98</sup>Paul T. Fuhrmann, "Philip Mornay and the Huguenot Challenge to Absolutism," in *Calvinism and the Political Order*, ed. George L. Hunt (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1965), 46. In 1711 Hotman's *Franco-Gallia* was translated into English and published in England (see Francis Hotman [sic], *Franco-Gallia, Or, An Account of the Ancient Free State of France, and Most other Parts of Europe, before the Loss of their Liberties* [London: Tim Goodwin, 1711]). For more on Hotman, see Donald R. Kelley, *Francois Hotman: A Revolutionary's Ordeal* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1983).

<sup>99</sup>Skinner, *Foundations of Political Thought*, 2:310.

<sup>100</sup>For a description of this book, see Fuhrmann, "Philip Mornay and the Huguenot Challenge," 47.

<sup>101</sup>Ibid., 48. For more on Beza's political philosophy, see Scott M. Manetsch, *Theodore Beza and the Quest for Peace in France, 1572-1598* (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 63-91; and John Witte, Jr., *The Reformation of Rights: Law, Religion, and Human Rights in Early Modern Calvinism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 81-141. For Beza and Calvin's interpretation of Rom 13:1-7, see Richard A. Muller, "Calvin, Beza, and the Exegetical History of Romans 13:1-7," in *The Identity of Geneva: The Christian Commonwealth, 1564-1864*, ed. John B. Roney and Martin I. Klauber (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1998), 39-56.

Beza's detailed work on the subject of resistance was seminal for establishing the right of revolution on theological grounds.<sup>102</sup> In 1579, a Huguenot calling himself Junius Brutus furthered Huguenot resistance thought by publishing *Vindiciae contra Tyrannos* [*Vindication of Liberty against Tyrants*], a book which George Mosse calls "one of the most important treatises in the history of political thought."<sup>103</sup> This book, likely written by Philip Mornay or Hubert Languet, joined with Beza's *Rights of Magistrates* in declaring that a monarch derives his authority through the common consent of the people.<sup>104</sup> Beza and the *Vindiciae* both argued that the representatives of the people, the aristocracy, had the authority to determine if a monarch had become a tyrant. If so, they could righteously take up to overthrow him.<sup>105</sup> Using theocentric arguments from primarily the Old Testament, these authors further established the right of revolution within the Reformed tradition.<sup>106</sup>

The Scottish Reformer John Knox published in 1558 a number of pieces that unsystematically denounced monarchical absolutism that same year, including *The First Blast of the Trumpet*, *The Letter to the Regent*, and *The Appellation to the Nobility and*

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<sup>102</sup>Hall writes, "While it is true that some of Calvin's writings contained the seeds that would later bloom into resistance theory, it was only after his death that the writings of Beza and other Huguenot victims of oppression fully coalesced. When the fiery writings of Knox and other Calvinistic Scots were added to the mix, a major political innovation resulted, namely, basing lawful resistance against totalitarianism on theological grounds" (Hall, *Genevan Reformation and the American Founding*, 168).

<sup>103</sup>Mosse, *Calvinism*, 19. The *Vindiciae* was translated into English and was printed in London in 1648 as *Vindiciae contra Tyrannos: A Defense of Liberty against Tyrants; or, Of the Lawful Power of the Prince over the People, and of the People over the Prince* (London: Matthew Simmons, 1647). Skinner refers to this work as "perhaps the greatest and undoubtedly the most famous contribution to the Huguenot theory of revolution" (Skinner, *Foundations of Modern Political Thought*, 2:304).

<sup>104</sup>Fuhrmann, "Philip Mornay and the Huguenot Challenge," 48-49.

<sup>105</sup>The political philosophers who wrote along these lines in the sixteenth century were given the title Monarchomachs. For more on the Monarchomachs, see William Archibald Dunning, *A History of Political Theories* (New York: Macmillan, 1927), 2:39-80.

<sup>106</sup>Hall mentions the following writers in the Reformed tradition who also wrote against monarchical absolutism and supported a right of resistance/revolution with Scriptural and theological arguments: Peter Viret (*Remonstrances aux Fideles*, [1547], *Le Monde a L'Empire et Le Monde Demoniacale*, [1561], *The World and the Empire*, [1583]); Martin Bucer (*De Regno Christi*, [1551]); Lambert Daneau (*Politice Christiana*, [1598]); and Johannes Althusius (*Politica*, [1603]). See Hall, *Genevan Reformation and the American Founding*, xvii-xviii, 122-214.

*Estates*.<sup>107</sup> Knox's most mature expression of antimonarchical republicanism can be found in his *A Defense of the Biblical Doctrine of Resistance to Wicked and Tyrannical Civil Magistrates*, which was published the same year that Calvin died (1564).<sup>108</sup> George Buchanan carried arguments for resistance forward in Scotland with his 1579 publication, *De Jure Regni apud Scotos* [*The Right of the Kingdom of Scotland*]. This work synthesized the work of Knox and argued that rulers were to be held accountable for their actions by the people at large. Buchanan argued that if a king should "break all the bonds of laws and plainly behave himself as a public enemy," he is to be justly opposed and punished by the people as a tyrant.<sup>109</sup> Buchanan asks, "May not every one out of the whole multitude of mankind assault with all the calamities of war, a tyrant who is a public enemy, with whom all good men have a perpetual warfare?"<sup>110</sup> Scottish arguments for political resistance reached their fullest expression with Samuel Rutherford's 1644 publication of *Lex, Rex* [The Law and the King], which he completed while serving as a commissioner to the Westminster Assembly in the midst of the English Civil War.<sup>111</sup> Rutherford wrote *Lex, Rex* in response to John Maxwell's royalist treatise, *Sacro-Sancta Regum Majestas; or, The Sacred and Royal Prerogative of Christian Kings*, and in it he asserted that the king is under the law of God.<sup>112</sup> Civil rulers, for

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<sup>107</sup>For the full text of Knox's numerous political writings, see John Knox, *On Rebellion*, ed. Roger A. Mason (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994). For more on Knox's "doctrine of resistance by the people against tyrannical rulers," see Richard L. Greaves, *Theology and Revolution in the Scottish Reformation: Studies in the Thought of John Knox* (Washington, DC: Christian University Press, 1980), 171-76.

<sup>108</sup>Hall, *Genevan Reformation and the American Founding*, 236.

<sup>109</sup>George Buchanan, *De Jure Regni apud Scotos; or, a Dialogue Concerning the Due Privilege of Government in the Kingdom of Scotland* (London: Richard Baldwin, 1689), 45. This particular reprint, printed after the Glorious Revolution of 1688, was published together with the Huguenot treatise *Vindiciae contra Tyrannos*.

<sup>110</sup>*Ibid.*, 66.

<sup>111</sup>Samuel Rutherford, *Lex, Rex* (London: John Field, 1644). The original subtitle read, "A Dispute for the Just Prerogative of King and People; Containing the Reasons and Causes of the Most Necessary Defensive Wars of the Kingdom of Scotland, and of Their Expedition for the Aid and Help of Their Dear Brethren of England; In Which Their Innocency is Asserted . . . ."

<sup>112</sup>John Coffey, *Politics, Religion and the British Revolutions: The Mind of Samuel Rutherford*

Rutherford, derive their authority from God, and yet it is the people who determine (through Parliament) who their rulers will be.<sup>113</sup> Governing authority is granted by the people's representatives to a particular king conditionally, and they may depose and punish a king if he breaks the constitutional standards he is required to keep.<sup>114</sup> The Puritan parliament enacted such a punishment when it approved the execution of Charles I in 1649, with the support of British Puritans like John Owen.<sup>115</sup>

Protestant justifications of a right of resisting one's political authorities have a long history. Bishop Hoadly in the early eighteenth century had ample precedent and support for his own assertion of a right of resistance. Long before John Locke argued for a right of resistance, Protestant theologians had already made the case that the biblical command to submit to the civil authorities is not absolute and that godly resistance is not only allowable but sometimes is required.

### **John Locke and the Reformed Resistance Tradition**

Jonathan Mayhew and Bishop Hoadly did not have to choose between a "Lockean" argument for resistance and a Protestant argument for resistance, for Locke's arguments are similar to the arguments used by Reformed theologians in the sixteenth

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(Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1997). Coffey notes that Rutherford drew his republican arguments from both Scripture and natural reasoning, but this in no way compromised his understanding of the noetic effects of the fall or the epistemological necessity of Scripture (ibid., 152-55). Reasoning from natural law was commonplace in Reformed theology starting with Calvin and in no way is indicative of Enlightenment rationalism. For the place of natural law reasoning in the Reformed tradition, see David VanDrunen, *Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms: A Study in the Development of Reformed Social Thought* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010). For the place of natural law reasoning in Continental and British arguments for republicanism, see VanDrunen, *Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms*, 119-48.

<sup>113</sup>Hall, *Genevan Reformation and the American Founding*, 255.

<sup>114</sup>Ibid., 256.

<sup>115</sup>John Owen supported the decision to execute King Charles I and was invited to preach the sermon to parliament the day after Charles's execution (Carl Trueman, *John Owen: Reformed Catholic, Renaissance Man* [Farnham, UK: Ashgate, 2011], 4). Similarly, Jonathan Mayhew defended the Puritan resistance to Charles I as "a righteous and glorious stand, made in defense of the natural and legal rights of the people, against the unnatural and illegal encroachments of arbitrary power" (Morgan, *Puritan Political Ideas*, 321).

and early seventeenth century.<sup>116</sup> His political thought on the question of resistance developed in continuity with his predecessors in the Reformed tradition, especially with the Huguenot and Scottish traditions.<sup>117</sup> Many of these theologians justified a right of resistance not only on the basis of theological and biblical arguments but on secular and practical arguments as well. Among Protestant writers, it was largely Beza and the Huguenot writers of the sixteenth century that first based their justification for political resistance on “a purely political and non-sectarian argument” in order to garner political support from the broadest possible base.<sup>118</sup> While Christopher Goodman and especially John Knox argued for a right of resistance based upon a religious covenant, the sixteenth-century Huguenots made arguments that were less religious in nature in order to win support from the non-Protestant majority in France.<sup>119</sup> George Buchanan as well offered a “secular” justification of popular (and even individual) political resistance in his 1579 *The Right of the Kingdom of Scotland* based solely on concepts of natural right and an a-theological contract between the king and the people, whereby the people as a whole retain the right of revolution.<sup>120</sup>

Locke’s argument that political authority is granted conditionally to rulers by popular consent was anticipated by numerous Reformed theologians in the sixteenth century. Ponet’s 1556 *Short Treatise on Politick Power* argued that rulers derive their

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<sup>116</sup>For example, see Michael Zuckert, *The Natural Rights Republic* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1996); and William T. Reddinger, “Political Thought in Political Sermons of the American Founding Era” (PhD diss., Northern Illinois University, 2010).

<sup>117</sup>My argument in this section is heavily dependent upon Quentin Skinner’s *Foundations of Modern Political Thought*. Skinner’s magisterial work is widely regarded as containing one of the best treatments of the political thought of the Reformation and post-Reformation periods. See John B. Morrall, review of *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought*, by Quentin Skinner, *Religious Studies* 16, no. 3 (September 1980): 375-77; and Judith Shklar and Julian H. Franklin, review of *The Foundations of Political Thought*, by Quentin Skinner, *Political Theory* 7, no. 4 (November 1979): 549-58.

<sup>118</sup>Skinner, *Foundations of Modern Political Thought*, 2:322. In Beza’s 1534 *The Right of Magistrates*, he advances his position based on “arguments from reason” and invokes notions which he declares to be “self-evident” (ibid., 2:326).

<sup>119</sup>Ibid., 2:322.

<sup>120</sup>Ibid., 2:339-46.

authority from the people, who grant it to them “upon trust” and yet retain the authority “upon just occasion . . . to take way what they gave.”<sup>121</sup> Beza, the author of the *Vindiciae*, and other Huguenot writers began to argue after the St. Bartholomew’s Day Massacre, according to Skinner, that “the original and fundamental condition of the people must be one of natural liberty.”<sup>122</sup> Any form of legitimate government must therefore originate by the free consent of the governed. Citing the example of David, the author of the *Vindiciae* states that it is “by the people and for the people that they rule” and that “they should not claim that they have received their kingdom from God alone and by the sword, as they say, since they were first girded with that very sword by the people.”<sup>123</sup> Beza’s 1554 *Punishment of Heretics* stated that magistrates were “constituted by the consent of the people” to act as “guardians of the laws” that were originally over them.<sup>124</sup> The author of the *Vindiciae* also asserted, as summarized by Skinner, that “because people create their rulers on set terms, they must always retain a right of resistance if these terms are not honored.”<sup>125</sup>

Similarly, arguments used by Locke for a right of resistance from natural law did not originate with him. Christopher Goodman’s 1558 *Superior Powers* appealed to the natural rights of citizens, claiming that men are “reasonable creatures” and not “brute beasts” who naturally possess a measure of “power and liberty,” as well as a “portion or right . . . in the country where they inhabit.”<sup>126</sup> Therefore, all free subjects “may lawfully claim” their natural liberty “as their own possession” and as a “right,” and “if they suffer

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<sup>121</sup>Skinner, *Foundations of Modern Political Thought*, 2:320.

<sup>122</sup>Ibid.

<sup>123</sup>Brutus, *Vindiciae*, 69.

<sup>124</sup>Quoted in Skinner, *Foundations of Modern Political Thought*, 2:320.

<sup>125</sup>Ibid., 2:325. Skinner argues that this idea has its roots in Scholastic and Conciliarist thinkers and refers to it as a “scholastic” idea (ibid., 323).

<sup>126</sup>Goodman, *How Superior Powers Ought to Be Obeyed*, 148-49.

this right to be taken from them,” they wrongfully allow themselves be robbed of what lawfully belongs to them.<sup>127</sup> The author of the *Vindiciae* stated that “it is clear that men are free by nature” and “would not willingly have elected the command of another and renounced the law, as it were, of their own nature, in order to bear another’s law, except for the sake of some great advantage.”<sup>128</sup>

A number of scholars have noted John Locke’s close connection to the Reformed resistance tradition.<sup>129</sup> In discussing the relationship between Locke and the Reformed theologians of the sixteenth century, Quentin Skinner notes that “if we glance forward more than a century to John Locke’s *Two Treatises of Government*—the classic text of radical Calvinist politics—we find the same set of conclusions being defended, and to a remarkable extent by the same set of arguments.”<sup>130</sup> In his assessment, “The modern theory [of a strictly political concept of a moral right of resistance] was first fully articulated by the Huguenots during the French religious wars in the second half of the sixteenth century.”<sup>131</sup> Skinner notes that historians are mistaken who attempt to make a sharp distinction between Locke and the Protestant tradition on the question of resisting one’s civil authorities:

It is a mistake . . . to think of the development of [Locke’s] modern “liberal” theory of constitutionalism essentially as an achievement of the seventeenth century. As will by now be clear, the concepts in terms of which Locke and his successors developed their views on popular sovereignty and the right of revolution had already

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<sup>127</sup>Skinner, *Foundations of Modern Political Thought*, 2:149, 160.

<sup>128</sup>Stephanus Junius Brutus, *Vindiae, Contra Tyrannos*, ed. and trans. George Garnett (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 92.

<sup>129</sup>Scholars sharply disagree about how Locke is to be understood in relation to the teachings of the New Testament. Leo Strauss and his followers hold that Locke’s political philosophy is unbiblical and diverges greatly from the New Testament (Leo Strauss, *Natural Right and History* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1953], 214-18). Greg Forster provides an extended discussion and rebuttal of Strauss’s interpretation of Locke, and concludes that “there is nothing in Locke’s politics that violates the clear teachings of the Bible” (Greg Forster, *John Locke’s Politics of Moral Consensus* [New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005], 235-39).

<sup>130</sup>Skinner, *Foundations of Modern Political Thought*, 2:239.

<sup>131</sup>*Ibid.*, 2:240.

been largely articulated and refined over a century earlier. . . . A generation before Locke produced his classic defense of the people's right to resist and remove a tyrannical government, Oliver Cromwell had already found it quite sufficient (according to Burnet's report) to reassure himself about the lawfulness of executing Charles I by engaging in "a long discourse" about "the nature of the regal power, according to the principles of Mariana and Buchanan."<sup>132</sup>

Skinner is not alone in seeing the relationship between Locke and the Protestant tradition. In his extended analysis of Locke, John Dunn concluded that "the Lockean social and political theory is to be seen as the elaboration of Calvinist social values" which he worked out from within his "inherited theological framework."<sup>133</sup> More recently Mark David Hall has made the case that Locke's view of resistance should be understood as part of the broader Reformed political tradition.<sup>134</sup>

Political science professor William Reddinger has recently attempted to argue that Locke's position on political resistance was out-of-step with the purest and most biblical branch of the Reformed tradition and that there were two distinct Protestant resistance traditions: a "Continental tradition" and an "Anglo tradition."<sup>135</sup> The Continental tradition of resistance, according to Reddinger, is the orthodox Reformed position, which relied more faithfully on revelation than on reason and asserted only lesser magistrates have a right to resist. By comparison, the Anglo tradition of resistance relied more heavily on reason than on revelation, advocated popular resistance, and is the Lockean position, as distinct from the position of Reformed orthodoxy. Reddinger

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<sup>132</sup>Skinner, *Foundations of Modern Political Thought*, 2:347-48. For his closing quotation of Burnet, Skinner cites Gilbert Burnet, *The History of My Own Times* (Oxford: n.p., 1833), 1:76. Skinner's reference to the Jesuit Juan de Mariana supports his argument that the Reformed tradition became harmonious with certain Scholastic and Roman Catholic views of resistance as the tradition progressed.

<sup>133</sup>John Dunn, *The Political Thought of John Locke* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1969), 259. Greg Forster also views Locke and the Reformed tradition as harmoniously united on the question of political resistance (Forster, *John Locke's Politics of Moral Consensus*, 235-39).

<sup>134</sup>Mark David Hall, *Roger Sherman and the Creation of the American Republic* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 12-40; and Mark David Hall, "Vindiciae, Contra Tyrannos: The Influence of the Reformed Tradition in the American Founding," in *Faith and the American Republic*, ed. Daniel L. Dreisbach and Mark David Hall (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 34-62.

<sup>135</sup>William T. Reddinger, "The American Revolution, Romans 13, and the Anglo Tradition of Reformed Protestant Resistance Theory," *American Political Thought* 5 (Summer 2016): 359-90.

argues that the American revolutionaries were in continuity with Anglo (or Lockean) tradition and not with the Continental tradition. They were therefore out-of-step with the purest expressions of Reformed Protestantism and corrupted by Lockean rationalism.

Reddinger misreads Calvin by superimposing an artificial distinction between British and Continental views of political resistance onto the Protestant resistance writers of the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries. John Calvin—whom Reddinger views as the Continental tradition’s “foremost exponent”—has a closer connection with the notion of popular resistance than Reddinger acknowledges.<sup>136</sup> When a “lesser magistrate” rises up to righteously resist oppression, it is likely that Calvin conceived that he would have garnered the popular support of the righteous in carrying out the lawful resistance. Calvin’s acknowledgement of lesser magistrates does not preclude the possibility that the righteous might unite with the lesser magistrates and lend popular support in resistance. If this is so, the distinction between Calvin’s lesser magistrate argument and arguments that discuss the people’s resistance is essentially specious. It is also noteworthy that many of the “Anglo” advocates of popular resistance (e.g. Goodman, Ponet, and Knox) developed and published their justifications of popular resistance while with Calvin in Geneva. Further, no writer to my knowledge in the sixteenth, seventeenth, or eighteenth centuries distinguished between “Anglo” and “Continental” views of political resistance. More often than not, those who advocated for political resistance as well as those who rejected it clumped together “Anglo” and “Continental” resistance writers and did not distinguish between Calvin and Knox, for example, as representatives of two different traditions.<sup>137</sup> The major distinction on the

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<sup>136</sup>See Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 2:1517, where Calvin states that God may raise up “open avengers . . . to punish the wicked government and deliver his people.” Robert Filmer pointed out the seeds of popular resistance thought in Calvin, writing before Locke’s publications in 1680 (Filmer, *Patriarcha*, 4). Quentin Skinner also sees Calvin’s writings on resistance as providing a seedbed for popular resistance thought (Skinner, *Foundations of Modern Political Thought*, 2:192).

<sup>137</sup>In addition to those referred in this chapter above, Reddinger adds John Milton, who asserted his agreement with both Knox and Calvin on the question of resistance (Reddinger, “American

question of political resistance that was made historically leading up to the American Revolution was between those who advocated the doctrines of non-resistance, passive obedience, and political absolutism (in one form or another) and those who advocated a right of resistance in limited situations. Admittedly, a variety of expression exists between the advocates of resistance, but no sharp distinction should be made between Continental and British writers, or between Calvin and Knox, or between Locke and the Reformed tradition on the question of lawful resistance.

Failure to recognize the connection between Locke and the Reformed political tradition has caused interpreters of American Revolutionary-era thought to simply equate the bulk of Revolutionary thought as Lockean, as if a major disjunction exists between the Enlightenment “rationalism” of Locke’s political thought and that of the Protestant theologians before him.<sup>138</sup> Winthrop Hudson pointed this out in 1965, stating that John Locke’s

political thought was thoroughly acceptable in America because it was a restatement of familiar principles—principles forged by the heirs of John Calvin during the English Civil Wars and long the common property of most of colonial America. . . . If the Revolutionary generation was not misled by the propagandist tactic of appealing to Locke instead of appealing to the Puritan controversialists whose sentiments he reiterated, subsequent generations have been misled. Most modern scholars have tended to regard Burke and Otis and Adams as either ill-informed or not quite bright in attributing Locke’s ideas to the sons of Geneva, and they have pictured Locke’s political thought as something new, modern, different, “secular.” Having posited this discontinuity, they have then been puzzled by what they could only regard as the strange alliance of “rationalists” and “pietists” in the colonists’ struggle for “liberty both civil and ecclesiastical.”<sup>139</sup>

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Revolution,” 377).

<sup>138</sup>For a brief discussion of those who pose this disjunction, see Reddinger, “American Revolution,” 360-61.

<sup>139</sup>Winthrop Hudson, “John Locke: Heir of Puritan Political Theorists,” in *Calvinism and the Political Order*, ed. George Hunt (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1965), 108-9. John Adams himself believed that Locke’s views had their genesis in the Reformed resistance tradition, specifically in the thought of John Ponet. Adams wrote that “*The Shorte Treatise of Politick Power . . . by John Ponnet [sic]*, D. D. was printed in 1556, and contains all the essential principles of liberty, which were afterwards dilated on by Sidney and Locke. . . . [In] the whole in interval between 1640 and 1660 . . . not only Ponnet and others were reprinted, but Harrington, Milton, the *Vindiciae contra Tyrannos*, and a multitude of others, came upon the stage” (John Adams, *A Defence of the Constitutions of Government of the United States of America* [London: C. Dilly, 1788], 3:210-11).

One need not look outside of the Revolutionary-era clergy's own theological tradition to find the substance of their justification of political resistance. Locke himself articulates positions on the question of political resistance which are very much in line with the Reformed theological tradition.

### **Jonathan Mayhew's Doctrine of Resistance in Context**

As important as it may have been to Adams, Jonathan Mayhew's *Discourse concerning Unlimited Submission* was not the first sermon to be preached in America in the eighteenth century to justify political resistance. Prior to Mayhew's 1750 *Discourse*, many other American clergymen in the eighteenth century had published their arguments for a right of political resistance as well. While Mayhew was explicitly dependent upon Bishop Hoadly, he could just as well have depended upon a number of American clergymen who had argued in the first half of the eighteenth century that political resistance was sometimes demanded.

John Hancock, a Congregationalist minister in Lexington, Massachusetts, and father of the famed president of the Continental Congress and signer of the Declaration of Independence, wrote in 1722 that civil authorities are to make laws "for the defending [their people] in their common rights of men." Some, however, might "forget their duty and abuse their power . . . [and grow] imperious and tyrannical." Hancock addressed such rulers who did so directly, stating, "If you should abuse your power and go over all the bounds of your duty and obligations, oppress and vex this people and lay heavy burdens upon them, and grievous to be born, you'll forfeit the gratitude and regard due to benefactors."<sup>140</sup> Such forfeiture obliquely implies that tyrannical rulers might lawfully be resisted.

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<sup>140</sup>John Hancock, *Rulers should be Benefactors* (Boston: B. Green, 1722), 9, 13, 24-25. Hancock cited Dan 4 and God's "deposition" of King Nebuchadnezzar, brought on by his "pride and insolence" (ibid., 25).

Elisha Williams, the rector of Yale College from 1726 to 1739 and former tutor of Jonathan Edwards, more clearly asserted the right of resisting tyrannical rulers in his 1744 *The Essential Rights and Liberties of Protestants*. Williams rejected an absolutist reading of Romans 13, which some (in his words) interpreted “to serve the designs of arbitrary power [for] erecting a civil tyranny over a free people.” Williams argued that it is necessary to distinguish between “the powers which are not” (or “pretended power[s]”) and “the powers which are” (or “the powers that are of God” and his “ordinance”). One is to be in subjection to the powers which are truly of God and God’s ordinance, and one owes no submission to the powers that are not. In his words,

The powers that be in Great Britain are the government therein according to its own Constitution. If then the higher powers for the administration rule not according to that Constitution, or if any king thereof shall rule so, as to change the government from legal to arbitrary; the power from God fails them, it is then a power not in this text, and so no subjection due to it by the text. . . . A power that is no better than a pretended one can’t challenge any obedience by virtue of this text. . . . This text shows that obedience is due to civil rulers in cases wherein they have power to command, and does not call for it any farther.<sup>141</sup>

For Williams, Romans 13 also teaches that the legitimate civil authorities are given a limited power from God and are therefore due a “limited obedience.”<sup>142</sup> Williams’s motive in writing this work was to defend the religious liberty of Great Awakening revivalists from a statute curtailing the freedom of preachers to itinerate in Connecticut.<sup>143</sup> While he appreciatively refers to John Locke throughout this work, Williams’s overall theology was orthodox and evangelical in spirit.<sup>144</sup>

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<sup>141</sup>[Elisha Williams], *The essential Rights and Liberties of Protestants* (Boston: S. Kneeland and T. Green, 1744), 26-27.

<sup>142</sup>*Ibid.*, 27.

<sup>143</sup>Ellis Sandoz, ed., *Political Sermons of the American Founding Era, 1730-1805* (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1998), 1:52.

<sup>144</sup>*Ibid.*, 5, 7, 30. Williams was closely connected with Thomas Scott and Phillip Doddridge of England. Doddridge wrote of Williams, “I look upon him to be one of the most valuable men upon earth” (quoted in William B. Sprague, *Annals of the American Pulpit* [New York: Robert Carter, 1857], 1:284).

The year before Mayhew published his *Discourse concerning Unlimited Submission*, Congregationalist minister Jonathan Todd also published his rejection of political absolutism in his 1749 sermon on civil government entitled *Civil Rulers, the Ministers of God*. In this work, Todd stated,

The doctrine of obedience and subjection to magistrates has doubtless been carried too far by those who allow the people to make no resistance, nor self-defense, under the most arbitrary and illegal abuses of power, but insist that they tamely sit still and see their laws and liberties, religion, and properties invaded under a notion of authority and power. Doubtless, when the whole head is sick and the foundations of a state are removed, when the governing powers become tyrannical and arbitrary and usurp a power that never was given them, and evidently go counter to the instructions of the great Lord, by whom they rule, the law of self-defense is in force amongst a people and they may judge that God is to be obeyed rather than man.<sup>145</sup>

Unlike Mayhew, Todd was a Trinitarian who held more conservative theological views. He argued against religious toleration and insisted that civil magistrates were responsible for ensuring “that there be such a worship [in their jurisdiction] that God hath appointed maintained therein and to guard the church against the encroachments of seducers.”<sup>146</sup>

A substantial list of other American clergymen in the first half of the eighteenth century published works that at least implied a right of resistance to one’s civil authorities. For example, Ebenezer Pemberton in 1710 rejected absolutism and spoke of the limits of civil authority.<sup>147</sup> John Woodward in 1712 rejected “unlimited obedience” and implied that only “the wholesome laws enacted by legislative power are always tenderly to be regarded by us.”<sup>148</sup> Jeremiah Wise noted the limitations put on civil authorities in 1729.<sup>149</sup> Joseph Allen in 1744 stated that the Bible’s command to submit to

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<sup>145</sup>Jonathan Todd, *Civil Rulers the Ministers of God, for Good to Men* (New London, CT: Timothy Green, 1749), 32.

<sup>146</sup>*Ibid.*, 18-19. Todd quoted Samuel Rutherford’s 1644 *The Due Right of Presbyteries* in support of his views against religious toleration (*ibid.*, 20).

<sup>147</sup>Ebenezer Pemberton, *The Divine Original and Dignity of Government Asserted* (Boston: B. Green, 1710), 24-26.

<sup>148</sup>John Woodward, *Civil Rulers are God’s Ministers for the People’s Good* (Boston: B. Green, 1712), 30-31.

<sup>149</sup>Jeremiah Wise, *Rulers the Ministers of God for the Good of their People* (Boston: T. Fleet,

civil authorities “intends *lawful* authority, for it is no fault at all, but a duty to disobey if these injunctions are opposite to the laws of God.”<sup>150</sup> Gilbert Tennent, the famed Great Awakening revivalist, also argued in 1748 that warfare is justified in defending one’s civil and religious liberties.<sup>151</sup> Also, if the people “do not obtain protection” from their magistrate, it is not “reasonable he should expect support, honor, and obedience from his subjects.”<sup>152</sup> While none of these clergymen elaborated on the right of resisting one’s civil authorities to the extent that Mayhew did, their arguments are essentially the same ones that Mayhew used in his more extensive development of the right of resistance. Mayhew’s biographer Charles Akers is correct in asserting that “Mayhew had said [in his 1750 sermon] little of a political nature that could not be found in the sermons of some of his ministerial colleagues.”<sup>153</sup>

After Mayhew’s 1750 *Discourse*, clergy continued to justify political resistance in the years leading up to the American Revolution. Numerous political sermons were preached prior to 1763 justifying resistance and warfare against the French during the French and Indian War (1754-1763), while others eulogized King George II (d. 1760) as a great defender of civil and religious rights and liberties.<sup>154</sup> Even so, a number of ministers continued to publicize justifications of political resistance to one’s

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1729), 18-19, 43.

<sup>150</sup>James Allen, *Magistracy an Institution of Christ upon the Throne* (Boston: John Draper, 1744), 40.

<sup>151</sup>Gilbert Tennent, *The late Association for Defence, farther encouraged, or, The Consistency of Defensive War, with True Christianity* (Philadelphia: William Bradford, 1748), 7, 17-20.

<sup>152</sup>Gilbert Tennent, *The late Association for Defence, encouraged, or, The lawfulness of a Defensive War* (Philadelphia, William Bradford, 1748), 13.

<sup>153</sup>Akers, *Called unto Liberty*, 97.

<sup>154</sup>See George Whitefield, *A Short Address to Persons of all Denominations, occasioned by the Alarm of an Intended Invasion* (Philadelphia: B. Franklin and D. Hall, 1756); Samuel Cooper, *A Sermon Preached before His Excellency Thomas Pownall . . . Upon Occasion of . . . the Reduction of Quebec* (Boston: Green & Russell, 1759); Samuel Davies, *A Sermon Delivered at Nassau-Hall . . . On the Death of His Late Majesty George II* (Boston: R. Draper, 1762); and Gilbert Tennent, *A Sermon . . . Occasioned by the Death of King George the Second* (Philadelphia: W. Dunlap, 1761).

own civil authorities prior to the Revolutionary period. One such example was Benjamin Lord, an orthodox Calvinist who strongly supported religious revivals and served in a Congregational church in Norwich, Connecticut.<sup>155</sup> Writing in 1752, Lord argued that the command in Romans 13 to submit to the “higher powers” refers only to the civil authorities “which are lawful and good.”<sup>156</sup> “An absolute unlimited monarchy, or any arbitrary government which disposes of men’s lives, liberty, and estate at pleasure without law or reason, cannot be the government here intended [in Romans 13], for that in nature is unsuitable to the main ends of government.”<sup>157</sup> Samuel Cooper, another orthodox minister, asserted in 1756 that believers owe only a “proper submission” to their government, “for absolute, unlimited submission belongs to brutes and not to men.”<sup>158</sup> This list of ministers illustrates that Jonathan Mayhew was neither the first nor the last American clergyman to argue for a right of resistance in colonial America.

### **Conclusion**

Before the political controversies of 1760s drew near, Jonathan Mayhew’s well-publicized sermon made the case for the legitimacy of political resistance. Harkening back to the execution of Charles I, Mayhew argued his position to counter the doctrine of political absolutism that was yet present in both Great Britain and colonial America in the eighteenth century. In so doing, Mayhew was explicitly dependent upon the work of Bishop Benjamin Hoadly, who argued the same right of political resistance against both Jacobites favorable to the exiled Stuarts and nonjurors who rejected the moral legitimacy of the Glorious Revolution. Both Mayhew and Hoadly repeated the

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<sup>155</sup>Sprague, *Annals of the American Pulpit*, 1:297-98.

<sup>156</sup>Benjamin Lord, *Religion and Government subsisting together in Society, Necessary to their Compleat Happiness and Safety* (New London, CT: Timothy Green, 1752), 25.

<sup>157</sup>Lord, *Religion and Government*, 26.

<sup>158</sup>Samuel Cooper, *A Sermon Preached in the Audience of his Honour Spencer Phips* (Boston: Green and Russell, 1756), 31.

justifications and arguments that were found within the tradition of Protestant orthodoxy, reaching as far back as the mid-sixteenth century. While many of these positions are found within the writings of John Locke, they are not “Lockean” in a narrow sense or in any sense that would see their origin in Enlightenment rationalism. While some interpreters of Mayhew want to limit the origins of eighteenth-century resistance thought to the influence of either political radicalism or John Locke, this is to ignore the bulk of the evidence and the assessment of those who criticized Hoadly in his own day.

Mayhew was not alone in his views on resistance among the clergy of eighteenth-century America. A broad range of clergymen similarly held the position that resistance to one’s governing authorities is sometimes justified. The very same year that Mayhew published his *Discourse concerning Unlimited Submission*, a “Calvinist of the old school” named Samuel Phillips asserted the same position as Mayhew on political resistance.<sup>159</sup> According to Phillips, the Bible teaches that

it is the unquestionable duty of the people to be subject to [political rulers] and that for conscience sake. That is to say, unless they shall so pervert their authority as to decree and administer in such manner as has a direct tendency to overthrow the Protestant religion or to deprive the people of their liberty and property; or, in a word, unless they violate their oath and appear no other but as enemies to the civil and religious constitution. For although I constantly teach submission to the King as supreme and unto governors as being sent by him, and in due proportion to all others who are clothed with authority, yet, I could never see reason to countenance the doctrine of passive obedience and non-resistance in the latitude which some have pleaded for.<sup>160</sup>

While Mayhew was on the theologically liberal end of those who held such views, many of the more orthodox clergy like Samuel Phillips, Elisha Williams, and Gilbert Tennent expressed the same view. Mayhew’s arguments for political resistance, therefore, did not originate in theological liberalism or Enlightenment rationalism but are part and parcel of

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<sup>159</sup>Sprague, *Annals of the American Pulpit*, 1:273.

<sup>160</sup>Samuel Phillips, *Political Rulers Authoriz’d and Influenc’d by God our Saviour, to decree and execute Justice* (Boston: John Draper, 1750), 33.

the British Reformed tradition, which continued to feel threatened by the specter of political and ecclesiastical absolutism in the middle of the eighteenth century.

CHAPTER 2  
EARLY COLONIAL RESISTANCE AND ECHOES OF  
THE GLORIOUS REVOLUTION

The American clergy urged resistance to British authority in the 1760s. After the French and Indian War, Parliament imposed policies that asserted their direct rule over the colonies. They imposed the 1765 Stamp Act without regard for the constitutional principle of the consent of the people. The clergy in America urged resistance as a Christian duty. This began their long campaign to preserve the colonists' civil liberties and legal rights. Their arguments relied heavily on previous seventeenth and eighteenth-century justifications of resistance. They drew upon the legacy of the colonial clergy's support for resistance to the Stuart-imposed administration over New England, which led to the overthrow of Governor Edmund Andros in 1689. This seventeenth century revolution provided an important precedent for the American clergy's resistance thought in the Revolutionary era.

**Colonial Resistance to the 1765 Stamp Act**

The American colonists possessed a long history of zealously guarding the rights and liberties they believed were justly theirs. The earliest generation of New England colonists codified their belief that the British government was morally bound and obligated to uphold their colonial charters, their constitutional rights as developed in the British legal tradition, and their natural rights given to them by their Creator. The earliest law code in Massachusetts had enshrined various "liberties" as "fundamental" or belonging by nature to both those who govern as well as the governed.<sup>1</sup> A number of

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<sup>1</sup>David D. Hall, *A Reforming People: Puritanism and the Transformation of Public Life in New*

other early law codes in the British colonies codified numerous rights and liberties, providing the legal backdrop for protests that led to the Revolution.<sup>2</sup> These legal documents include the “Petition of Right” (1628), “The Massachusetts Body of Liberties” (1641), and “The Charter of Liberties and Frame of Government of the Province of Pennsylvania in America” (1682).<sup>3</sup> Far from being a post-Lockean development, the colonists’ concern with rights and liberties goes back to the earliest days of establishing the colonies.

Colonial lawmakers and politicians were not the only ones concerned with political rights and liberties prior to the American Revolution. American clergymen believed that the British colonists possessed rights and liberties that were legally guaranteed to them under law. They believed these rights were precious and must be protected. The ministers in Massachusetts issued a declaration in 1635, stating that “in a free State, no magistrate hath power over the bodies, goods, lands, liberties of a free people, but by their free consents.”<sup>4</sup> Almost a hundred years later, Benjamin Colman in 1730 called for “conscious subjection and obedience to the laws and magistrates” who “protected and defended their just rights and liberties.” Colman stated that this belief in rights, liberties, and qualified submission to one’s civil authorities was the early doctrine of the Reformed churches over against “Romish imposture” and usurpation.<sup>5</sup> In 1744 Elisha Williams also declared that every man has “a natural right to . . . his own person

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*England* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2011), 30-31.

<sup>2</sup>John R. Witte, *The Reformation of Rights: Law, Religion and Human Rights in Early Modern Calvinism* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 279-319. Witte points to numerous Puritan documents in New England to delineate what he calls the “Puritan seedbed of American Constitutionalism” (ibid., 318).

<sup>3</sup>For the full text of the “Petition of Right,” “The Massachusetts Body of Liberties,” and “The Charter of Liberties and Frame of Government of the Province of Pennsylvania in America,” see Bruce Frohnen, ed., *The American Republic: Primary Sources* (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 2002), 15-30, 98-100.

<sup>4</sup>Hall, *A Reforming People*, 32.

<sup>5</sup>Benjamin Colman, *Government the Pillar of the Earth* (Boston: T. Hancock, 1730), 13.

and his own actions and labor and to what he can honestly acquire by his labor, which we call property” and that “if every man has a right to his person and property, he has also a right to defend them, and a right to all the necessary means of defense.”<sup>6</sup>

This long-standing concern for rights and liberties laid the foundation for colonial resistance to the 1764 Sugar Act and the 1765 Stamp Act. It was not the colonial clergy, however, but lawyers and politicians who published the earliest protests to these policies of the Grenville administration.<sup>7</sup> These publications argued that Britain’s direct taxation on the colonies for the purpose of raising revenue violated the fundamental rights of the colonists as free Englishmen, since the colonists lacked representation in the British Parliament. The right of “no taxation without representation” was a guarantee in the Magna Carta that Englishmen cherished as an essential plank of limited government and a bulwark for protecting individual rights and liberties. In the eyes of many colonists, if the British Parliament disregarded the principles of the Magna Carta and the guarantees in the colonial charters, it was assuming a virtually unlimited power over them. A representative assembly of the citizens of Boston noted this in its response to the Sugar Act in 1764, stating,

But what still heightens our Apprehensions is that those unexpected proceedings may be preparatory to new Taxations upon us. For if our Trade may be taxed why not our Lands? Why not the produce of our Lands and every Thing we possess or make use of? This we apprehend annihilates our Charter Right to Govern and Tax ourselves. It strikes at our British Privileges which as we have never forfeited them

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<sup>6</sup>[Elisha Williams], *The essential Rights and Liberties of Protestants* (Boston: S. Kneeland and T. Green, 1744), 3.

<sup>7</sup>The most important published protests against the 1764 Sugar Act were Oxenbridge Thacher, *The Sentiments of a British American* (Boston: Edes and Gill, 1764); and James Otis, *The Rights of the British Colonies Asserted and proved* (Boston: Edes and Gill, 1764). Significant responses to the 1765 Stamp Act include John Dickinson, *The Late Regulations Respecting the British Colonies on the Continent of America Considered* (Philadelphia: William Bradford, 1765); Stephen Hopkins, *The Rights of the Colonies Examined* (Providence, RI: William Goddard, 1765);, and Daniel Dulany, *Considerations on the Propriety of Imposing Taxes in the British Colonies For the Purpose of raising a Revenue, by Act of Parliament* (New York: John Holt, 1765). For a defense of Grenville’s Stamp Act, see Thomas Whately, *The Regulations Lately Made Concerning the Colonies, and the Taxes Imposed upon Them, Considered* (London: J. Wilkie, 1765). Dulany’s work was especially popular and extensively read in the colonies (Edmund S. Morgan, *The Stamp Act Crisis: Prologue to Revolution*, 3rd ed. [Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 1995], 91).

we hold in common with our Fellow Subjects who are Natives of Britain. If Taxes are laid up us in any shape without ever having a Legal Representation where they are laid, are we not reduced from the Character of Free Subjects to the miserable state of Tributary Slaves?<sup>8</sup>

Similarly, the governor of Rhode Island, Stephen Hopkins, stated that the proposed Stamp Tax would be “a manifest violation of their [the colonists’] just and long enjoyed rights. For it must be confessed by all men, that they who are taxed at pleasure by others, cannot possibly have any property, can have nothing to be called their own; they who have no property, can have no freedom, but are indeed reduced to the most abject slavery.”<sup>9</sup> The American clergyman similarly opposed the 1764 Sugar Act and the 1765 Stamp Act because they believed these bills posed an imminent threat to their civil liberties and legal rights. Ezra Stiles, a Congregationalist minister and later President of Yale, protested the direct taxation of the colonists embodied in such acts, claiming that such a policy violated the “fundamental principle of the British, or rather English, Constitution that no body of the king’s subjects be taxed but by their own consent.”<sup>10</sup>

In spite of such assertions, historians Mark Noll, Nathan Hatch, and George Marsden have argued that the American colonists were wrong to see the Stamp Act as a violation or threat to their rights. They argue that the colonists wrongly interpreted the intentions of the British government toward them, and their resistance to the Stamp Act was unreasonable. They judge that the Stamp Act was only a modest tax and that British intentions regarding the colonists were wholly reasonable. The 1765 Stamp Act, they write, grew out of Prime Minister Grenville’s reasonable conviction that “it was appropriate for Americans to make a modest contribution for Britain’s efforts to defend the colonial frontiers and to aid in easing the great war debt which the mother country

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<sup>8</sup>Morgan, *Stamp Act Crisis*, 35. This statement was likely drawn up by Samuel Adams. There was virtually universal agreement in 1764 among the colonial assemblies that Parliament did not have a legal right to directly tax the colonies for the purpose of revenue (ibid., 39-40).

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., 37.

<sup>10</sup>Ezra Stiles to John Hubbard, June 12, 1764, quoted in Bernhard Knollenberg, *Origin of the American Revolution: 1759-1766* (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 2002), 181.

then possessed.”<sup>11</sup> There was no threat to their rights and liberties. The colonists were, therefore, deeply misled by a radical, “‘real’ Whig” ideology that caused them to imagine the Stamp Act posed a threat to their civil liberties when in fact there was none. Radical political philosophy overrode reality in the minds of the colonists and “governed the colonists’ perception of events.”<sup>12</sup> According to Noll, Hatch, and Marsden, “virtually no historian believes that the blunders of Parliament constituted the threat the colonists thought they did. Regardless of how the patriots perceived it, they were not in a desperate situation.”<sup>13</sup>

Political historians who are experts on the Stamp Act period broadly dispute the assertions of Noll, Hatch, and Marsden regarding the significance of the Stamp Act. Yale historian Edmund Morgan has convincingly demonstrated that Greenville’s new taxes on the colonies in 1764-1765 were aimed not just at raising revenue but in seizing greater power and political control over the British colonies in North America. In the judgment of Morgan, the main issue in 1765 was not raising revenue, but “putting Americans in their place.”<sup>14</sup> Starting in 1764, certain royalist agents both in Britain and in the colonies were calling for a complete reorganization of the governance of New England and a revocation of New England’s charters.<sup>15</sup> Those who called for a

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<sup>11</sup>Mark A. Noll, Nathan O. Hatch, and George M. Marsden, *The Search for Christian America* (Westchester, IL: Crossway, 1983), 77.

<sup>12</sup>*Ibid.*, 79.

<sup>13</sup>*Ibid.*, 96. Noll, Hatch, and Marsden further state that “Parliament’s Tea Act of 1773 represented an effort to bail out the struggling East India Company” and that the enactment of the 1774 Coercive Acts “was not excessive action” (*ibid.*, 78-79). Furthermore, these authors state that the grievances listed against King George III in the Declaration of Independence were propaganda and all “exaggerated greatly the intent of the King and the Parliament to destroy the liberties of the colonies and the actual damages which their conduct had caused” (*ibid.*, 96). The colonists did this because “they overestimated their ability to discern connections between Parliamentary actions and Parliamentary intentions.” Noll, Hatch, and Marsden then surprisingly state that “this confidence stemmed from an Enlightenment view of the world which had scant room for God or his revelation.” The authors conclude by saying, “It is difficult to see how Christians can without qualification defend the innate justice of the war” (*ibid.*, 97).

<sup>14</sup>Morgan, *Stamp Act Crisis*, 65.

<sup>15</sup>*Ibid.*, 50.

revocation of the charters reprinted in the *Newport Mercury* newspaper in Rhode Island on June 11, 1764, a copy of Charles I's 1634 commission to Archbishop William Laud, granting him power to revoke England's colonial charters. They did this, according to Morgan, presumably "to suggest that a similar move by George III would not be a novel one" and thereby to encourage the king to seize absolute control over the colonies.<sup>16</sup> Not everyone desired that the high degree of self-government enjoyed by the colonists should continue, and the threat to participatory government in the colonies was real. The Stamp Act was but one piece of a broader imperial posture toward the colonies, and resistance to it must be understood in this context. Bernhard Knollenberg, a legal expert and former librarian of Yale University, agreed with Morgan's assertion that the civil liberties and political rights of the colonists were under threat by the 1764-1765 policies of the Grenville administration. According to Knollenberg, the powers assumed by the British government with the 1764 Sugar Act and 1765 Stamp Act were without precedent and truly "revolutionary" in nature.<sup>17</sup> They marked a significant shift in government policy and set a new precedent that was of "extreme importance."<sup>18</sup>

Many in the British government recognized the importance of the Stamp Act in establishing a new parliamentary power and right to directly extract revenue from the American colonies. British officials openly acknowledged that the Stamp Act was passed to establish a legal precedent for a new power over the internal affairs of the colonies.<sup>19</sup> Some of these British politicians understood that Grenville's policies truly posed a threat to the just rights and liberties of the American colonists, and they protested the measure from within Parliament. Isaac Barré, a member of the British Parliament, passionately

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<sup>16</sup>Morgan, *Stamp Act Crisis*, 50.

<sup>17</sup>Knollenberg, *Origin of the American Revolution*, 140-41.

<sup>18</sup>*Ibid.*, 214.

<sup>19</sup>*Ibid.*, 215.

argued against the passage of the 1765 Stamp Act, noting on the floor of Parliament that the heirs of the original colonists who had “fled from [British] tyranny” were “as truly loyal as any subjects the king has, but a people jealous of their liberties and who will vindicate them if ever they should be violated.” The interest that a certain party was taking in the colonies was, according to Barré, motivated by a desire “to rule over them.”<sup>20</sup> Another prominent member of Parliament, William Pitt, also argued that the Stamp Act was tantamount to enslavement. In arguing for its repeal on January 14, 1766, Pitt stated in Parliament, “I rejoice that America has resisted. Three millions of people, so dead to all the feelings of liberty as voluntarily to submit to be slaves, would have been fit instruments to make slaves of the rest.”<sup>21</sup>

The 1765 Stamp Act itself had certain “ominous features,” in the words of Morgan, that made clear that more was in view in the act than simply the opening of a new revenue stream from the colonies. The act contained provisions that abridged the colonists’ rights to a trial by jury and enlarged the role of the admiralty courts. According to Morgan, “as they read the Stamp Act . . . the colonists would find themselves taxed without consent for purposes of revenue, their rights to common-law trial abridged, the authority of one prerogative court (admiralty) enlarged, and the establishment of another (ecclesiastical) hinted at.”<sup>22</sup> The Stamp Act hinted that Parliament was, according to Morgan, “contemplating the establishment of bishops in America” and ecclesiastical courts, “whose prerogative it was to exercise jurisdiction not only in testamentary cases but also in moral offenses.”<sup>23</sup> The language of the act was ambiguous, but one of the items taxed was documents in courts “exercising ecclesiastical

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<sup>20</sup>Knollenberg, *Origin of the American Revolution*, 213.

<sup>21</sup>William Pitt, “Speech of William Pitt the Elder,” January 16, 1766, in *Celebrated Speeches of Chatham, Burke, and Erskine* (Philadelphia: E. C. & J. Biddle, 1851), 12.

<sup>22</sup>Morgan, *Stamp Act Crisis*, 74.

<sup>23</sup>*Ibid.*, 73.

jurisdiction.” This could have simply been a reference to special probate courts that adjudicated testamentary matters, or it could have meant that the government was contemplating the establishment of bishops and ecclesiastical courts, which handled such matters in England. Either way, this language coincided with the efforts in the New England colonies to secure the appointment of a bishop in America and contributed to the anxiety the colonists felt.<sup>24</sup>

A prominent British clergyman played an important part as well in alerting the colonial clergy to the threat to their civil and religious liberties contained in the 1765 Stamp Act. In 1764 George Whitefield, the famed itinerant evangelist, met with a group of New Hampshire ministers and warned them about a British plot to curtail the civil and religious liberties of New Englanders, with the goal of ending colonial self-government and establishing the Church of England in the colonies.<sup>25</sup> The eighteenth-century historian William Gordon recorded Whitefield’s words to the clergymen, conveyed to them in Portsmouth, New Hampshire, on April 2, 1764, as follows:

I can’t in conscience leave the town without acquainting you with a secret. My heart bleeds for America. O poor New England! There is a deep laid plot against both your civil and religious liberties, and they will be lost. Your golden days are at an end. You have nothing but trouble before you. My information comes from the best authority in Great Britain. I was allowed to speak of the affair in general, but enjoined not to mention particulars.<sup>26</sup>

Gordon noted that “nothing . . . excited a greater alarm in the breasts of those to whom it was communicated” than Whitefield’s warning. According to American political

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<sup>24</sup>Morgan, *Stamp Act Crisis*, 73. Akers notes how concerns for religious liberty were very much on the minds of those who resisted the Stamp Act: “Bishops and stamps, religious and political freedoms, were thoroughly intertwined in the Dissenting mind of the northern American colonies by the end of 1764” (Charles Akers, *Called unto Liberty: A Life of Jonathan Mayhew, 1720-1766* [Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1964], 197).

<sup>25</sup>Ellis Sandoz, ed., *Political Sermons of the American Founding Era, 1730-1805* (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1998), 1:122.

<sup>26</sup>William Gordon, *The History of the Rise, Progress, and Establishment of the Independence of the United States of America* (London: Charles Dilly and James Buckland, 1788), 1:143-44. Whitefield’s words were conveyed to Gordon directly by Samuel Langdon. Gordon also notes that Ezra Stiles was informed in 1765 of the details of a plan to reorganize the colonies’ government and impose Episcopalianism upon them (ibid., 145-46).

philosopher Ellis Sandoz, “This episode galvanized the clergy in their opposition to British policy, especially when the intelligence proved true and the 1765 Stamp Act was adopted.”<sup>27</sup>

When the Stamp Act was repealed in the spring of 1766, many within the British Empire celebrated its repeal. Americans had resisted the Stamp Act by refusing to import British goods, which had caused economic hardship in England. As soon as word of the repeal leaked out from Westminster, the bells of London’s churches began to ring and continued ringing throughout the entire day. According to Morgan, popular opinion in Britain was “overwhelmingly for repeal.”<sup>28</sup> When word of the repeal reached America, the colonists were likewise filled with a great sense of joy and relief. Official days of thanksgiving were declared throughout the colonies, and numerous sermons were preached to mark the occasion. Jonathan Mayhew’s thanksgiving sermon expressed the prevailing view that the colonists’ very existence as free citizens had been at stake in the conflict with Britain over the Stamp Act. In his 1766 thanksgiving sermon, Mayhew recounted his view of the colonists’ rights that had been recently threatened:

It shall now be taken for granted, that as we were free-born, never made slaves by the right of conquest in war, if there be indeed any such right, nor sold as slaves in any open lawful market, for money, so we have a natural right to our own, till we have freely consented to part with it, either in person, or by those whom we have

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<sup>27</sup>Gordon, *History of the Rise, Progress, and Establishment*, 120-22. See Carl Bridenbaugh, *Mitre and Sceptre: Transatlantic Faiths, Ideas, Personalities, and Politics, 1689–1775* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1962), 235. According to Nathaniel Whitaker, Whitefield was greatly concerned about American rights and liberties. In a funeral oration for Whitefield, Whitaker gave the following assessment: “He was no less a friend to the civil liberties of mankind. He was a patriot, not in show, but reality, and an enemy to tyranny. He abhorred episcopal oppression. Often have I heard him express his zeal against the existence of it in this land; as it would evidently tend to deprive those of their religious and civil privileges, who had fled from the cruel oppression of the bishops in England, and sought a peaceable retreat in this then howling wilderness. He was greatly concerned for the liberties of America, and under God it was in no small measuring owing to him, that the Stamp-Act, that first attack upon our liberties in these corners, was repealed. He was a real patriot, a friend to his country, and ardently prayed for its peace and prosperity. Though he was loyal to his king and paid him all due honor, yet he had a quick sense of the liberties of his fellow subjects. America lay near his heart, which was tenderly affected at the view of the oppressions which threaten us. All America are indebted to him as a friend to our religious and civil liberties and privileges, and who never failed to exert his best influences for our peace and happiness” (Nathaniel Whitaker, *A Funeral Sermon on the Death of the Reverend George Whitefield* [Salem, MA: Samuel Hall, 1770], 33-34).

<sup>28</sup>Morgan, *Stamp Act Crisis*, 291.

appointed to represent and to act for us. It shall be taken for granted that this natural right is declared, affirmed, and secured to us, as we are British subjects, by Magna Carta; all acts contrary to which are said to be *ipso facto* null and void. And that this natural, constitutional right has been further confirmed to most of the plantations by particular subsequent royal charters, taken in their obvious sense; the legality and authority of which charters was never once denied by either House of Parliament, but implicitly at least acknowledged ever since they were respectively granted, till very lately. It is taken for granted also that the right of trial by juries is a constitutional one. . . . [T]he plantations [colonies] in which civil government has been established have all along, till of late, been in the uninterrupted enjoyment of both the rights aforesaid, which are of the utmost importance, being essential to liberty. It shall, therefore, be taken for granted that the colonies had great reason to petition and remonstrate against a late act of Parliament as being an infraction of these rights, and tending directly to reduce us to a state of slavery.<sup>29</sup>

What was behind this recent threat to the colonists' rights? For Mayhew, it was Stuart and French absolutism. Rightly or wrongly, Mayhew believed that the Stamp Act had been encouraged "not improbably in the interests of the Houses of Bourbon and the Pretender, whose cause they meant to serve by bringing an open rupture between Great Britain and her colonies."<sup>30</sup> Its repeal, then, for Mayhew, had saved both Great Britain and its colonies from "a fatal rupture" and a likely French conquest.<sup>31</sup> Numerous other thanksgiving sermons were preached in the American colonies, celebrating what was widely perceived as nothing less than deliverance from political absolutism and enslavement.<sup>32</sup>

Far from merely being concerned with the monetary and economic issues

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<sup>29</sup>Jonathan Mayhew, *The Snare broken* (Boston: R. & S. Draper, 1766), 12-13.

<sup>30</sup>*Ibid.*, 17.

<sup>31</sup>*Ibid.*, iv.

<sup>32</sup>The American clergy preached and published a large number of sermons celebrating the 1766 repeal of the Stamp Act. In addition to Jonathan Mayhew's *The Snare broken* and Charles Chauncy's *Discourse On "the good News from a far Country,"* see Henry Cumings, *A Thanksgiving Sermon Preached at Billerica* (Boston: Kneeland and Adams, 1766); Joseph Emerson, *A Thanksgiving Sermon Preach'd at Pepperrell . . . On the Account of the Repeal of the Stamp Act* (Boston: Edes and Gill, 1766); William Patten, *A Discourse Delivered at Hallifax . . . On the Day of Thanksgiving . . . for the Repeal of the Stamp Act* (Boston: D. Kneeland, 1766); David S. Rowland, *Divine Providence Illustrated and Improved* (Providence, RI: Sarah Goddard, 1766); Samuel Stillman, *Good New from a far Country* (Boston: Kneeland and Adams, 1766); Benjamin Throop, *A Thanksgiving Sermon, Upon the Occasion, of the glorious News of the repeal of the Stamp Act* (New London: Timothy Green, 1766); J. J. Zubly, *The Stamp-Act Repealed* (Savannah: James Johnston, 1766); and Elisha Fish, *Joy and Gladness: A Thanksgiving Discourse . . . Occasioned by the Repeal of the Stamp-Act* (Providence, RI: Sarah Goddard, 1767). See also [Ebenezer Devotion], *The Examiner Examined* (New Haven, CT: Samuel Green, 1766); and Ebenezer Bridge, *A Sermon Preached Before His Excellency Francis Bernard* (Boston: Green and Russell, 1767).

involved, those who promoted early resistance to the Sugar Act and Stamp Act did so because of a perceived threat to their civil and religious liberties. When the clergymen joined the protest to the British policies, they did so in a way that was in continuity with long-standing concerns over rights and liberties. When the Stamp Act was repealed, there was great celebrating in the colonies—not so much that a tax had been repealed but that the civil liberties, rights, and privileges of the British colonists in America had been preserved.<sup>33</sup>

### **The Doctrine of Resistance during the Stamp Act Crisis**

Colonial clergymen repeated the assertion that resistance to one's political authorities was sometimes justified during the Stamp Act crisis of 1765–1766. The changed circumstances did not produce a new doctrine or ideology of resistance. Rather, the clergy's doctrine of resistance remained in continuity with the long tradition of Protestant resistance thought, which maintained that active resistance to one's civil authorities is sometimes justified. While the colonial clergy reasserted their justifications of resistance, they also warned their audiences against lawlessness, violence, and ungodly forms of resistance that were merely expressions of immorality cloaked in self-justification.

It was largely the theologically orthodox and pro-revival clergy who gave leadership to those who protested and resisted the Stamp Act.<sup>34</sup> Naphtali Daggett, an orthodox New Light Congregationalist and Professor of Divinity at Yale, was a strong opponent of the Stamp Act.<sup>35</sup> New Light Congregationalists like Daggett filled the ranks

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<sup>33</sup>Mayhew's views were generally representative of the clergy who published sermons dealing directly with the Stamp Act Crisis. See, for example, Emerson, *Thanksgiving Sermon Preach'd at Pepperrell*, 9-14; and Throop, *Thanksgiving Sermon*, 11-13.

<sup>34</sup>It is difficult to determine the full extent that the clergy were involved in the colonial resistance to the Sugar Act and the Stamp Act. No sermons exist that addressed the Stamp Act directly while it was yet in force, yet a number of clergy actively encouraged resistance to it and publicly gave thanks when it was repealed.

<sup>35</sup>Morgan, *Stamp Act Crisis*, 235, 243. See also Sprague, *Annals of the American Pulpit*,

of the Sons of Liberty in Connecticut and were largely responsible for organizing resistance to it there.<sup>36</sup> Another orthodox Congregationalist, Samuel Langdon, was one of the main leaders of the Sons of Liberty in New Hampshire during the uprising against the Stamp Act.<sup>37</sup> It was the opinion of John Hughes, the Distributor of Stamps for Delaware and Pennsylvania that the opposition to the Stamp Act in his area came predominately from the ranks of Presbyterians, who were dominated by New Light (i.e. pro-revival) voices after the Old Light and New Light Presbyterians merged in 1758.<sup>38</sup> After receiving the commission for his position, Hughes, an Anglican, wrote to Benjamin Franklin on September 8, 1765, stating that “when it is known that I have received my Commission I fancy I shall not escape the storm of Presbyterian Rage.”<sup>39</sup> Franklin’s son William, the governor of New Jersey, agreed with Hughes’s assessment, writing that “the Presbyterians of New England have wrote to all their Brethren throughout the Continent, to endeavor to stir up the Inhabitants of each Colony to act as they have done, in hopes of thereby making it appear to the Ministry too difficult a Matter to call them to account for their late outrageous Conduct.”<sup>40</sup>

As news of the Stamp Act’s passage was reaching Massachusetts, the doctrine of political resistance received a very public reaffirmation in the city of Boston. Andrew Eliot was chosen to preach the annual election sermon before the colony’s political leaders, including Governor Francis Bernard. Eliot was a Boston Congregationalist clergyman and one whom his son described as “a moderate Calvinist” who held the

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1:479-84.

<sup>36</sup>Morgan, *Stamp Act Crisis*, 244-46.

<sup>37</sup>*Ibid.*, 190.

<sup>38</sup>*Ibid.*, 161, 249.

<sup>39</sup>*Ibid.*, 258. For more of Hughes’s assessment of the Stamp Act resistance coming from Presbyterians, see *ibid.*, 260-66.

<sup>40</sup>*Ibid.*, 163.

Westminster Shorter Catechism “in high esteem” and “inculcated [it] zealously upon the youth of his congregation.”<sup>41</sup> Eliot laid out his justification of political resistance in this election sermon, preached on May 25, 1765. In the course of delineating the duties of leaders to their people and people to their leaders, Eliot asserted his view that political resistance to one’s civil leaders is sometimes justified. While Romans 13, according to Eliot, teaches that obedience to one’s rulers is necessary, there still exists a right of resistance in certain situations:

Some have argued the doctrine of passive obedience and non-resistance in all cases whatsoever or that we are not to oppose those who are in authority, although they evidently act contrary to the design of their institution and are bent to ruin the society, which it is their duty to defend and promote. A doctrine so big with absurdity that one would think no one of common understanding could embrace it, certainly he must have the temper of a slave that can practice upon it. St. Paul very plainly teaches us how far subjection is due to a civil magistrate, when he gives it as a reason for this subjection, “for he is the minister of God to thee for good.” The end for which God has placed men in authority is that they may promote the public happiness. When they improve their power to contrary purposes, when they endeavor to subvert the constitution and to enslave a free people, they are no longer the ministers of God, they do not act by his authority; if we are obliged to be subject, it is only for wrath and not for conscience sake, and they who support such rulers betray their country and deserve the misery they bring on themselves.<sup>42</sup>

Willfully submitting to tyrannical civil authorities, according to Eliot, is not a Christian duty but a sin and a great offense against God:

Where men are grossly of a contrary character and pervert their power to tyrannical purposes, submission, if it can be avoided, is so far from being a duty, that it is a crime. It is an offence against the state of which we are members and whose happiness we ought to prefer to our chief joy. It is an offence against mankind, whose rights we meanly betray. It is an offence against God, who is good to all, and how he has appointed government for the welfare and happiness and not the destruction of his creatures.<sup>43</sup>

Even though resistance to tyrannical rulers is a duty, Eliot expressed this justification of resistance moderately and cautiously:

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<sup>41</sup>Sprague, *Annals of the American Pulpit*, 1:420.

<sup>42</sup>Andrew Eliot, *A Sermon Preached before His Excellency Francis Bernard* (Boston: Green and Russell, 1765), 42-43.

<sup>43</sup>*Ibid.*, 47-48.

I am sensible it is difficult to state this point with precision, to determine where submission ends and resistance may lawfully take place, so as not to leave room for men of bad minds unreasonably to oppose government and to destroy the peace of society. Most certainly people ought to bear much before they engage in any attempts against those who are in authority.<sup>44</sup>

Such cautious assertions are in continuity with the moderate justification of resistance asserted by Jonathan Mayhew in 1750. While their overall theologies differed significantly, the liberal Mayhew and the orthodox Eliot agreed in their understanding of political resistance.

In their rejection of political radicalism, the Massachusetts clergy who supported the right of political resistance did not instigate or support violent resistance to the Stamp Act of 1765. Clergymen like Eliot who justified the right of resistance expressed their disapproval of the instances of mob violence that occurred when resistance to the Stamp Act took a violent turn in Boston. When a mob rioted and notoriously descended upon the house of Lieutenant Governor Hutchinson on August 26, 1765, Eliot risked his safety by gathering up Hutchinson's books and manuscripts that were being thrown into the street, preserving a large number of them.<sup>45</sup> The Sunday before Hutchinson's home was sacked, Jonathan Mayhew preached a sermon which encouraged his hearers to "use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh" and not to "use any method for the defense of our rights and privileges besides those which are honest and honorable."<sup>46</sup> "Within these restrictions and limitations, let us do all in our power," was Mayhew's counsel to his hearers, but he was not a supporter of rioting and mob violence. The day after Hutchinson's home was sacked, Mayhew wrote to Hutchinson and expressed his grief and outrage over the destruction of his home. Far from approving of the mob violence, he abhorred it, telling Hutchinson that "I had rather lose my hand

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<sup>44</sup>Eliot, *Sermon Preached before His Excellency*, 43.

<sup>45</sup>Sprague, *Annals of the American Pulpit*, 1:418.

<sup>46</sup>Akers, *Called unto Liberty*, 202, 204.

than encourage such outrages.”<sup>47</sup> The following Sunday, Mayhew preached a sermon against “abusing liberty to licentiousness,” denouncing the mob violence of the previous week.<sup>48</sup>

After Parliament repealed the Stamp Act the following spring, Mayhew restated his position on political resistance in a 1766 sermon entitled *The Snare Broken*. In this sermon Mayhew carved out a place between those who argued for passive obedience on the one hand and those who had enacted mob violence in Boston on the other. Mayhew again denounced the rioters of the following summer, “who had the effrontery to cloak their rapacious violence with the pretext of zeal for liberty” and had perpetrated “abominable excesses and outrages on the persons or property of others.”<sup>49</sup> At the same time, he stated his disagreement with those who called for non-resistance to the British Stamp Act—who followed “the principles of [Robert] Sibthorpe, [Roger] Maynwaring, and [Robert] Filmer” and who “determined to go no farther in order to obtain redress than in the way of petition and remonstrance.”<sup>50</sup> Mayhew believed in making “humble and respectful” appeals to the government, but believed they should not be “abject and servile.”<sup>51</sup> In the wake of the Stamp Act violence, Mayhew wanted to both affirm “the doctrines of civil liberty” he had first “learned from the holy scripture,” and also not give any credence to those who had participated in mob violence. While

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<sup>47</sup>Jonathan Mayhew to Thomas Hutchinson, August 27, 1765, quoted in Akers, *Called unto Liberty*, 206. George Bancroft noted that Sam Adams agreed with Mayhew and similarly disapproved of mob violence. The people of Boston gathered in town-meetings the morning after Hutchinson’s home was destroyed and also voted to express their “detestation of these violent proceedings” (George Bancroft, *History of the United States of America from the Discovery of the Continent* [New York: D. Appleton, 1895], 3:137). Sam Adams denounced the events of August 26 as “of a truly mobbish nature” and voted to “assist the magistrate to their utmost in preventing or suppressing any further disorder” (Ira Stoll, *Samuel Adams: A Life* [New York: Free Press, 2008], 45). See also David Ramsey, *The History of the American Revolution* (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1990), 1:61.

<sup>48</sup>Akers, *Called unto Liberty*, 206.

<sup>49</sup>Mayhew, *The Snare broken*, 15. See also Akers, *Called unto Liberty*, 213.

<sup>50</sup>Mayhew, *The Snare broken*, 25.

<sup>51</sup>*Ibid.*, 34-35.

standing by the right of popular resistance, Mayhew refused to offer specifics as to when a popular revolution may be justified:

I will not meddle with the thorny question whether or how far it might be justifiable for private men, at certain extraordinary conjunctures, to take the administration of government in some respects into their own hands. Self-preservation being a great and primary law of nature, and to be considered as antecedent to all civil class and institutions, which are subordinate and subservient to the other, the right of so doing, in some circumstances, cannot well be denied.<sup>52</sup>

While popular revolutions may be justified, Mayhew restricted such to “certain extraordinary conjunctures” and provided no easy answers that could be used to countenance a violent mob revolt. The violent response to the Stamp Act did not cause Mayhew to alter his 1750 position on the right of resistance but to guard his moderate expressions of it.

The liberal minister Charles Chauncy in his 1766 thanksgiving sermon also expressed a moderate position on the right of resistance as well. On the one hand, he too denounced the “violent outrages upon the property of others” which had been committed by “evil-minded persons.”<sup>53</sup> He was thankful that such mob violence over the Stamp Act had been relatively limited in Boston:

There has been no public disturbance since the outrage at Lieut. Governor Hutchinson’s house. That was so detested by Town and Country and such a spirit at once so generally stirred up, particularly among the people, to oppose such villainous conduct, as has preserved us ever since in a state of as great a freedom from mobish actions as has been known in the Country. . . . The colonists in general, the inhabitants of this Province in particular, are as great enemies to all irregular turbulent proceedings, and as good friends of Government, and as peaceable loyal Subjects as any that call King George III their rightful and lawful Sovereign.<sup>54</sup>

On the other hand, Chauncy joined Mayhew in affirming the right of resistance, even while condemning mob violence:

Tis certainly true [that] there may be such exercise of power, and in instances of

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<sup>52</sup>Mayhew, *The Snare broken*, 50.

<sup>53</sup>Charles Chauncy, *A Discourse on “the Good News from a Far Country”* (Boston: Kneeland and Adams, 1766), 19.

<sup>54</sup>*Ibid.*, 25-26.

such a nature, as to render non-submission warrantable upon the foot of reason and righteousness. Otherwise it will be difficult, if possible, to justify the [Glorious] Revolution and that establishment in consequence of it upon which his present majesty sits upon the British throne.<sup>55</sup>

Chauncy clearly distinguished between “non-submission” that was “warrantable” and the “villainous conduct” of “mobbish actions.”

While steadfastly asserting the right of resistance, clergymen across the theological spectrum denounced the violence that lingers in the historical memory of Stamp Act resistance. Boston clergymen Eliot, Mayhew, and Chauncy all denounced violence and lawlessness, even while standing by the position that resistance to civil authorities is sometimes justified. Their assertions of political resistance were not calls for anarchy, mob-rule, or violent uprisings. Their moderate position distinguished them both from the advocates of non-resistance on the one hand and the violent Bostonian mob on the other.

### **New England’s First Revolution**

Resistance to the 1765 Stamp Act was clearly not the first time that the British colonists had resisted their own British authorities. When conflict broke out between the colonists and the agents of Charles I in 1635 over the issue of colonial religion, the New England clergy assembled and unanimously stated that they would “defend [their] lawful possessions.”<sup>56</sup> Political disagreement continued to stir up resistance to the king and his agents throughout the seventeenth century, with the colonists taking up defensive positions to defend Boston when it was feared that a royal takeover of the colony was imminent in 1664.<sup>57</sup> Resistance to the demands of the king that same year caused them to

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<sup>55</sup>Chauncy, *Discourse on “the Good News,”* 19.

<sup>56</sup>Bancroft, *History of the United States*, 1:274. John Wingate Thornton also notes that “New England shared in the English revolution of 1640; sent preachers and soldiers, aid and comfort, to Cromwell; gave an asylum to the tyrannicides, Whalley, Goffe, and Dixwell; reaffirmed the same maxims of liberty in the revolution of 1688, and so stood right on the record for the third revolution of 1776” (John Wingate Thornton, *The Pulpit of the American Revolution* [Boston: Gould and Lincoln, 1860], xx).

<sup>57</sup>Bancroft, *History of the United States*, 1:371-72.

put into writing their humble intention to refuse “to yield up our liberties, which are far dearer to us than our lives, and which we have willingly ventured our lives and passed through many deaths to obtain.”<sup>58</sup> The continued threat the colonists felt from political absolutism helped keep the issue of political resistance alive in the minds of the British colonists leading up to the American Revolution.

The most significant act of colonial resistance to British authorities before the Stamp Act took place in 1689. It was then that the New England colonists deposed the royal governor over the newly-constituted Dominion of New England, Governor Edmund Andros. The colonists’ resistance to Governor Andros lends an important perspective on colonial resistance in the American Revolution. In 1686 Edmund Andros arrived in Boston to rule over the newly-formed Dominion of New England, the original charter of Massachusetts being annulled by Charles II. Upon his arrival, Governor Andros began assuming direct control over the government of New England, subsuming Massachusetts, Plymouth, Rhode Island, Connecticut, New York, and New Jersey under his authority.<sup>59</sup> With the colonial charters either formally annulled or ignored, the colonial legislatures were also dissolved, and colonies like Massachusetts were denied the high degree of self-government they had long enjoyed. Town meetings were now forbidden in 1688, except for one meeting per year for the election of civil officers.<sup>60</sup> With the colonial charters set aside, Andros also nullified all of the colonists’ land titles and claimed that all land belonged to the crown. He then required land owners to reapply, sometimes at an exorbitant rate, for a valid title to their land. He did this even though some of the land

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<sup>58</sup>Bancroft, *History of the United States*, 1:374.

<sup>59</sup>Most of the documents regarding the overthrow of Andros’s government can be found in *The Andros Tracts*, 3 vols. (Boston: The Prince Society, 1868-1874). A very detailed, albeit sympathetic, discussion of Andros and the Dominion of New England, can be found in Viola Florence Barnes, *The Dominion of New England* (New York: Frederick Ungar, 1960).

<sup>60</sup>Mary Lou Lustig, *The Imperial Executive in America: Sir Edmund Andros, 1637–1714* (Teaneck, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2002), 166.

had been held and kept within particular families for as many as sixty years.<sup>61</sup> Without the consent of any local representative assembly, Andros raised property taxes and excise taxes by executive fiat.<sup>62</sup> Cotton Mather recorded in his 1702 *Magnalia Christi Americana* how those who protested Andros' fiat taxes were treated:

When among the inhabitants of Ipswich some of the principal persons modestly gave reasons why they could not choose a commissioner to tax the town until the King should first be petitioned for the liberty of an assembly, they were committed unto jail for it, as an "high misdemeanor," and were denied an *habeus corpus* and were dragged many miles out of their own country to answer it at a court in Boston . . . . When the prisoners pleaded the privileges of Englishmen, "That they should not be taxed without their own consent," they were told, "That those things would not follow them to the ends of the earth. . . . You have no more privileges left you but this, that you are not bought and sold for slaves."<sup>63</sup>

Citizens of New England were imprisoned without a writ of habeus corpus, denied the right to a trial by a jury of their peers, and fined exorbitant fines and fees at the pleasure of Andros and his circle. Furthermore, colonists were not allowed to leave the colonies except with official permission, and a standing army was housed for the first time in Massachusetts.<sup>64</sup> Printing presses were not tolerated either.<sup>65</sup> It was clear that Andros did not view the colonists as possessing the rights and privileges that other Englishmen enjoyed.<sup>66</sup>

Puritan inhabitants of Massachusetts were further troubled by Andros's advancement of Restoration Anglicanism which honored the memory of Charles I and the Royalist cause against the Puritans in the English Civil War. On January 31, 1687,

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<sup>61</sup>In some cases the fees amounted to one fourth the value of the land itself. Increase Mather said of Andros: "The governor invaded liberty and property after such a manner as no man could say anything was his own" (Bancroft, *History of the United States*, 1:587).

<sup>62</sup>Cotton Mather, *Magnalia Christi Americana* (Hartford, CT: Silas Andrus and Son, 1853), 1:176-77.

<sup>63</sup>*Ibid.*, 177. This episode is discussed in greater detail in Lustig, *Imperial Executive in America*, 149-50.

<sup>64</sup>Lustig, *Imperial Executive in America*, 157-60.

<sup>65</sup>Bancroft, *History of the United States*, 1:584.

<sup>66</sup>Lustig, *Imperial Executive in America*, 151.

Puritans in Boston were shocked by the ringing of bells and the holding of two Anglican memorial services to commemorate Charles I on the anniversary of his execution. Religious services were also held on Christmas day, another affront to Puritan sentiments.<sup>67</sup> Andros ended the public support of Congregationalist ministers and attempted to wrest control of Harvard University away from the Congregational clergy. In 1686 an Anglican worship service took place in Boston—the first ever in the city.<sup>68</sup> By 1688 Andros required that Anglican services be held regularly on Sundays in the Old South Church in Boston.<sup>69</sup> Nineteenth-century historian John Fiske notes how ominous these events must have been to the Puritans, given the policy of persecution the Stuarts were then pursuing in Scotland against the Covenanters:

In the eyes of the people it was much more than a mere question of disturbing Puritan prejudices. They had before them the experience of Scotland during the past ten years, the savage times of “Old Mortality,” the times which had seen the tyrannical prelate, on the lonely moor, begging in vain for his life, the times of Drumclog and Bothwell Brigg, of Claverhouse and his flinty-hearted troopers, of helpless women tied to stakes on the Solway shore and drowned by inches in the rising tide. What had happened in one part of the world might happen in another, for the Stuart policy was the same. It aimed not at securing toleration but at asserting unchecked supremacy. Its demand for an inch was the prelude to its seizing an ell, and so our forefathers understood it.<sup>70</sup>

Of greater concern was Andros’s seeming desire to impose the 1558 and 1562 Acts of Uniformity upon the clergy.<sup>71</sup> Andros also required legally-binding oaths to now be taken by swearing on the Bible, something many Puritans viewed as superstitious and

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<sup>67</sup>Lustig, *Imperial Executive in America*, 160.

<sup>68</sup>Samuel Eliot Morrison, *The Oxford History of the American People* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1965), 116. This religious assembly was the beginning of the church that would become King’s Chapel, the first Episcopal Church in New England. See Frederick Lewis Weis, *The Colonial Clergy and the Colonial Churches of New England* (Baltimore: Genealogical Publishing, 1977), 242.

<sup>69</sup>Lustig, *Imperial Executive in America*, 164.

<sup>70</sup>John Fiske, *The Beginnings of New England* (Cambridge, MA: Riverside Press, 1898), 299-300.

<sup>71</sup>Lustig, *Imperial Executive in America*, 190. Lustig notes that Cotton Mather was charged with breaking the Acts of Uniformity in February 1689 for a tract which was sharply critical of “Common Prayer Worship.”

refused to do as a matter of conscience. For this they were fined for contempt of court and jailed if they could not pay the fine.<sup>72</sup>

The colonial clergy took a prominent role in actively resisting and overthrowing the Andros government. John Wise, a Congregational minister in Essex, Massachusetts, led the protest against Andros's fiat taxation in 1687. He suffered imprisonment, was faced with an exorbitant fine, and was suspended from his ministry under the authority of Andros.<sup>73</sup> The most significant leaders, however, in the overthrow of Andros were Increase and Cotton Mather. Increase Mather was the pastor of Boston's North Congregational Church and president of Harvard College. His son, Cotton Mather was also a pastor in Boston's North Church and a prolific author. Increase Mather made numerous attempts beginning in late 1687 to leave the colony for England to petition the British government for Andros's removal. Andros tried to prevent Mather from sailing for Boston and twice sent officers to arrest him on trumped-up charges. Mather escaped arrest the second time after escaping from his residence in disguise, and in March 1688 he was finally successful in boarding a ship for England.<sup>74</sup> While in England that summer, Increase Mather formally petitioned King James II, outlining the many affronts the New England colonists were experiencing under Andros to their civil and religious liberties.<sup>75</sup> To publicize the plight of New England, Mather also had published in 1688 A

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<sup>72</sup>Lustig, *Imperial Executive in America*, 149.

<sup>73</sup>David S. Lovejoy, *The Glorious Revolution in America* (New York: Harper & Row, 1972), 184-85.

<sup>74</sup>Lustig, *Imperial Executive in America*, 162-64.

<sup>75</sup>Ibid., 184-85. Mather's petition to James II, presented on July 2, 1688, contains the colonists' complaints under five headings: "[1] That his Majesty's subjects in New England may be quieted in the possession of all property, both in houses and lands, as they enjoyed them before the government was changed . . . and that the ancient records there settled for title of lands may be confirmed. [2] That there be liberty of conscience in matters of religion, and that there former methods of swearing in giving of evidence may be allowed, and all their meeting houses left free to them, according to the intentions of the builders thereof. [3] That no laws may be made nor money raised there without the consent of a general assembly, as it is in the other plantations. [4] That all townships may have liberty to assemble and manage the business of there several precincts, as under the former government and have power to receive and dispose of all voluntary contributions. [5] That the College at Cambridge in New England, with the revenues thereunto belonging, be confirmed in the hands of a president and fellows as formerly" (*Andros*

*Narrative of the Miseries of New England* in London.<sup>76</sup> Mather's publication was quickly reprinted in Boston as well. When news reached New England that James II had abdicated the throne, the colonists of Massachusetts quickly revolted and deposed Governor Andros on April 18, 1689.<sup>77</sup> Andros was jailed and eventually sent back to England. A group of civic leaders in Boston, led by Cotton Mather and other clergymen, issued a "Declaration of the Gentlemen, Merchants, and Inhabitants," declaring the Dominion of New England dissolved and the old colonial charters to be back in force. This declaration was drafted by Cotton Mather himself.<sup>78</sup> The Puritan clergy of Boston, including Congregationalist ministers James Allen and Joshua Moody, instructed their people that the Massachusetts Charter of 1629 was again in effect, and that the declarations of the Stuarts to the contrary should be ignored.<sup>79</sup>

The Massachusetts clergy justified their resistance in 1689 by appealing both to their civil rights and religious liberties, and by asserting that the government of Andros and the Stuarts over them had been illegal, oppressive, and therefore illegitimate. They desired only a conservative revolution which would see Puritan Congregationalism again secured in Massachusetts and their charter rights and common English rights restored. The April 1689 "Declaration of the Gentlemen, Merchants, and Inhabitants" drafted by Cotton Mather framed the overthrow of Andros against the backdrop of a "horrid Popish plot" which designed nothing less than "the extinction of the Protestant religion" in New England.<sup>80</sup> Furthermore this declaration characterized the government of Edmund

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*Tracts*, 3:138).

<sup>76</sup>[Increase Mather], *A Narrative of the Miseries of New-England* (London: Richard Janeway, 1688).

<sup>77</sup>Esmond Wright, *The Search for Liberty: From Origins to Independence* (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1995), 241.

<sup>78</sup>Morrison, *History of the American People*, 120.

<sup>79</sup>J. M. Sosin, *English America and the Revolution of 1688: Royal Administration and the Structure of Provincial Government* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1982), 94-95.

<sup>80</sup>*The Declaration of the Gentlemen, Merchants, and Inhabitants of Boston, and the Countrey*

Andros as an “absolute and arbitrary” dictatorship which aimed at nothing less than the enslavement of the colonists:

It was not plainly affirmed in open council and by the same in private converse, that the people of New England were all slaves and the only difference between them and slaves is there not being bought and sold; and it was a maxim delivered in open court unto us by one of the council that we must not think the privileges of English men would follow us to the end of the world. Accordingly, we have been treated with multiple contradictions to *Magna Carta*, the rights of which we laid claim unto. Persons who did but peaceably object against the raising of taxes without an assembly have been fined. . . . Packed and picked juries have been very common. . . . Some . . . have been kept in long and close imprisonment without any the least information appearing against them or an *Habeas Corpus* allowed unto them.<sup>81</sup>

Given these manifold abuses, Governor Andros’s government and laws were viewed by the people at large as illegitimate and worthy of their righteous opposition. Still, it was only when the James II was deposed that the people of Massachusetts felt compelled to act. Mather’s “Declaration” stated that those who overthrew Andros only did so after the ruling classes and representatives of the people in Britain had led the way by inviting William to assume the British throne:

Almighty God has been pleased to prosper the noble undertakings of the Prince of Orange to preserve the three kingdoms from the horrible brinks of popery and slavery and to bring to a condign punishment those worst of men by whom English liberties have been destroyed, in compliance with which glorious action we ought surely to follow the patterns of the nobility, gentry, and commonalty in several parts of the kingdom have set before us, though they therein have chiefly proposed to prevent what we already endure.<sup>82</sup>

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*Adjacent* (Boston: Samuel Green., 1689), 1. Mather and those who gathered with him in Boston wrote this declaration and had it publically read. They also met with Andros to demand his surrender. They took these actions to stay ahead of the revolutionaries amassing in Boston, to prevent unnecessary violence, and to provide an orderly course for the colony to take in setting up a temporary government while awaiting further orders from England. According to Cotton Mather, “some of the principal gentlemen in Boston . . . all agreed that they would, if it were possible, extinguish all essays in the people towards an insurrection, in daily hopes of orders from England for their safety. But that if the country people by any violent motions pushed the matter on so far as to make a revolution unavoidable, then to prevent the shedding of blood by an ungoverned mob, some of the gentlemen present should appear at the head of the action with a declaration accordingly prepared” (Mather, *Magnalia Christi Americana*, 1:179-80). Far from being agitators of violence, Mather and his associates took leadership of the Revolution in order to prevent violence. See Lovejoy, *Glorious Revolution in America*, 240-41; and Barnes, *Dominion of New England*, 241-42. Lustig argues that the clergy had long been planning and making the arrangements for a revolution in New England since the fall of 1688 (Lustig, *Imperial Executive in America*, 194-95).

<sup>81</sup>*Declaration of the Gentlemen*, 3.

<sup>82</sup>*Ibid.*, 3-4. Lustig notes that in defying Andros “the Congregationalist ministers were emulating their Anglican brethren in England” who had extensively defied the authority of James II

The people of New England long endured many abuses under Andros and waited patiently before acting. Their resistance was orderly, measured, and restrained. They had respectfully petitioned the king for a redress of their grievances and were not advancing a lawless or reckless rebellion.

John Palmer, one of Andros's councilmen who was deposed and imprisoned along with him, wrote a defense of Andros's government while in prison awaiting passage to England. He addressed his defense to the New England clergy and had it published in Boston in 1689, entitling it *The Present State of New-England Impartially Considered, In a Letter to the Clergy*. Among other things Palmer charged the clergy with condoning the sin of rebellion in overthrowing the Andros government:

I am amazed to see Christians call that a duty which God has so remarkably showed his displeasure against in all countries and ages. Is not rebellion as the sin of witchcraft? (Num. 11:12, 16) Who was it that sent the leprosy amongst the children of Israel for their murmuring? (Psalm 78) Or how came the sudden fire with which they were burnt up? How many thousands perished by the pestilence? Or were they a few that were stung to death with fiery serpents? Do we not read, that the earth opened and swallowed up some of their captains, with their wives and children quick, which horrible destruction fell upon the Israelites for their murmuring against Moses, whom God had appointed their head and chief magistrate? What shall I say of Absalom? What of Achitophel? Or what of Sheba? Holy Writ is so full of examples of the like nature that nobody can esteem that a duty which is so often testified against.<sup>83</sup>

Palmer continued by detailing an extended articulation and defense of the doctrine of passive obedience and non-resistance:

[If] any injury be offered unto us because it so please him that has the sovereign power, it ought rather to be patiently tolerated than by force resisted. For although we do not owe an active obedience to such commands of princes, yet we do owe a passive; though we ought not to violate the laws of God or of nature to fulfill the will of the greatest monarch, yet ought we rather patiently to submit to whatsoever he shall inflict upon us for not obeying than by resistance to violate our country's peace. The best and safest course we can steer in such a case is either by flight to preserve ourselves, or resolutely to undergo whatsoever shall be imposed upon us.<sup>84</sup>

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(Lustig, *Imperial Executive in America*, 194).

<sup>83</sup>[John Palmer], *The Present State of New-England Impartially Considered, In a Letter to the Clergy* [Boston: n.p., 1689], 20.

<sup>84</sup>*Ibid.*, 23.

Palmer relied upon both classical and Christian sources in his argument for passive obedience. In rejecting of any right of resistance whatsoever, Palmer also rejected the notion that lesser magistrates have a right to resist the authorities over them for the defense of the people.<sup>85</sup> In his words, a king is to be submitted to “absolutely, without exceptions to any other commands than those directly from God, who is so far from justifying our resistance that he commands our passive obedience.”<sup>86</sup>

Palmer’s 1689 assertion of political absolutism did not go unanswered. An anonymous response entitled *Revolution in New England Justified* appeared in Boston in 1691. This work mostly repeated the account of Andros’s tyranny and oppressive abuses of the people of Massachusetts. It also disparaged “the doctrine of passive obedience and non-resistance” which Palmer had maintained, arguing that “the happy revolution” had “exploded” and shown it to be “ridiculous”:

No man does really approve of the Revolution in England but must justify that in New England also, for the latter was effected in compliance with the former, neither was there any design amongst the people of New England to reassume their Ancient Charter government until his present majesty’s intended descent into England, to rescue the nation from slavery as well as popery, was known to them.<sup>87</sup>

Citing 2 Kings 18 and Hezekiah’s rebellion against the Assyrians, the author of *Revolution in New England Justified* asserts that “the Scripture speaks of a lawful and good rebellion as well as of that which is unlawful.”<sup>88</sup> The people of New England had rebelled against an unlawful and ungodly government and had done so in a godly way. They were not guilty of wickedness or the sin of rebellion in “casting off the arbitrary power of those ill men who invaded liberty and property to such an intolerable degree as has been proved against them.”<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>85</sup>[Palmer], *Present State of New-England*, 32-34.

<sup>86</sup>*Ibid.*, 33.

<sup>87</sup>*Revolution in New England Justified* (Boston: Joseph Brunning, 1691), 1.

<sup>88</sup>*Ibid.*, 45-46.

<sup>89</sup>*Ibid.*, 45. Other defenses of the New Englanders in throwing off the government of Andros

The debate between Palmer and the defenders of the New England revolutionaries was only part of a trans-Atlantic debate among clergymen over the doctrine of political resistance. On both sides of the Atlantic, the Glorious Revolution carried forward the debate over political absolutism and the legitimacy of political resistance.<sup>90</sup> After the Glorious Revolution, this debate was connected with the question of William and Mary's legitimacy as British monarchs. As Palmer debated the New Englanders, the debate over William and Mary's legitimacy and the right of resistance was debated in England as well. Those who justified the overthrowing of James II explicitly tapped into their Protestant heritage for justification. For example, in his response to John March, the vicar of Newcastle and Stuart-loyalist, James Welwood argued against the doctrine of non-resistance and passive obedience and asserted that the Reformed tradition was on his side:

The greatest and most learned of [the Protestant] religion expressly [are] allowing of [resistance] in many cases, as among many others, Calvin, Beza, Du Plessis, Luther, Melancton, Zwinglius, Dumoulin, etc. And to evince that their practice goes equal pace with their opinion, I must tell you, that you cannot instance me any Protestant Church in Europe (England alone excepted) that was not necessitated to wrestle through its Reformation from Popery and slavery by resisting the power that would have perpetuated both.<sup>91</sup>

This debate continued on in Britain over the Glorious Revolution and the right of

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include [Nathaniel Byfield], *An Account of the Late Revolutions in New England* (Boston: n.p., 1689); [Nathaniel Byfield], *Seasonable Motives to Our Duty and Allegiance* (Philadelphia: William Bradford, 1689); [Increase Mather], *A Narrative of the Miseries of New England* (London: Richard Janeway, 1688); and *A Narrative of the Proceedings of Sir Edmond Androsse* (n.p., 1691).

<sup>90</sup>The Stuarts and their loyalists continued to assert notions of divine right absolutism after the Restoration. In 1683 the Convocation of the University of Oxford issued a decree condemning "certain pernicious books and damnable doctrines destructive to the sacred persons of the princes, their state and government, and all of humane society." This judgment condemned all works it deemed were opposed to political absolutism, including political writings by Rutherford, Buchanan, Milton, Baxter, Knox, Goodman, Owen, and others. See David Wootton, ed., *Divine Right and Democracy: An Anthology of Political Writings in Stuart England* (London: Penguin, 1986), 120-26.

<sup>91</sup>James Welwood and John March, *A Vindication of the Present Great Revolution in England in Five Letters* (London: R. Taylor, 1689). For more on John March and his ardent loyalty to James II, see Richard Sharp, "March, John," in *The Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, ed. H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 36:603-4. See also Gilbert Burnet, *A Sermon Preached before the House of Commons . . . Being the Thanksgiving-Day For the Deliverance of this Kingdom from Popery and Arbitrary Power* (Boston: S. Green, 1689); and Benjamin Bird, *The Jacobites Catechism* (London: T. Wesley, 1692).

resistance, escalating in the eighteenth century. This debate captured the attention of Hoadly, Sacheverell, Bradbury, and other British Protestants who divided over the questions of non-resistance, passive obedience, and the legitimacy of Stuart claims to the throne after the 1688 revolution. It is this same debate and discussion that informed Jonathan Mayhew and lay behind his assertion of a right of resistance.

### **The First and Second American Revolutions**

The New England Revolution of 1689 set the stage for the American Revolution. The colonial resistance to Edmund Andros was justified by the most prominent clergy in the colonies and set an important precedent for colonial resistance to absolutism. It was in response to Edmund Andros's fiat taxation that the American colonists first protested against taxes laid upon them without representation. It is surprising that such historians as Noll, Hatch, and Marsden completely ignore New England's Revolution of 1689 in their discussion of the ideology behind the American Revolution.<sup>92</sup> Unlike many modern historians, the American clergymen who celebrated the repeal of the Stamp Act drew easy parallels between resistance to the Stamp Act and resistance to Edmund Andros. For example, Joseph Emerson, a Congregationalist minister in Pepperrell, Massachusetts, in 1766 called to mind the deliverance from the reign of Governor Edmund Andros in 1689 as a parallel deliverance from the Stamp Act:

I would lead you to recollect the wonderful deliverance the oppressed people of God of this land experienced in the days of Sir Edmund Andros, that creature of that tyrannical roman-catholic prince, King James II, as many, if not most of you, are ignorant of the grievances our fathers labored under at that time, and the noble opposition they made to an arbitrary governor and government.<sup>93</sup>

For Emerson, resistance to the Stamp Act in 1765 and resistance to Andros in 1689 were

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<sup>92</sup>Noll, Hatch, and Marsden's *Search for Christian America* does not mention Edmund Andros, the Dominion of New England, or the New England Revolution of 1689. Noll's *America's God* contains this omission as well.

<sup>93</sup>Emerson, *Thanksgiving Sermon Preach'd at Pepperrell*, 22.

both events in a whole sequence of noble acts that were to be recounted to the next generation of British subjects:

Tell them that in the year 1689, they rose in arms against a tyrannical governor, took him, sent him prisoner to England and were there vindicated and commended, and with a great deal of labor and cost got some of their privileges restored which had been unlawfully wrested from them. Tell them, that in the year 1765 the friends of liberty exerted themselves, combined together with fixed resolutions not to give up their liberty so far as to submit to a law which taxed them without their own consent. Tell them they did these things under the influence of that God who made them free. And charge them by no means to give up their privileges, their privileges as men, as Englishmen, as part of the British Empire. Charge them to stand up for them, though to the hazard of their lives.<sup>94</sup>

Emerson saw these two events as part of a past sequence of God's deliverances in preserving Britain and the liberties of British Protestants. In his thanksgiving sermon, he also quoted Isaac Watt's 1695 "A Hymn of Praise for Three Great Salvations" in full, which celebrated God's deliverance from the 1588 Spanish Armada, the November 5th Gunpowder Plot of 1605, and the tyranny of James II in 1688.<sup>95</sup> Emerson agreed with Watts in interpreting these events as the work of God's providence in protecting both the British nation and its Protestant religion, and he understood both the 1689 deliverance from Andros and the 1766 repeal of the Stamp Act as parallel instances of divine deliverance.

When the Stamp Act was repealed in 1766, other clergymen called to mind the past resistance to James II and Edmund Andros in the late 1680s. Congregational clergyman William Patten of Halifax, Massachusetts, reminded his congregation in 1766 of Andros's tyranny and used it to denounce the principles of passive obedience and non-resistance, which would "set an abjured pretender on the throne instead of his present majesty and establish papism instead of the reformed religion in the nation."<sup>96</sup> In a

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<sup>94</sup>Emerson, *Thanksgiving Sermon*, 30. In this same sermon, Emerson charged his hearers to "have a reverence for and be duly subject to lawful authority" (ibid., 31).

<sup>95</sup>Ibid., 19-21. See Isaac Watts, *Horae Lyricae: Poems, Sacred to Devotion and Piety: To Virtue, Honour, and Friendship: and to the Memory of the Dead* (London: Joseph Rickerby, 1837), 14-16.

<sup>96</sup>Patten, *Discourse Delivered at Halifax*, 18.

thanksgiving sermon on the repeal of the Stamp Act, David Rowland, a minister in Providence, Rhode Island, recounted the defeat of Charles Edward Stuart (Bonnie Prince Charlie) in the uprising of 1745.<sup>97</sup> In his mind, the deliverance just experienced from the Stamp Act was in continuity with the 1745 deliverance from the Stuart “pretender” and his absolutist views.

As troubles with Britain intensified in the 1760s and 1770s, the Andros affair was not forgotten. Instead, Andros and his tyranny appear repeatedly in the political sermons of this period.<sup>98</sup> Also, a number of pieces from the Andros era were republished in the 1770s that recalled the oppressions of Andros and his attempts to tax the colonists without representation. The 1691 *Revolution in New England Justified* was reprinted and published in Boston in 1773, thus justifying the right of resistance and the Revolution itself for a new generation of readers. Similarly, Increase Mather’s 1688 *A Narrative of the Miseries of New-England* was reprinted in Boston in 1775, reminding the colonists of the oppressions the earlier colonists had previously suffered at the hands of an oppressive tyranny. As the colonists headed for a second revolution in the 1770s, the memory of the late 1680s strengthened their resolve.

### Conclusion

British colonists in North America were concerned with preserving their political rights, civil liberties, and colonial privileges since the very beginning of the colonial existence. While some historians have deemed the resistance to the 1765 Stamp

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<sup>97</sup>Rowland, *Divine Providence Illustrated and Improved*, iii, 12, 17.

<sup>98</sup>For example, William Patten, *A Discourse Delivered at Hallifax* (Boston: D. Kneeland, 1766), 18; Jason Haven, *A Sermon Preached before his Excellency Sir France Bernard* (Boston: Richard Draper, 1769), 17-18; Samuel Cooke, *A Sermon Preached at Cambridge* (Boston: Edes and Gill, 1770), 35-36; Charles Chauncy, *Trust in God, The Duty of a People in a Day of Trouble* (Boston: Daniel Kneeland, 1770), 15-18; Judah Champion, *A Brief View of the Distresses, Hardships, and Dangers our Ancestors Encounter’d in settling New-England* (Hartford, CT: Green & Watson, 1770), 20; and Ebenezer Baldwin, appendix to *A Sermon Containing Scriptural Instructions to Civil Rulers, and all Free-born Subjects*, by Samuel Sherwood (New Haven, CT: T. and S. Green, 1774), 48-49, 70. Cooke stated in 1770 that the name of Edmund Andros was “a name never to be forgotten” (Cooke, *Sermon Preached at Cambridge*, 35).

Act as misguided, there is good reason to believe that the colonists were in real danger of losing the high degree of self-government and relative independence they had enjoyed since the overthrow of James II and his agent in New England, Edmund Andros. The Grenville administration had designs in seizing new powers and setting new precedents with the Stamp Act, and a wide variety of individuals on both sides of the Atlantic perceived this—from William Pitt and Isaac Barré in the British Parliament to George Whitefield, the British evangelist in America.

The clergy who opposed the Stamp Act did so with moderation, with the orthodox clergy taking the lead in opposing it. These clergy denounced mob violence and lawlessness, all the while maintaining their belief that resistance to the civil authorities is sometimes lawful and morally justified. In this they had the precedent of the colonial clergy who resisted the government of Edmund Andros, including John Wise, Increase Mather, and Cotton Mather. These clergy had made the case for a right of resistance to civil and religious tyranny and had stood up for the colonists' rights as free-born Englishmen. Their example was not forgotten by those who similarly objected to being taxed without representation in 1765.

While some historians view these clergy as stepping outside of their own theological tradition in resisting the Stamp Act, it is more natural to understand their opposition to the Stamp Act against the backdrop of their own colonial and religious history. This is, after all, the tradition they called to mind as they celebrated the Stamp Act's repeal. It was common for American clergyman to interpret colonial resistance and the subsequent deliverance from the Stamp Act in continuity with previous acts of resistance and previous acts of divine deliverance. For the colonial clergy, the Stamp Act was not an isolated incident. Nor did it relate solely to matters of taxation and money. The clergymen understood the Stamp Act against the backdrop of the broader struggle that English Protestants had long endured for their civil and religious liberties. Their resistance to it, then, even over the specific principle of "no taxation without

representation” was very much in continuity with their own clerical forerunners in the seventeenth century.

## CHAPTER 3

### THE DEBATE OVER AMERICAN BISHOPS AND THE GROWING THREAT TO RELIGIOUS LIBERTY

Direct rule by Parliament threatened the colonists' religious liberty as well as their civil liberty. The British Parliament repealed the Stamp Act in 1766, claiming that continuing it would be "attended with many inconveniences" and might be "detrimental to the commercial interests" of Britain.<sup>1</sup> Parliament nevertheless continued to assert new unlimited powers over the colonies. On the same day Parliament repealed the Stamp Act, it also passed the 1766 Declaratory Act, stating that

His Majesty's colonies and plantations in America . . . have been, are, and of right ought to be subordinate unto and dependent upon the imperial crown and parliament of Great Britain; and that the King's majesty, by and with the advice and consent of the lords spiritual and temporal, and commons of Great Britain, in parliament assembled, had, hath, and of right ought to have, full power and authority to make laws and statutes of sufficient force and validity to bind the colonies and people of America, subjects of the crown of Great Britain, in all cases whatsoever.<sup>2</sup>

Colonists soon recognized that the Declaratory Act established the same principle of political absolutism as the Stamp Act. It was based on the 1719 Irish Act, which asserted British dominance and power over the conquered people of Ireland. The Irish Act of 1719 decreed

that the said kingdom over Ireland hath been, is, and of a right ought to be subordinate unto and dependent upon the Imperial Crown of Great Britain, as being inseparably united and annexed thereunto; and that the King's Majesty, by and with the advice and consent of the lords spiritual and temporal and commons of Great Britain in parliament assembled, had, hath, and of right ought to have full power and authority to make laws and statutes of sufficient force and validity, to bind the

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<sup>1</sup>Edmund S. Morgan, *Prologue to Revolution: Sources and Documents on the Stamp Act Crisis, 1764–1766* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1959), 155.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

kingdom and people of Ireland.<sup>3</sup>

The language of the two acts is virtually identical. The 1766 Declaratory Act asserted political dominance over the colonies in even stronger terms than was asserted over the conquered people of Ireland, with the absolute qualifier added to the end, “in all cases whatsoever.” This phrase would provoke concern and expressions of outrage in the published protests in the years that followed.<sup>4</sup>

As colonial leaders grappled with the implications and significance of the Declaratory Act, the colonial clergy possessed an acute and growing sense from the mid-1760s that their religious liberties were under assault. This perceived threat to religious liberty alienated the colonial clergy from those in power in England and contributed significantly to the agitation and unrest that would provoke the American Revolution. The issue that agitated the clergy the most in the late 1760s and early 1770s was the prospect of established episcopal bishops being settled in America. The threat of episcopal bishops compelled the American clergy to organize and resist what they perceived was a plot against their religious liberty and ecclesiastical independence.

### **Religious Liberty and the American Revolution**

Many historians have neglected the religious elements that contributed to the onset of the American Revolution. The debate among interpreters of the Revolution has largely played out between those who emphasize economic causes, social causes, and philosophical or ideological causes.<sup>5</sup> Religious causes have traditionally been neglected.

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<sup>3</sup>Josef L. Altholz, *Selected Documents in Irish History* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 58-59.

<sup>4</sup>See for example Samuel Mather, *An Attempt to Shew, That America must be Known to the Ancients* (Boston: J. Kneeland, 1773), 30-31.

<sup>5</sup>For helpful discussions of differing economic, social, and ideological interpretations of the American Revolution, see Alfred F. Young and Gregory H. Nobles, *Whose American Revolution Was It? Historians Interpret the Founding* (New York: New York University Press, 2011); Alan Gibson, *Interpreting the Founding* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2006); Michael D. Hattem, “The Historiography of the American Revolution,” *Journal of the American Revolution* (August 27, 2013), accessed August 3, 2016, <https://allthingsliberty.com/2013/08/historiography-of-american-revolution/>; and Jack Greene, ed., *The Reinterpretation of the American Revolution, 1763–1789* (New York: Harper & Row, 1968), 2-73.

In his extensive study of the role that religion played in bringing about the American Revolution, University of California historian Carl Bridenbaugh noted “the tendency of modern historians to omit any consideration of the significance of religion at all” in understanding the causes of the American Revolution. Writing in 1962, Bridenbaugh recommended a different approach: “It is indeed high time that we repossess the important historical truth that religion was a fundamental cause of the American Revolution.”<sup>6</sup> Scholars who have followed Bridenbaugh and highlighted the religious aspects of the American Revolution include Alan Heimert, Patricia Bonomi, Thomas Kidd, James Byrd, and Steven Waldman.<sup>7</sup>

Religion was indeed a fundamental cause of the American Revolution, especially for the clergy who resisted the British. For the majority of the American clergy, the American Revolution grew out of a long-standing struggle over the issue of religious liberty in the colonies. While religious toleration was granted early on in Rhode Island, Pennsylvania, and Maryland, Massachusetts was slow in granting religious liberty to those who dissented from the established form of Congregationalism that was practiced there. After Governor Andros was overthrown in 1689, Massachusetts received a new charter in 1691, which granted “liberty of conscience . . . in the worship of God to all Christians (except papists).”<sup>8</sup> Coinciding with the 1689 Act of Toleration, this new Massachusetts charter was a part of the expansion of religious liberty that took place with the overthrow of James II. While the Congregationalists in New England had not

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<sup>6</sup>Carl Bridenbaugh, *Mitre and Sceptre: Transatlantic Faiths, Ideas, Personalities, and Politics, 1689–1775* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1962), xx.

<sup>7</sup>Alan Heimert, *Religion and the American Mind: From the Great Awakening to the Revolution* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1966); Patricia U. Bonomi, *Under the Cope of Heaven: Religion, Society, and Politics in Colonial America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988); Thomas S. Kidd, *God of Liberty: A Religious History of the American Revolution* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012); James P. Byrd, *Sacred Scripture, Sacred War: The Bible and the American Revolution* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013); and Steven Waldman, *Founding Faith: How Our Founding Fathers Forged a Radical New Approach to Religious Liberty* (New York: Random House, 2008).

<sup>8</sup>Jon L. Wakelyn, ed., *America's Founding Charters: Primary Documents of Colonial and Revolutionary Era Governance* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2006), 324.

initially granted toleration to those outside of their establishment, this charter made religious toleration a part of the fabric of Massachusetts life. Gradually, religious toleration and liberty became a part of New England's cherished heritage.<sup>9</sup>

The colonial clergy widely held that civil liberties and religious liberties were so naturally linked that a threat to one was a threat to the other. This perspective was present as the colonists battled France in the 1740s and 1750s, and it carried forward to 1776 and beyond. In 1745 Gilbert Tennent asserted that "our religious liberty is involved in the defense of our civil liberty," and he viewed the purpose of the current conflict with France to be that "not only our civil but religious liberty [might be] more established."<sup>10</sup> In 1775 the Presbyterian Synod of New York and Philadelphia echoed Tennent's perspective and issued a "pastoral letter" encouraging Presbyterian laity to continue esteeming the British sovereign and to desire only "the preservation and security of those rights which belong to you as freemen and Britons." It admonished the Presbyterian congregations under its care to recognize that "there is no example in history where civil liberty was destroyed, and the rights of conscience preserved entire."<sup>11</sup> Echoing this pastoral letter, which he himself may have written, John Witherspoon, president of Princeton College, similarly asserted in 1776 that "there is not a single instance in history in which civil liberty was lost, and religious liberty preserved entire. If therefore we

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<sup>9</sup>Bridenbaugh, *Mitre and Sceptre*, 172-78. In his discussion of New England's shift to embracing religion liberty and toleration, Bridenbaugh mentions the impact of John Locke and Whig writer Thomas Gordon but neglects to mention the strand of toleration thought that took root among Congregationalists in England. John Owen, for example, wrote a number of works promoting religious toleration in the 1660s and 1670s. See John Owen, *The Works of John Owen*, ed. William H. Goold (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1967), 13:344-578. Owen was a strong defender of religious toleration in England, and his writings on toleration preceded those of John Locke. Locke was a student at Christ Church, Oxford, when Owen was both the Dean of Christ Church and the Vice Chancellor of the University (John Locke, *Political Writings*, ed. David Wootton [Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 2003], 16). For more on the relationship between Locke and Owen, see John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Toleration*, ed. J. R. Milton and Philip Milton (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 20-26.

<sup>10</sup>Gilbert Tennent, *Necessity of Praising God for Mercies Received* (Philadelphia: William Bradford, 1745), 8.

<sup>11</sup>*A Pastoral Letter from the Synod of New-York and Philadelphia* (New York: Shober and Loudon, 1775), 6.

yield up our temporal property, we at the same time deliver the conscience into bondage.”<sup>12</sup> Witherspoon hoped then that “God [would] grant that in America true religion and civil liberty may be inseparable, and that the unjust attempts to destroy the one, may in the issue tend to the support and establishment of both.”<sup>13</sup>

The colonial clergy viewed civil and religious liberties as inseparably connected with each other. Connecting civil and religious liberty had the effect of causing them to view British laws like the 1765 Stamp Act, the 1767 Townshend Acts, and the 1774 Coercive Acts as direct threats not only to civil liberties but to religious liberties as well.<sup>14</sup> Bridenbaugh stated that “in the eyes of the dissenting ministers, no distinction between religious and civil liberties any longer existed” after the 1765 Stamp Act.<sup>15</sup> This perspective led the Revolutionary-era clergy to be not so much concerned with stamps, taxes, and tea, but with their very freedom to worship God according to the dictates of their consciences. This, after all, was why their forefathers had fled the oppressions of the Stuarts. For many clergy, the battles of the 1630s and 1640s were being played out all over again in the 1760s and 1770s.

### **The American Episcopate and the Threat to Religious Liberty**

While taxation without representation posed a significant threat to the American clergy, plans to establish episcopal bishops in America posed an even greater threat to the civil and religious liberties of the colonists in the 1760s and 1770s. Many High Church Anglicans resented the new allowances made to nonconformists in 1689

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<sup>12</sup>John Witherspoon, *The Works of the Rev. John Witherspoon* (Philadelphia: William W. Woodward, 1802), 3:37.

<sup>13</sup>*Ibid.*, 3:46.

<sup>14</sup>The 1765 Stamp Act itself had hinted at the establishment of bishops and ecclesiastical courts in America, thus blending civil and religious affairs (Edmund S. Morgan, *The Stamp Act Crisis: Prologue to Revolution*, 3rd ed. [Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 1995], 73).

<sup>15</sup>Bridenbaugh, *Mitre and Sceptre*, 257.

and were not happy with the extension of toleration to dissenters. In the wake of expanded religious liberty and toleration, this ecclesiastical party sought not only to maintain the power of their establishment in Britain but also to extend their power in the colonies as well. They planned to accomplish this, in part, through the establishment of sanctioned, resident bishops in America. The first expression of Episcopalianism in the colonies was the Episcopal church established in Boston, started under the auspices of Governor Andros in 1686. The Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts (or S.P.G.) was established in 1701 to extend the reach of the church hierarchy into the American colonies and gradually bring the colonies, in the words of Bridenbaugh, “under Episcopal control.”<sup>16</sup> As early as 1703, S.P.G. officers began formally petitioning for an American bishop, and S.P.G. agents in America would continue to call for an American bishop until war between Britain and the American colonies was inevitable.

The S.P.G. and its advocates doggedly pursued the dream of an American Episcopate for many years without success. High Church Anglicans almost obtained an American bishop in the reign of Queen Anne, but her death in 1714 crushed their immediate hopes. King George I looked with favor upon dissenters as his allies against the Jacobins and their High Church supporters. His ascension to the throne thus dealt their plans a major blow.<sup>17</sup> The Bishop of Oxford, Thomas Secker, renewed the call for an American bishop in 1741. Secker’s calls for American bishops received support from the Episcopal hierarchy in England, but his immediate plans were thwarted when the Jacobite uprising of 1745 stirred up popular opposition in England to High Church Anglicanism once again.<sup>18</sup>

By the 1760s Presbyterians and Congregationalists in New England and the

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<sup>16</sup>Bridenbaugh, *Mitre and Sceptre*, 26.

<sup>17</sup>*Ibid.*, 27.

<sup>18</sup>*Ibid.*, 30-32.

Middle Colonies began to feel increasingly threatened by renewed and growing efforts of S.P.G. Episcopalians to establish “an American Episcopate” of bishops.<sup>19</sup> Joseph Bellamy reportedly called episcopacy a “cancer” in 1762, stating that it was “daily increasing by the golden influence of an English propagating society . . . who are frequently crossing a briny deep to import prelatic tyranny, which our fathers could not bear and which threatens speedy ruin to our American vine.”<sup>20</sup> Jonathan Mayhew was especially concerned about the S.P.G. and its efforts to impose bishops upon America. He rightly recognized that the establishment of bishops was part of a much broader plan to completely reorganize the colonies, both politically and ecclesiastically. For reasons that are easy to justify and understand, Jonathan Mayhew published a sharp denunciation of the S.P.G. and its agents in North America in 1763.<sup>21</sup> S.P.G. advocates in the early 1760s were in fact zealously involved in planning a complete re-ordering of colonial life from the top down. The British essayist and litterateur Samuel Johnson, for one, championed plans for making the episcopal church the official church of the British colonies, for revoking the colonial charters and consolidating them, and for seeing the crown appoint “some gentleman of great dignity and worth . . . to be in the nature of a

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<sup>19</sup>Steven Waldman states, “By the 1760s, many colonists were becoming nearly hysterical over the possibility that England would send bishops to live in the colonies” (Waldman, *Founding Faith*, 47).

<sup>20</sup>[Samuel Andrews], *A Sermon Preached at Litchfield* (n.p., 1770), 11.

<sup>21</sup>Jonathan Mayhew, *Observations on the Charter and Conduct of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts* (Boston: Richard and Samuel Draper, 1763). Mayhew’s polemic was directed at East Anthon’s *Considerations on the Institution and Conduct of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts* (Boston: Green and Russell, 1763). Mayhew’s opposition to the S.P.G. provoked a flurry of pamphlets in response. See [Henry Caner], *A Candid Examination of Dr. Mayhew’s Observations* (Boston: Thomas and John Fleet, 1763); [John Aplin], *Verses on Doctor Mayhew’s Book of Observations* (Providence, RI: William Goddard, 1763); [Arthur Browne], *Remarks on Dr. Mayhew’s Incidental Reflections Relative to the Church of England* (Portsmouth: D. Fowle, 1763); and Thomas Secker, *An answer to Dr. Mayhew’s Observations on the charter and conduct of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts* (Boston: R. and S. Draper, 1764). For Mayhew’s replies, see Jonathan Mayhew, *A Defense of the Observations on the Charter and Conduct of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts* (Boston: R. and S. Draper, 1763); and Jonathan Mayhew, *Remarks on an Anonymous Tract, entitled An answer to Dr. Mayhew’s Observations* (Boston: R. and S. Draper, 1764). Bridenbaugh notes that Mayhew’s publications in this controversy “won for himself a transatlantic reputation as the champion of British Nonconformity, and it is doubtful if even Benjamin Franklin had as many readers” (Bridenbaugh, *Mitre and Sceptre*, 242).

Vice Roi or Lord Lt. to reside in New York.”<sup>22</sup> For New Englanders, these plans sounded like the re-imposition of the type of government that had been implemented in the days of Governor Andros.<sup>23</sup> John Adams shared his agreement with Mayhew on the threat that the proposed bishops represented. He noted this in his *Dissertation on Canon and Feudal Law*, published anonymously in 1765. According to Adams,

There seems to be a direct and formal design on foot, to enslave all America. This, however, must be done by degrees. The first step that is intended seems to be an entire subversion of the whole system of our fathers, by the introduction of the canon and feudal law into America. . . . The designs and labors of a certain society [the S.P.G.] to introduce the former of them into America, have been well exposed to the public by a writer of great abilities [footnote: “The Late Rev. Dr. Mayhew”].<sup>24</sup>

Adams and Mayhew both were concerned about the activities of the S.P.G. to see ecclesiastical law imposed upon the colonies through the agency of American bishops.<sup>25</sup> Adams’s published statement above demonstrate that clergymen like Mayhew were not the only ones who were concerned about the intentions of the British toward the colonies in this period.

Certain clergymen formed clerical organizations in the 1760s to address the threat of American bishops. In 1766 John Rodgers, a Presbyterian pastor in New York City, and other clergymen formed “a general Convention” to “unite endeavors and counsels for spreading the gospel and preserving the religious liberties of our churches.”<sup>26</sup> This committee met annually from 1766 until 1775 and was made up of Old

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<sup>22</sup>Bridenbaugh, *Mitre and Sceptre*, 216.

<sup>23</sup>Over against the original Rhode Island charter, the governor of Massachusetts Francis Bernard urged the crown to create a colonial “nobility appointed by the king for life” (*ibid.*, 217). This too was an affront to colonial sensibilities.

<sup>24</sup>John Adams, *The Works of John Adams*, ed. Charles Francis Adams (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1851), 3:464.

<sup>25</sup>Akers argues that “Mayhew took his stand with the Puritan fathers” on the debate with the S.P.G. over episcopal bishops, even though differing from them on broader theological matters, as Mayhew himself admitted (Charles Akers, *Called unto Liberty: A Life of Jonathan Mayhew, 1720-1766* [Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1964], 189).

<sup>26</sup>See Samuel Miller, *Memoirs of the Rev. John Rodgers, D. D.* (New York: Whiting and

Side Presbyterians, New Side Presbyterians, and a variety of New England Congregationalists, including Francis Allison, Patrick Allison, and Alexander MacWhorter.<sup>27</sup> Around 1766 this group sent a letter to a committee of dissenters in England, expressing their deep concern over the plans for an American Episcopate:

The late attempts of the Episcopalian missionaries among us to introduce an American Episcopate, have given a very just and general alarm to our churches, who fled from the unmerciful rigor and persecutions of diocesan bishops in our mother country, to settle in an uncultivated wilderness. The recollection of the cruelties and hardships which our fathers suffered, before this peaceful retreat was opened for us, fills our minds with an utter abhorrence of every species of ecclesiastical tyranny and persecution.<sup>28</sup>

This letter went on to give the specific reason as to why such plans filled these American clergymen with foreboding:

We oppose not . . . the introduction of diocesan bishops in America from any apprehension that we have any exclusive privileges above others, or from any right we have to endeavor to prevent them from enjoying the same liberty with any other denomination of Christians in the colonies. We oppose the scheme from very different motives and principles. Our fears would not be so much alarmed could any rational method be devised for sending over bishops among us, stripped of every degree of civil power and confined in the exercise of their ecclesiastical functions to their own society; and could we have sufficient security that the British parliament that would send them over, thus limited, to gain a peaceable settlement here, would never be induced by their complaints for the want of power to enlarge it at any future period. But it is very evident that it is not that harmless and inoffensive bishop which is designed for us, or which the missionaries among us request; and therefore we cannot but be apprehensive of danger from the proposed episcopate, however plausible the scheme may be represented.<sup>29</sup>

English bishops in America would have English powers and privileges. It would be impossible for bishops to be introduced in America without carrying with them their traditional legal authority:

We all know the jealousy of the bishops in England concerning their own power and

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Watson, 1813), 187.

<sup>27</sup>Miller, *Memoirs of the Rev. John Rodgers*, 188. Another committee of ministers and civic leaders within the city of New York gathered for the same purpose as well. Rodgers was a part of this second group also, as were ministers Archibald Laidlie and John Mason (*ibid.*, 192).

<sup>28</sup>*Ibid.*, 189.

<sup>29</sup>*Ibid.*, 190-91.

dignity suffering by the example of such a limited bishop in America, and we also know the force of a British act of parliament and have reason to dread the establishment of bishops' courts among us. Should they claim the right of holding these courts, and of exercising the powers belonging to their office by the common law of England (which is esteemed the birth-right of a British subject) we could have no counterbalance to this enormous power in our colonies, where we have no nobility or proper courts to check the dangerous exertions of their authority, and when our governors and judges may be the needy dependents of a prime minister, and therefore afraid to disoblige a person who is sure of being supported by the whole bench of bishops in England. So that our civil liberties appear to us to be in eminent danger from such an establishment. We have so long tasted the sweets of civil and religious liberty, that we cannot be easily prevailed upon to submit to a yoke of bondage, which neither we nor our fathers were able to bear.<sup>30</sup>

Since a certain set of bishops in England, the so-called "Lords Spiritual," possessed ecclesiastical and civil power in England, the introduction of bishops into American society was almost certain to introduce a new office with broader discretionary powers into the colonies. This would alter the political and ecclesiastical order in the colonies and curtail the civil and religious liberties of the colonists.

### **Thomas Bradbury Chandler and the Argument for American Bishops**

Thomas Bradbury Chandler became the leading advocate of episcopal bishops in America, and the debate over bishops escalated in 1767 with the publication of his *Appeal to the Public in Behalf of the Church of England in America*. Chandler was at that time an Episcopal rector in Elizabethtown, New Jersey. He had been encouraged by Bishop Secker to promote the cause of American bishops and was a likely candidate for such a position.<sup>31</sup> Chandler sought to gently answer the objections that had been raised against American bishops and dispel the fears of those who opposed them. His published *Appeal* touched off a firestorm that brewed well into the 1770s. Chandler's many publications on the subject made him the leading proponent of American bishops in North America.

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<sup>30</sup>Miller, *Memoirs of the Rev. John Rodgers*, 191-92.

<sup>31</sup>Bridenbaugh, *Mitre and Sceptre*, 204-6.

Chandler argued in his *Appeal* that bishops were an essential part of the church government and ministry as understood by Episcopalians. Even though the bishop of London had taken “some cognizance of ecclesiastical matters in the plantations [i.e. American colonies],” an American bishop was necessary so that the regular functions of episcopal government could be exercised in the colonies.<sup>32</sup> Without a bishop, argued Chandler, those baptized as infants in the Episcopalian church in America were denied the benefits of confirmation.<sup>33</sup> Furthermore, the lack of a bishop made ordination of clergymen in North America very difficult, for “none can be admitted to Holy Orders without crossing the Atlantic, with great hazard and expense.”<sup>34</sup> Even when these difficulties were overcome, it was difficult for a bishop living in England to be “sufficiently acquainted with the characters of those who go home from this country for Holy Orders.” Chandler argued that because of this, “ordination has been sometimes fraudulently and surreptitiously obtained by such wretches as are not only a scandal to the Church but a disgrace to the human species.”<sup>35</sup> For all these reasons, the Episcopal Church in America was in need of resident bishops. Chandler turned the argument for religious liberty in his favor, also arguing that those in the colonies who cherished religious liberty should be consistent and heartily support the liberty of Episcopalians to obtain an American bishop: “The principles of religious liberty professed by the dissenters must not only restrain them from opposing an American Episcopate . . . but oblige them . . . to befriend it.”<sup>36</sup> Chandler asserted that such a request was only their just and equal due: “We request only the liberty of enjoying the institutions of our church, and

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<sup>32</sup>Thomas Bradbury Chandler, *Appeal to the Public in Behalf of the Church of England in America* (New York: James Parker, 1767), 28.

<sup>33</sup>*Ibid.*, 18-25.

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

<sup>35</sup>*Ibid.*, 36.

<sup>36</sup>*Ibid.*, 83.

thereby of being put upon an equal footing with our neighbors—with the various sects of English dissenters, who have the full enjoyment of their respective forms of ecclesiastical government and discipline, and even with the Moravians and Papists, who are severally allowed a bishop.”<sup>37</sup>

Chandler further attempted to dispel the fear of American bishops by declaring that such a bishop would only have ecclesiastical duties and would not possess any civic functions in American society. This, after all, was one of the major concerns of those who opposed the American bishops. American bishops would have limited powers:

It has long been settled . . . that the bishops to be sent to America shall have no authority but purely of a spiritual and ecclesiastical nature, such as is derived altogether from the church and not from the state, that this authority shall operate only upon the clergy of the church and not upon the laity nor dissenters of any denomination, that the bishops shall not interfere with the property or privileges, whether civil or religious, of churchmen or dissenters, that . . . they shall have no concern with the probate of wills . . . nor be judges of any cases . . . but that they shall only exercise the original powers of their offices as before stated, i.e. ordain and govern the clergy, and administer confirmation to those who shall desire it.<sup>38</sup>

Chandler also argued that Episcopal bishops in America would not interfere with the civil or religious liberties of those outside the Episcopal fold: “The bishops proposed would have no power over them or concern with them. . . . American bishops are to have no authority over dissenters.”<sup>39</sup>

With these assurances and appeals to religious liberty, Chandler called for Episcopal bishops to be sent to America without delay. The prejudices against American bishops “must have arisen from misapprehensions,” and those who have opposed such plans have been “led by ignorance or misinformation.”<sup>40</sup> Justice and liberty, according to Chandler, demand that plans to settle bishops in America not be opposed:

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<sup>37</sup>Chandler, *Appeal to the Public in Behalf of the Church of England*, 42.

<sup>38</sup>*Ibid.*, 79.

<sup>39</sup>*Ibid.*, 93, 95.

<sup>40</sup>*Ibid.*, 116.

If all the religious denominations in America, by the general Constitution of the British colonies, are to be treated on the footing of a perfect equality, for which some have contended; then, the Church of England is as fully entitled to the complete enjoyment of its own discipline and institutions as any other Christian. If any one denomination is entitled to a superiority above others, as is believed by many; then, the claim of the Church of England to this preference is not to be disputed. One of these must be undoubtedly the case, and on either supposition to endeavor to prevent the Episcopate we have asked for, is injustice and cruelty.<sup>41</sup>

The question of whether the Church of England was “entitled to a superiority above others” was not relevant to the request for resident bishops, according to Chandler.

Residential bishops were a matter of justice and compassion. With this, Chandler opened a new round of debate over the question of American bishops.

### **Reaction to Chandler’s Call for Bishops**

Chandler’s 1767 *Appeal* provoked a firestorm of response and agitated the clergy who were concerned over the potential loss of religious liberty. The debate over Chandler’s proposal of American bishops immediately raged in the newspapers, with hundreds of articles appearing in *The American Whig*, *The Centinel*, and *The Anatomist*.<sup>42</sup> Many Congregational and Presbyterian ministers strongly opposed Chandler’s call for American bishops, while Episcopal clergymen like Charles Inglis, Myles Cooper, Samuel Auchmuty, and Samuel Seabury, Jr., joined Chandler’s side of the conflict.<sup>43</sup> Interest in the debate led to the immediate reprinting in 1768 and 1769 of numerous newspaper articles pertaining to the debate over bishops in two large volumes.<sup>44</sup> These volumes testify to the significance in the debate over American bishops in the late 1760s. Individual pamphlets were published in response to Chandler’s *Appeal* as well. The anonymous *A Letter concerning an American Bishop . . . to Dr. Bradbury Chandler* is

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<sup>41</sup>Chandler, *Appeal to the Public in Behalf of the Church of England*, 117.

<sup>42</sup>Bridenbaugh, *Mitre and Sceptre*, 311.

<sup>43</sup>*Ibid.*, 246.

<sup>44</sup>*Collection of Tracts from the Late Newspapers . . . On the Subject of the Residence of Protestant Bishops in the American Colonies*, 2 vols. (New York: John Holt, 1768-1769).

one such example. This publication accused Chandler of dishonesty and misleading his readers regarding the powers that American bishops would actually assume. This pamphlet also recalled the sufferings that were brought to Scotland when bishops were forcibly imposed upon the Scottish people after the Restoration. Bishops were further to be resisted, according to the author, because they had shown themselves in the past to “invade the civil liberty, by preaching passive obedience and non-resistance and [by] declaring for arbitrary power.”<sup>45</sup>

With Jonathan Mayhew’s death in 1766, Charles Chauncy became the leading spokesman against the plan for episcopal bishops. In 1768 Chauncy published his reply to Chandler’s *Appeal*, entitled *The Appeal to the Public Answered in behalf of the Non-Episcopal Churches in America*. This lengthy work responded section-by-section to Chandler’s call for bishops, providing the most substantial response to his arguments. In as many words, Chauncy argued that Chandler’s call for bishops was disingenuous and would result in a vastly different outcome than what he was promising. Chandler’s *Appeal*, according to Chauncy, cleverly promoted a plan that so re-invented the office of an episcopal bishop as to make it virtually unrecognizable. Chandler’s ecclesiastically-contained bishops were vastly more palatable to those with concerns about religious liberty, but his notion of American bishops was entirely novel and did not resemble Episcopal bishops as they functioned in England at all. According to Chauncy, “The bishops, proposed for the colonies [by Chandler], besides being restrained in the exercise of their authority to the clergy only are to be stripped of all that civil power, which is, in England, annexed to their ecclesiastical.” Bishops without civil or judicial powers are “so widely different from the bishops of the Church of England at home” that it is difficult to believe that bishops would function in such a vastly different way in

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<sup>45</sup>*A Letter Concerning an American Bishop . . . to Dr. Bradbury Chandler* (n.p., 1768), 6, 13-18.

America.<sup>46</sup>

Chauncy was not opposed to bishops who would function in a purely spiritual and ecclesiastical way within the Episcopal Church. He was opposed to bishops in America because they would be “under a state-establishment which would put them upon a different foot from the other denominations and, without all doubts, sooner or later expose them to many difficulties and grievous hardships.”<sup>47</sup> Chauncy argued that British bishops sent to America would in fact jeopardize the spiritual and religious liberties of the colonies, because American bishops would not leave behind the rights and duties that they possessed in Britain. To do so would go against the order and uniformity of the Church of England:

It may deserve consideration, as uniformity is one of the main things aimed at in the constitution of the Church of England, whether it would comport with this design to make the proposed difference between bishops here and at home? Are they not officers of one and the same church, and of equal rank and degree? Why then should they be thus vested with different powers? . . . Would it not hurt, if not quite destroy the Church’s uniformity, in regard of its officers?<sup>48</sup>

If Chandler wanted to argue for bishops divested of civil power, he should be consistent and advocate this for bishops in England as well:

Not that we object against the proposed abridgement of the power of bishops as unreasonable in itself. We think, on the contrary, it is a wise and equitable alteration and heartily wish that these appendages, quite extraneous to the office of bishops, and greatly prejudicial to the faithful execution of it, may no more be united with it. The sooner they are disjoined, and forever separated, the better. It would, we apprehend, tend greatly to promote the good of the Church of Christ. But what we object is the partiality of the proposal: its being confined to the colonies and not extended to the mother country. For if this planned restraint is reasonable in itself, it is as reasonable it should take place there, as here; and to desire it here upon any other plan than such an extensive one as shall operate in England, as well as America, appears to us inconsistent and absurd.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>46</sup>Charles Chauncy, *The Appeal to the Public Answered, In Behalf of the Non-Episcopal Churches in America* (Boston: Kneeland and Adams, 1768), 144.

<sup>47</sup>Ibid., 189.

<sup>48</sup>Ibid., 146.

<sup>49</sup>Ibid.

Given this inconsistency, any bishops that would be sent to America would certainly obtain powers beyond the limitations set forth in Chandler's *Appeal*, and this would completely disrupt the current state of civil and religious order of the colonies:

If bishops are sent to the colonies with civil as well as spiritual powers, and claim it as their right to concern themselves here, as they do at home, with the probate of wills, letters of Guardianship and Administration, holding their courts, and acting as judges in matters of this nature, it would introduce an essential change in the settled constitution of the colonies upon this head, and vacate all their laws relative thereto. And this alteration would affect all denominations among us, Episcopalians in common with others.<sup>50</sup>

Such an imposition would be “destructive” and “would, without all controversy, be the occasion of universal confusion” and trouble: “Instead of the peace we now enjoy, there would be noise and clamor, anger, wrath, strife, and all manner of distraction.”<sup>51</sup>

Chauncy argued further that Chandler and whoever else had joined with him in such a scheme had no authority from the Crown to completely alter the function of bishops and invent a new type of bishop for the American colonies. Whatever promises and assurances he had given in his *Appeal* were therefore of no weight and authority:

It is truly extraordinary, that Episcopalians should tell us of a scheme for the mission of bishops to the colonies settled at home, and approbated by the clergy of the Church of England here, to the entire neglect of his Majesty, the acknowledged supreme head of their church; without which there can be not only no settlement of a plan, referring to any ecclesiastical affair whatever, but no authority so much as to attempt to form one.<sup>52</sup>

For Chandler to conceive and promote such a novel scheme for episcopal governance of the colonies as a mere clergyman put him at odds, according to Chauncy, with the very hierarchy he was attempting to promote and see imposed.<sup>53</sup>

The debate over bishops between Chandler and Chauncy continued into the 1770s, contributing to the ongoing sense of concern the colonists had for their civil and

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<sup>50</sup>Chauncy, *Appeal to the Public Answered*, 148.

<sup>51</sup>*Ibid.*, 149.

<sup>52</sup>*Ibid.*, 138.

<sup>53</sup>*Ibid.*, 141.

religious liberties. In response to Chauncy and others, New York episcopal minister Charles Inglis wrote in 1768 in support for the S.P.G. and the proposal of an American episcopate.<sup>54</sup> Chandler himself responded to Chauncy directly with a lengthy response published in 1769 entitled *The Appeal Defended*.<sup>55</sup> This second piece touched off another round of vigorous debate. Chauncy responded with his 1770 *A Reply to Dr. Chandler's Appeal Defended*, which prompted Chandler's 1771 *The Appeal Further Defended*.<sup>56</sup> Chauncy had the final word with the appearance of his massive *Compleat View of Episcopacy* which was also published in 1771.<sup>57</sup> This debate over bishops was so prolonged and became so heated, according to Andrew Eliot, that it "engrossed the attention of the public."<sup>58</sup>

Congregationalists like Chauncy were not the only ones opposed to the plan for American bishops. A number of Episcopalian ministers in the colonies opposed the introduction of bishops into America as well, much to the displeasure of Chandler and his circle.<sup>59</sup> Thomas Gwatkin, Samuel Henley, Richard Hewitt, and William Bland, all Episcopal clergy, opposed the efforts of other Episcopal clergymen in Virginia who maneuvered to secure a formal petition King George III on behalf of the Episcopal clergy for the establishment of American bishops.<sup>60</sup> After Chandler published a sharp rebuke of

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<sup>54</sup>[Charles Inglis], *A Vindication of the Bishop Landaff's Sermon* (New York: J. Holt, 1768). Inglis would become the first Episcopal bishop in America, but not until after the American Revolution in 1787 (Bernhard Knollenberg, *Growth of the American Revolution, 1766–1775* [Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 2003], 274).

<sup>55</sup>Thomas Bradbury Chandler, *The Appeal Defended: Or, The Proposed American Episcopate Vindicated* (New York: Hugh Gaine, 1769).

<sup>56</sup>Charles Chauncy, *A Reply to Dr. Chandler's Appeal Defended* (Boston: Daniel Kneeland, 1770); and Thomas Bradbury Chandler, *The Appeal Farther Defended* (New York: Hugh Gaine, 1771).

<sup>57</sup>Charles Chauncy, *A Compleat View of Episcopacy* (Boston: Daniel Kneeland, 1771).

<sup>58</sup>Andrew Eliot to Thomas Hollis, April 18, 1768, quoted in Bridenbaugh, *Mitre and Sceptre*, 311.

<sup>59</sup>Miller, *Life of John Rodgers*, 185-86.

<sup>60</sup>*To the Public* (New York: n. p., 1771). This broadside contains the protests of Gwatkin, Hewitt, Henley, and Bland, who were against the plan put forward by some of their fellow clergymen to

these dissenting clergymen, Gwatkin responded in 1772 against the plan and assertions of Chandler.<sup>61</sup> In this reply, Gwatkin stated a number of reasons why he opposed Chandler's plan. Most significantly, Chandler's plan would curtail the civil and religious liberties of dissenters: "Our opposition is not to your having a bishop . . . but to your project of erecting a civil establishment of religion to the destruction of the rights and liberties of other Christian communities."<sup>62</sup> Even fellow Episcopalians were concerned about what an American episcopate would mean for religious liberty.

Chandler's campaign for American bishops roused and united a large number of an otherwise diverse body of American clergy. His advocacy of an American episcopate threatened the religious liberty of all, especially of dissenting denominations. Conservative and liberal clergy alike felt threatened by this, even as Grenville imposed another round of taxation upon the colonies with the Townsend Duties of 1767 and even as civilians were killed by British soldiers in the Boston Massacre of 1770. According to Bridenbaugh, "it is very, very difficult to recover imaginatively a real understanding of the enormous effect of this controversy [over American bishops] on the opinions and feelings of a pious, dissenting people grown accustomed to ecclesiastical self-government and currently engaged in a struggle to protect their liberties in the civil sphere."<sup>63</sup> The clergy continued to express their concern over the imposition of bishops into the mid-1770s. Massachusetts Congregationalist Charles Turner stated in 1774 that it was not

by any means of trivial consequence that a laudable care be taken to prevent the establishment of an episcopal hierarchy among us. As episcopacy, in the modern sense of the word, is disagreeable to the gospel; so, it is to be considered as an engine of civil, as well as ecclesiastical slavery. "No Bishop, No King!" was a

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petition the king for resident bishops in America.

<sup>61</sup>[Thomas Bradbury Chandler], *An Address from the Clergy of New-York and New-Jersey to the Episcopalians in Virginia* (New York: Hugh Gaine, 1771).

<sup>62</sup>Thomas Gwatkin, *A Letter to the Clergy of New-York and New-Jersey, occasioned by an address to the Episcopalians in Virginia* (Williamsburg, VA: Alex. Purdie and John Dixon), 27.

<sup>63</sup>Bridenbaugh, *Mitre and Sceptre*, 313.

maxim with a British prince, whose ideas of royal power and what we call tyranny appear to have been the same; and who, perhaps, had no vast regard for bishop, church or religion, farther than he thought they might be subservient to his arbitrary views. It might not be greatly amiss if “No Bishop, No Tyrant!” should be ever held a sacred maxim with this people, and a proportionable vigilance be sued that episcopacy may never take place in this country.<sup>64</sup>

Such assertions fueled the discussion of resistance to the British and made the possibility of such resistance increasingly likely.

### **The Doctrine of Resistance during the Early Debate over Bishops**

As the debate over episcopal bishops captivated the colonists in the late 1760s and early 1770s, the colonial clergy continued to declare that Christians have a right to resist their civil authorities when necessary to defend their lawful rights and liberties. The clergymen of this period were quick to recall the history of the original New England settlements and the charters which had secured their religious and civil liberty. Abiel Leonard, a Congregationalist minister in Connecticut, recalled in a 1768 sermon “the inestimable liberties and privileges granted to these several governments by royal charters.” He called his listeners to hold these rights as precious, even as the possibility of losing them seemed more and more likely: “He who does not highly value and esteem the charter privileges of these colonies must certainly be either grossly ignorant of their real interests or very inimical towards them.”<sup>65</sup> Similarly, the orthodox Congregationalist minister Judah Champion from Litchfield, Connecticut, recounted in 1770 what the New England colonists had suffered in their long history of struggling for civil and religious liberty, hoping that “our privileges, civil and religious, may be continued inviolate.”<sup>66</sup>

The threat of bishops and the fear of losing civil and religious liberties

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<sup>64</sup>Charles Turner, *A Sermon Preached at Plymouth* (Boston: Greenleaf, 1774), 39.

<sup>65</sup>Abiel Leonard, *The Memory of God’s great goodness is to be abundantly uttered* (Providence, RI: Waterman and Russell, 1768), 29.

<sup>66</sup>Judah Champion, *A Brief View of the Distresses, Hardships, and Dangers our Ancestors encountered, in settling New-England* (Hartford, CT: Green & Watson, 1770), iv.

guaranteed in the colonial charters made the doctrine of political resistance all the more important in the late 1760s and early 1770s. As the debate over bishops agitated the colonies, Congregationalist minister Daniel Shute was chosen in 1768 to preach the annual Massachusetts election sermon. In this sermon Shute asserted a general right of political resistance in line with what Mayhew had asserted in 1750. Shute commended a “sacred regard to civil authority,” which is to be “cultivated by all,” but stated that this “sacred regard” for civil authority was not to be absolute. Those subject to the civil authorities should not submit themselves to particular laws which do not “coincide with moral fitness” and do not “answer the end for which only they are empowered to make laws,” namely, the good of the people. If laws are made which do not serve this purpose, then individuals are “under no obligation to observe them, but may be morally obligated to resist them.”<sup>67</sup> Shute then also expressed his rejection of the doctrine of passive obedience and non-resistance:

The doctrine of passive obedience and non-resistance in the unlimited sense it has been urged by some, came not down from above, as it can be supported neither by reason nor revelation, and therefore if anywhere, may be urged with a better grace by the rulers of darkness in the regions below upon those who . . . are excluded the common benefits of creation.

This rejection of passive obedience, however, “does not at all lessen the moral obligation of obedience in the people to an equitable administration and to use their endeavors that the laws made by their rulers to promote the good of the community should take place to that purpose.”<sup>68</sup>

Jason Haven, a Congregationalist minister from Dedham, Massachusetts, preached the annual Massachusetts election sermon the following year in 1769. He too rejected political absolutism in his sermon and asserted a right of resistance. According

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<sup>67</sup>Daniel Shute, *A Sermon Preached before his Excellency Francis Bernard* (Boston: Richard Draper, 1768), 46-47.

<sup>68</sup>*Ibid.*, 47.

to Haven, obedience to one's civil authorities is necessary "in every thing lawful." The submission enjoined upon the people in Romans 13 to one in authority is "no doubt to be understood with some limitations. . . . So far as he pursues the end for which God placed him in office, he is to be obeyed."<sup>69</sup> Sometimes, however, resisting a political ruler is a Christian duty:

When a ruler uses his authority for purposes just the reverse of those for which it was delegated to him—when he evidently encroaches on the natural and constitutional rights of the subject—when he tramples on those laws which were made, at once to limit his power, and defend the people—in such cases they are not obliged to obey him. They are guilty of impiety against God; and of injustice to themselves, and the community of which they are members if they do.

Haven then explicitly connected his position on political resistance with the debate over passive obedience and non-resistance that began in the late 1600s. While "the doctrine of passive obedience and non-resistance . . . had so many advocates in our nation a century ago, [it] is at this day generally given up as indefensible and voted unreasonable and absurd."<sup>70</sup>

The doctrine of absolute submission was not without its proponents during the conflict over bishops. An Episcopalian clergyman and S.P.G. agent from North Carolina, John Micklejohn, for one, excluded the possibility of any right of resistance in a 1768 sermon entitled *On the Important Duty of Subjection to the Civil Powers*.<sup>71</sup> In this sermon, Micklejohn argued that the duty called for in Romans 13 is one of absolute submission to one's civil authorities: "We are, all of us . . . indispensably obliged to pay the highest reverence and regard" to the civil authorities and nothing "can possibly

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<sup>69</sup>Jason Haven, *A Sermon Preached before his Excellency Sir Francis Bernard* (Boston: Richard Draper, 1769), 39.

<sup>70</sup>*Ibid.*, 40. Other assertions of a right of resistance and rejections of passive obedience and non-resistance were published in 1769 as well (e.g., *A Sermon Preached at the Anniversary Meeting of the Planter's Society* [Charlestown: Charles Crouch, 1769], 6-8).

<sup>71</sup>Durward T. Stokes, "Micklejohn, George," in William S. Powell, ed., *Dictionary of North Carolina Biography* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1991), 4:263-64.

exempt any one from the strictest obedience” to the command to submit to them.<sup>72</sup> Similarly, Episcopalian clergyman Samuel Andrews of New Haven, Connecticut, in 1770 rejected any right of resistance, scorned “the cry of legal resistance,” and defended the 1766 Declaratory Act.<sup>73</sup> Because of the assertions of these Episcopalian clergymen and others like them, advocacy of bishops became linked even more so with the notion of ecclesiastical absolutism.

### **Anglican Bishops and the Threat of Popery**

American clergymen were concerned about the imposition of episcopal bishops in American life not only because of the political and judicial powers that bishops possessed in England but also because of bishops’ perceived association with Roman Catholicism. Both Roman Catholics and High Church bishops shared a common attachment to hierarchical structures of church authority, liturgical formality, and ritualism. Many Protestant clergymen viewed Episcopalian bishops as only a small step removed from Catholic bishops and the ecclesiastical power that the Roman Catholic clergy wielded over the consciences of their adherents. This connection added another dimension to the concerns that colonial clergy felt in the conflict over Episcopal bishops in America.

Colonial antipathy toward Roman Catholicism ran deep among American Congregationalists and Presbyterians in the eighteenth century. The biggest threat the colonists felt from Roman Catholicism was from French Catholics in North America, especially before the Treaty of Paris in 1763. Protestant clergyman like Jonathan Edwards, Charles Chauncy, and George Whitefield all had a strong interest in the British

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<sup>72</sup>George Micklejohn, *On the important Duty of Subjection to the Civil Powers* (Newbern, NC: James Davis, 1768), 2.

<sup>73</sup>[Andrews], *Sermon Preached at Litchfield*, 9, 10.

conflicts against the French, especially as they played out in North America.<sup>74</sup>

Whitefield expressed what was certainly the view of many in 1756, namely, that “France and Rome and hell, with all its united force” were plotting and planning the overthrow of British civilization and British Protestantism in North America.<sup>75</sup> These “popish adversaries” were an “insulting, enraged, and perfidious enemy” who intended to “invade, subdue, and destroy” the British people in order “to blind, deceive, and tyrannize over the[ir] souls and consciences.”<sup>76</sup> In support of these assertions, Whitefield cited not only sixteenth-century persecution of Protestants by Catholics, such as the Marian persecution and the St. Bartholomew’s Day Massacre. Whitefield also cited the recent persecution of Protestants under Louis XV in the French region of Languedoc, which started in the 1720s. The ongoing persecution of Protestants at the hands of Roman Catholics in Europe made Catholic persecution seem like a real possibility in eighteenth-century America.<sup>77</sup>

The defeat of the French and the terms of the 1763 Treaty of Paris brought a short-lived peace to the hearts of those who feared Catholic oppression. By 1766 news of the arrival of a Roman Catholic bishop in Quebec revived the colonists’ fears of Catholic oppression coming to North America. Colonists also heard around this time that Roman Catholicism was making significant inroads in England. This also revived colonial fears

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<sup>74</sup>George M. Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards: A Life* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003), 310-15.

<sup>75</sup>George Whitefield, *A Short Address to Persons of all Denominations, occasioned by the Alarm of an Intended Invasion* (Philadelphia: B. Franklin and D. Hall, 1756), 15.

<sup>76</sup>*Ibid.*, 3, 10.

<sup>77</sup>*Ibid.*, 12-13. In 1724 Louis XV signed a law into effect that made the preaching of Protestantism punishable by death and sentence those who refused Roman Catholic practices would be either imprisoned or sent to the galleys. For the text of this law, see Francois Pierre Guillaume Guizot, *A Popular History of France* (Boston: Dana Estes and Charles E. Lauriat, c. 1870), 6:115-16. Nineteenth century historians estimated that eight Protestant ministers were executed under this law and almost two thousand Protestant were either imprisoned or sent to the galleys in the forty years that followed. Many Protestant women in France in the middle of the eighteenth century such as Marie Durand were held in the Tower of Constance in Aigues Mortes with life sentences, simply for the crime of attending a Protestant worship service. The last of these women were freed in 1768. See James Breck Perkins, *France Under Louis XV* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1897), 1:70-78.

and brought an end to the elation that was felt over the defeat of the French a few years earlier. For many colonists in the mid-1760s, from this point on, according to Bridenbaugh, “every day now seemed to be the fifth of November.”<sup>78</sup> The threat of Roman Catholic oppression was back. Jonathan Mayhew expressed his fear of Roman Catholic oppression in his 1765 Duddleian lecture at Harvard. Mayhew’s main concern in this address, entitled *Popish Idolatry*, was to illustrate the idolatrous aspects of Roman Catholicism and its fundamental differences from Protestant Christianity. As he drew his lecture to a close he alerted his hearers to the threat he felt Roman Catholicism currently posed: “Popery is now making great strides in England; as great, perhaps, as it did in the reign either of Charles or James the second. I pray God, things may not at length be brought to as bad a pass! Thousands of weak and wicked Protestants are annually perverted to an impious, horrid system of tyranny over the bodies and souls of men.”<sup>79</sup> Mayhew then elaborated on the threat that Roman Catholicism posed to civil and religious liberties:

Our controversy with [Roman Catholicism] is not merely a religious one . . . but a defense of our laws, liberties, and civil rights as men, in opposition to the proud claims and encroachments of ecclesiastical persons, who under the pretext of religion and saving men’s souls would engross all power and property to themselves and reduce us to the most abject slavery. . . . We ought in reason and prudence to detest the Church of Rome in the same degree that we prize our freedom. . . . Popery and liberty are incompatible, at irreconcilable enmity with each other. May gracious heaven ever preserve us from the one, and bless us with the other.<sup>80</sup>

American liberties would be lost if Catholicism ever became dominant.<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>78</sup>Bridenbaugh, *Mitre and Sceptre*, 236-37. The Catholic Gunpowder Plot to blow up the British Parliament was discovered on November 5, 1605. As events in the 1760s and 1770s unfolded in America, the American public still held to the memory of this Roman Catholic plot. After the Boston Massacre on March 5, 1770, the Baptist clergyman Samuel Stillman predicted that “The 5th of March, like the 5th of November, will be remembered in America as long as the sun and moon shall endure (Samuel Stillman, *A Sermon Preached to the Ancient and Honorable Artillery Company in Boston* [Boston: Edes and Gill, 1770], 18). For the continued recollection of the Gunpowder Plot after the American Revolution, see Caleb Evans, *British Freedom Realized* (Bristol: William Pine, 1788), 6-8.

<sup>79</sup>Jonathan Mayhew, *Popish Idolatry* (Boston: R. & S. Draper, 1765), 50.

<sup>80</sup>*Ibid.*, 49.

<sup>81</sup>For another anti-Catholic work of this period, see *A Word in Season to all protestants of all denominations throughout Great Britain, Ireland, and America* (Philadelphia: Anthony Armbruster, 1763).

The 1774 Quebec Act brought concerns over the extension of Roman Catholicism in North America to a climax. This act had the effect of establishing the free exercise of Roman Catholicism in the American interior. What was gained in the French and Indian War was now lost to Roman Catholicism, only this time it had the sanction of the British behind it. While the colonists were concerned about the spread of Catholicism in the interior, they were even more concerned about what the Quebec Act demonstrated about British policy toward the American colonies. The Quebec Act seemed to many colonists both arbitrary and absolutist, modifying the terms of government and annulling previous land grants in large sections of the American interior.<sup>82</sup> Such a step further underscored the sentiment that the British Parliament was just as much of a threat to civil and religious liberties as Roman Catholicism had been. According to one clergyman, “By the Quebec Act we find the parliament claim a power to establish in America the same arbitrary government that takes place in France.”<sup>83</sup> A cartoon in the July 1774 issues of *The Political Register* captured this sentiment, depicting episcopal bishops as dancing a celebratory dance around the recently passed Quebec Act, with Satan and British politicians looking on approvingly.<sup>84</sup>

By the time of the 1774 Quebec Act, those who were concerned about the defense of religious liberty did not see a need to sharply distinguish between Roman Catholics and High Church Episcopalians. Powerful ecclesiastical hierarchies, whether Episcopal or Roman Catholic, were not welcome. Both posed a significant threat to religious liberty, and both appeared to be operating in tandem to take ecclesiastical self-

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With concern over British oppression running high, anti-Catholic works were not prevalent in this period.

<sup>82</sup>Paul Langston, “‘Tyrant and Oppressor!’: Colonial Press Reaction to the Quebec Act,” *Historical Journal of Massachusetts* 34 (Winter 2006): 1-17.

<sup>83</sup>Ebenezer Baldwin, appendix to *A Sermon Containing Scriptural Instructions to Civil Rulers, and all Free-born Subjects*, by Samuel Sherwood (New Haven, CT: T. and S. Green, 1774), 71.

<sup>84</sup>James B. Bell, *A War of Religion: Dissenters, Anglicans, and the American Revolution* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2008), 105-6.

government away from the American colonists. The colonists felt the threat of oppression from Roman Catholics and the British authorities simultaneously with the passage of the Quebec Act. The British had united themselves with the forces of Roman Catholicism to oppress the colonies, and one of the first military engagements in the War for Independence would be the invasion of Roman Catholic Quebec.<sup>85</sup>

### **Conclusion**

The issue of religious liberty was a prominent factor in compelling the American clergy to protest and resist British policies in the late 1760s and 1770s. The clergy viewed civil liberty and religious liberty as inseparably linked. Any form of political absolutism that would attack one would surely attack the other. This perspective is seen in the colonists' responses both to the French and the British. The clergy viewed the French and Indian War as a conflict for the securing of both their civil and religious liberty, and when the British authorities began to impose upon the colonists' civil liberties, they felt compelled to resist them for the sake of their religious liberties as well. By the time of the 1774 Quebec Act, the colonists were just as concerned about British oppression as they were about oppression from the French. The Quebec Act itself was hated as much for the arbitrary nature of the British policy toward its colonies as it was for its encouragement of Roman Catholic expansion in North America.

The campaign for bishops in the late 1760s and early 1770s threatened both the civil and religious liberties of the colonists. The plan to install established bishops also threatened the ecclesiastical self-governance of dissenters in the colonies. For these reasons, the debate over bishops contributed significantly to the alienation and later separation of the colonies from Great Britain. John Adams recollected to a friend in 1815

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<sup>85</sup>According to Bell, "The provincial suspicion of a resurgent Roman Catholic France in North America was one of the prime reasons why early in the War for Independence, the Americans would invade Quebec in an effort to end the threat" (Bell, *War of Religion*, 106). See also Waldman, *Founding Faith*, 40.

that “the apprehensions of Episcopacy contributed . . . as much as any other cause, to arouse the attention not only of the inquiring mind, but of the common people, and urge them to close thinking on the constitutional authority of parliament over the colonies.” This was, for Adams, “a fact as certain as any in the history of North America.”<sup>86</sup> In agreement with Adams, Carl Bridenbaugh has concluded that the American Revolution “resulted quite as much from a religious as from a political change in the minds and hearts of the people.”<sup>87</sup> The colonists came to fear British absolutism once the threat of French absolutism was removed. This change was grounded in the ecclesiastical proposals for bishops, alongside the new economic and political policies enacted by the British Parliament.

Thomas Bradbury Chandler’s campaign for ecclesiastically-limited resident bishops failed to win a broad base of support in the colonies. It instead alienated Americans from the British establishment and contributed to the suspicions of an Anglican plot to bring the American colonies into a state of political and ecclesiastical servility. In spite of Chandler’s claims to the contrary, many believed that American bishops would come to possess discretionary political and judicial powers, as they did in England. For many American colonists, “Anglican bishops became the principle symbol in the American mind of the threatened ecclesiastical tyranny.”<sup>88</sup> The liberal Jonathan Mayhew and Charles Chauncy led the public opposition to residential bishops, and a number of orthodox clergy like John Rodgers also organized to oppose episcopal bishops as a way of defending religious liberty and ecclesiastical self-governance. The division over residential bishops was not limited to dissenters, as some episcopalian clergy in America like Thomas Gwatkin, Samuel Henley, Richard Hewitt, and William Bland also

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<sup>86</sup>John Adams to Jedediah Morse, December 2, 1815, in Adams, *Works*, 10:185.

<sup>87</sup>Bridenbaugh, *Mitre and Sceptre*, 20.

<sup>88</sup>*Ibid.*, 20. According to Bridenbaugh, New Englanders were “anti-Episcopal almost to a man” (*ibid.*, 58).

opposed Chandler's proposal.

As the debate over American bishops escalated, the doctrine of political resistance continued to find strong proponents, especially in Massachusetts. The Congregationalist clergymen like Jason Haven and Daniel Shute rejected political absolutism and the duty of absolute submission in their Massachusetts election sermons of 1768 and 1769. While Episcopalian clergyman John Micklejohn expressed the doctrine of absolute submission in 1768, his position was not common. Advocates of political resistance would find increased support in the 1770s, as tensions between Great Britain and the colonies neared a breaking point.

CHAPTER 4  
GROWING ABSOLUTISM AND THE ARGUMENT  
FOR SELF-DEFENSE (1770-1775)

As Parliament became increasingly insistent on its absolute prerogative over the American colonies, the American clergy responded by drawing heavily upon the long Protestant tradition of the duty to resist tyranny. By the 1770s the right of resistance to one's civil authorities was well-established. Protestant theologians from the earliest days of the Reformation had made the justification of this right a significant part of the Protestant tradition. British clergymen like Benjamin Hoadly carried forward the doctrine of political resistance and fused it to British Protestants' rejection of Stuart absolutism. The subsequent waves of Jacobinism that the Stuart Pretenders kept alive throughout the first half of the eighteenth century also kept the doctrine of political resistance alive, as Hanoverian loyalists continued to justify their rejection of Stuart claims to the throne. In the North American colonies, clergymen like Cotton and Increase Mather had justified political resistance and a right of revolution during the so-called "New England Revolution" that overthrew Governor Edmund Andros in 1689, leaving a significant precedent of political resistance that remained for resistance advocates in the 1760s and 1770s. Given this history, many British and American clergymen viewed both the Glorious Revolution and the Protestant Hanoverian secession itself as built upon the foundation of justified resistance and revolution. Being a loyal British patriot, then, in the minds of many, demanded a rejection of "passive obedience" and non-resistance doctrine and a hearty affirmation of a right of resistance.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>For example, Samuel Sherwood argued in 1774 that the doctrine of resistance "is perfectly agreeable to and justifies the principles on which the British nation acted, as a body, in deposing King James the second, that tyrannical oppressive prince, when pursuing measures tending to their destruction

British policies in the 1760s and 1770s raised the fear that a resurgent absolutism in some quarters of the British government threatened both the civil and religious liberties of the American colonists. Proposals for American bishops greatly agitated the colonists by threatening the religious liberty and ecclesiastical self-government of dissenting Christian denominations especially. On top of this were the perceived threats to civil liberties. The American colonists viewed the 1767 Townsend Duties on glass, lead, paints, paper, and tea as unconstitutional as the 1765 Stamp Act had been, but many were content to wait patiently and hope for their repeal. In 1770 the orthodox Congregationalist minister Judah Champion observed that this “parliamentary act for raising revenue in America is generally esteemed unconstitutional and not to wear a friendly aspect to our liberty. The total repeal of this is devoutly to be wished for. . . . While seeking redress in a constitutional way, let our fervent prayers ascend continually, that the throne may be established in righteousness.” While patience and mild protests characterized the clergy’s response to British policies in the early 1770s, deep apprehensions among the colonists lingered. Champion noted that the Townsend Duties “caused almost a universal uneasiness in the colonies,” and this uneasiness was to grow with the Boston Massacre of 1770, the *Gaspee* Affair of 1772, the attempt to land tea in Boston in 1773, and especially the Intolerable Acts of 1774.<sup>2</sup>

British measures taken against the colonists in the 1770s renewed their fears

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and in introducing King William of glorious memory to the throne. . . . The kings who have reigned over us since [this] period, in succession, can make out no just claim and title to the throne on any other principles than those advanced [in favor of the doctrine of resistance]. If these [principles] are not well grounded and established, but fail, they must fall with them and be deemed only usurpers and the pretender, on the other hand, the only rightful heir to the crown. If we embrace [non-resistance] doctrine . . . we must of necessity condemn the conduct of the nation in general in rising up against and deposing king James and join with the rebels in the highlands of Scotland in their endeavours to overthrow the present constitution of Great Britain and to bring in one of the descendants of James as our rightful king and disown him that now sits on the throne” (Samuel Sherwood, *A Sermon Containing Scriptural Instructions to Civil Rulers, and all Free-born Subjects* [New Haven, CT: T. and S. Green, 1774], 28). For another example, see Gad Hitchcock, *A Sermon Preached before his Excellency Thomas Gage* (Boston: Edes and Gill, 1774), 21-22.

<sup>2</sup>Judah Champion, *A Brief View of the Distresses, Hardships and Dangers our Ancestors encountered in settling New-England* (Hartford, CT: Green & Watson, 1770), 29.

and fueled the debate over the doctrine of resistance. Going into the 1770s, most American clergymen believed that resisting one's civil authorities was justifiable under certain circumstances. Not all American clergy, however, affirmed a right of resistance. Certain Episcopalians who supported plans for residential bishops like Samuel Andrews were uncomfortable with assertions of a right of resistance, holding that resistance to one's own political authorities was intrinsically sinful, disloyal, and impermissible for Christians. In a sermon published anonymously in 1770, Andrews criticized those who utter "the cry of legal resistance," stating that "love to the Lord and faithful obedience to the king is the Englishman's liberty," for "the King's supremacy . . . is the bulwark of Protestantism."<sup>3</sup> Andrews also affirmed "the supremacy of the British the Parliament over the colonies in all cases whatever," even going so far as to grant the point that lawfully "our lives . . . may be taken away by a British Act of Parliament."<sup>4</sup>

The growing threat of political absolutism provoked calls for self-defense and defensive warfare in the 1770s. These arguments for self-defense played an increasingly significant role in the clergy's argument for political resistance in this period. As British authorities enacted new and increasingly oppressive expressions of political absolutism in their policies toward the colonies in the mid-1770s, the American clergy justified political resistance as an expression of self-defense. Many clergy argued that defensive warfare was justified as a legitimate form of political resistance when it became necessary to defend the life and liberties of themselves and of subsequent generations of Americans. These arguments for political resistance on the grounds of self-defense were in continuity with previous justifications of political resistance found in the Protestant tradition. The clergy's arguments for political resistance on the basis of self-defense in the 1770s form another link of continuity in their understanding of political resistance

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<sup>3</sup>[Samuel Andrews], *A Sermon preached at Litchfield* (n.p., 1770), 10-11.

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*, 9.

with others in their own inherited theological tradition.

### **The Growing Political Absolutism of the 1770s**

Over the course of the 1770s, the American colonists were confronted with British actions and policies that increasingly moved in an absolutist and confrontational direction. The Boston Massacre opened the 1770s with a tragic and traumatic confrontation in Boston that provoked a public outcry. The response of the British government to the burning of the *Gaspee* by Rhode Island colonists in 1772 similarly alarmed the colonists. While both of these events produced a limited written response from the colonial clergy, it was the Intolerable Acts of 1774 that pushed the American clergy to more aggressively argue the case for political resistance and even to justify war against their own civil authorities as a means of self-defense.

The Boston Massacre in 1770, in which British soldiers in Boston fired upon a hostile mob, killing five persons, provoked a limited response from the clergy. Most clergy did not publish sermons that were specifically preached in response to this tragedy. One notable exception to this was the clergyman John Lathrop, pastor of Boston's Second Congregational Church, who preached a fiery sermon the Sunday following the Boston Massacre, entitled *Innocent Blood Crying to God from the Streets of Boston*. This sermon is the only published sermon of its kind that was preached specifically as a response to the Boston Massacre. Lathrop railed in this sermon against the soldiers who he believed were clearly guilty of murder: "The unparalleled barbarity of those who were lately guilty of murdering a number of our innocent fellow-citizens will never be forgot."<sup>5</sup> Lathrop laid the blame for the deaths in Boston on the British policy of stationing troops in Boston even more directly than on the soldiers themselves. The colonies in 1770, according to Lathrop, were experiencing "a time of profound peace,"

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<sup>5</sup>John Lathrop, *Innocent Blood Crying to God from the Streets of Boston* (Boston: Edes and Gill, 1771), 5.

and it was a serious error on the part of the British government “to have troops quartered among us on pretense of supporting government, where government has ever been supported as well as in any part of the known world.” Lathrop faulted the “common soldiers” for having “assaulted [citizens] in some or other part of the town almost every evening,” having “wounded” some of them, and now at last murdering some of them “in cold blood.”<sup>6</sup> Lathrop did not make any general calls for political resistance in this sermon, but protested and condemned the actions of the offending soldiers and expressed the hopes that the colonists “may be allowed to live in the full enjoyment of all those important rights and privileges, both of a civil and religious nature, with which the God of our fathers has been pleased to favor this part of his heritage.” To this end, he encouraged his hearers to “persuade men that liberty and religion are worth contending for” by their “pious and exemplary behavior . . . cheerfully conspir[ing] with our Lord and Master to do good unto all, even to the evil and unthankful.”<sup>7</sup> This modest response to the Boston Massacre is more typical of the clergy’s response in general.

The American clergy continued to express a general right of resistance in the years immediately after the Boston Massacre without any detectable change in the tone of moderation that characterized previous colonial expressions of such a right. The 1770 Massachusetts election sermon, preached less than three months after the Boston Massacre by Samuel Cooke, continued to express the right of resistance in a moderate and restrained tone. Cooke asserted before Lieutenant Governor Thomas Hutchinson and the gathered audience that “men . . . are under the absolute control of the High Possessor of heaven and earth and cannot, without the greatest impropriety and disloyalty to the King of kings, yield unlimited submission to any inferior power.”<sup>8</sup> Cooke counseled

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<sup>6</sup>Lathrop, *Innocent Blood Crying to God*, 19.

<sup>7</sup>*Ibid.*, 20-21.

<sup>8</sup>Samuel Cooke, *A Sermon Preached at Cambridge* (Boston: Edes and Gill, 1770), 14.

moderation and restraint to those who would stand in defense of their liberties:

In imitation of our pious forefathers, we are aiming at the security of our liberties, we should all be concerned to express by our conduct their piety and virtue. . . . While under government we claim a right to be treated as men, we must act in character by yielding that subjection which becomes us as men. Let every attempt to secure our liberties be conducted with a manly fortitude, but with that respectful decency which reason approves and which alone gives weight to the most salutary measures. Let nothing divert us from the paths of truth and peace, which are the ways of God.<sup>9</sup>

The election sermon of the following year preached by John Tucker similarly expressed a right of resistance and also maintained a tone of moderation and restraint. According to Tucker, “unlimited submission . . . is not due to government in a free state. There are certain boundaries, beyond which, submission cannot be justly required, nor is therefore due. These limits are marked out and fixed by the known, established, and fundamental laws of the state.”<sup>10</sup> When a government transgressed its legitimate boundaries, all resistance was to be moderate and restrained:

Upon the whole therefore, proper submission in a free state is a medium between slavish subjection to arbitrary claims of rulers on the one hand, and a lawless license on the other. It is obedience in subjects to all orders of government which are consistent with their constitutional rights and privileges. So much submission is due and to be readily yielded by every subject, and beyond this it cannot be justly demanded, because rulers and people are equally bound by the fundamental laws of the constitution.<sup>11</sup>

Although Tucker asserted a right of resistance, he was clear to condemn all violence and “lawless license” in response to any government abuses. If the time for resistance comes, it should be orderly and restrained: “Even under great and manifest oppression, a prudent regard to their own and the public safety may forbid, indeed, violent means of resistance; but should never lead them tamely to yield to unlawful claims.”<sup>12</sup> When they need to, the godly will “unite the members of society, as one body” and not engage in “rash and

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<sup>9</sup>Cooke, *Sermon Preached at Cambridge*, 46-47.

<sup>10</sup>John Tucker, *A Sermon Preached at Cambridge* (Boston: Richard Draper, 1771), 29.

<sup>11</sup>*Ibid.*, 32-33.

<sup>12</sup>*Ibid.*, 36.

unlawful measures of defense” but would engage in “such as are prudent and justifiable and engage in them to act with that determined resolution and firmness, resulting from reason and virtue, which is most likely to hold out and to prevail, in time, over every species of injustice and oppression.”<sup>13</sup>

The *Gaspee* Affair of 1772 produced more alarm in the colonies than the Boston Massacre, mainly because of the official response of the British to it. After Rhode Islanders boarded and burned the British customs schooner, the HMS *Gaspee*, the British government invested a court of inquiry in Rhode Island with the power to send any accused individuals to England to stand trial. This violation of the right to a local trial before a jury of one’s peers, was viewed as an intolerable and unjust expression of political absolutism, and it had a very alarming effect on the colonies. Thomas Jefferson later recounted how this incident awakened the colonists to new plans for unified actions:

Nothing of particular excitement occurring for a considerable time, our countrymen seemed to fall into a state of insensibility to our situation; the duty on tea, not yet repealed, and the declaratory act of a right in the British Parliament to bind us by their laws in all cases whatsoever, still suspended over us. But a court of inquiry held in Rhode Island in 1772, with a power to send persons to England to be tried for offenses committed here, was considered, at our session of the spring of 1773, as demanding attention. . . . We were all sensible that the most urgent of all measures was that of coming to an understanding with all the other colonies to consider the British claims as a common cause to all and to produce a unity of action, and for this purpose that a committee of correspondence in each colony would be the best instrument for intercommunication.<sup>14</sup>

The abridgment of the right to a local trial by a jury of one’s peers greatly alarmed certain colonial clergymen as well. In response to the *Gaspee* affair, a visiting Baptist clergyman named John Allen preached a fiery sermon in Boston’s Second Baptist Church, which was soon anonymously published as *An Oration on the Beauties of Liberty*. Referring to himself as a “British Bostonian,” Allen protested the abusive power of the admiralty

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<sup>13</sup>Tucker, *Sermon Preached at Cambridge*, 40-41.

<sup>14</sup>Thomas Jefferson, *Memoir, Correspondence, and Miscellanies, from the Papers of Thomas Jefferson*, ed. Thomas Jefferson Randolph, 2nd ed. (Boston: Gray and Bowen, 1830), 1:4.

courts “to confine suspected persons (guilty or not guilty) and drag them away three thousand miles to take their trial by a jury of strangers, if not enemies.” Such actions would be, in effect, to transport them back “to the tyranny their forefathers fled from.”<sup>15</sup> If the courts are to be so altered and controlled by the crown, America would become “a nation of slaves” and all the “essential rights as Americans” would be lost.<sup>16</sup> Allen went on to compare this British policy with the “absolutist” rulers of the past such as Julius Caesar, King John, Charles II, and James III of Scotland, who ruled and reigned “by a despotic power, which they assumed, contrary to the laws and rights of the people.”<sup>17</sup> Allen closed his sermon with a passionate appeal for the Americans to defend their rights and liberties from the growing oppression:

See your danger, death is near, destruction is at the door. Need I speak? Are not your harbors blockaded from you? Your castle secured by captives, your lives destroyed, revenues imposed upon you, taxation laid, military power oppressing, your charter violated, your G[overnor]’s heart not right, your constitution declining, your liberties departing, and not content with this, they now attack the life, the soul and capital of all your liberties, to choose your judges, and make them independent upon you for office or support, and erect new courts of admiralty, to take away by violence, the husband from his family, his wife, his home, his friends, and his all . . . Has not the voice of your father’s blood cried yet loud enough in your ears, in your hearts, “ye sons of America scorn to be slaves”? . . . Therefore if there be any vein, any nerve, any soul, any life or spirit of liberty in the sons of America, show your love for it: guard your freedom, prevent your chains, stand up as one man for your liberty.<sup>18</sup>

In the face of Parliament’s absolutist and oppressive policies, Allen believed that collective resistance was necessary. Such resistance would not be rebellion, but merely the exercise of justifiable self-defense: “It is no rebellion to oppose any king, ministry, or governor that destroys by any violence or authority whatever the rights of the people.

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<sup>15</sup>[John Allen], *An Oration Upon the Beauties of Liberty* (Boston: D. Kneeland, 1773), 15.

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

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

<sup>18</sup>*Ibid.*, 19.

Shall a man be deemed a rebel that supports his own rights?”<sup>19</sup> Far from being an act of rebellion, self-defense, for Allen, is a natural right, as well as a duty. Referring to the overthrow of Governor Andros, Allen argued that such future resistance had ample precedent in “the people sending home their governor in irons some years ago.”<sup>20</sup>

Most ministers did not find the situation as threatening as Allen did until the passage of the Coercive Acts in 1774, which were passed by the British Parliament in response to the Boston Tea Party. These acts included the Boston Port Act, which shut down the port of Boston, and the Massachusetts Government Act, which revoked the 1691 Massachusetts charter, effectively dissolved the provincial assembly, and restricted town meetings to once per year. Parliament also passed the Administration of Justice Act, which allowed the governor to remove the trials of accused British officials outside of Massachusetts, and the Quartering Act, which provided for the housing of British troops in Massachusetts. For many colonial clergy, these acts were a clear expression of absolute power and crossed the line of what could be morally tolerated.

The clergy of Massachusetts protested the absolutist nature of the Coercive Acts, largely due to their oppressive effects on the colonists in general and due to the fiat seizing of property by the crown which the act entailed. Charles Chauncy published a description of the sufferings experienced by the people in Boston as a result of the Boston Port Act. Writing anonymously, Chauncy told of the miseries of thousands of people in and around Boston, since “the support of this town is almost wholly dependent upon trade.”<sup>21</sup> The result of the Boston Port Act was to bring “no less . . . than fifteen thousand

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<sup>19</sup>[Allen], *Oration on the Beauties of Liberty*, 19.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid., 20. Allen likely penned and called for united resistance in at least two other works as well: [John Allen], *The American Alarm, or the Bostonian Plea, for the Rights and Liberties of the People* (Boston: D. Kneeland and N. Davies, 1773); and [John Allen], *The Watchman's Alarm to Lord North* (Salem, MA: E. Russell, 1774).

<sup>21</sup>[Charles Chauncy], *A Letter to a Friend* (Boston: Greenleaf, 1774), 4.

. . . to a starving condition.”<sup>22</sup> Chauncy was convinced that relief from this act would likely not come “till hundred are starved to death, if not provided for by heaven in some unknown way or other.”<sup>23</sup> In addition to these sufferings, the principle of justice was violated by the *de facto* seizing of property by the crown. According to Chauncy, “the wharfs and landing-places in the town of Boston, which are the property of numerous individuals . . . are, as to the use of them, wherein only their value consists, wrested out of their hands, and put into the King’s, to be disposed of at his pleasure.” The reality of this was “a further aggravation of our sufferings and what [gave] the keenest edge to them.” If the king attempted to do this in London, for example, Chauncy believed that the people there would “with one united voice complain of tyranny [and] a bare-faced invasion of their rights if they were thus restrained from the use of this or the other valuable part of their property, unless by a granted license at the pleasure of his Majesty.”<sup>24</sup> Such an “arbitrary exercise of power, which indiscriminately makes the use of their rightful property dependent on pleasure at three thousand miles distance” was manifestly unjust and immoral.<sup>25</sup> Chauncy believed that it was a self-evident reality that the Boston Port Act was not only “unconstitutional” and “arbitrary” but also “rigorously hard and cruel,” with an intended design “to oblige America, by the iron hand of power, to submit to sovereign pleasure.”<sup>26</sup> As Chauncy understood it, the British “plan to be carried into execution, and by forcible measures, is entire submission to the demands of despotism, instead of those constitutional laws we are perfectly willing to be governed

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<sup>22</sup>[Chauncy], *Letter to a Friend*, 6.

<sup>23</sup>*Ibid.*, 11.

<sup>24</sup>*Ibid.*, 12.

<sup>25</sup>*Ibid.*, 12-13.

<sup>26</sup>*Ibid.*, 19, 24.

by.”<sup>27</sup>

The orthodox Congregational minister Ebenezer Baldwin in Danbury, Connecticut, agreed with Chauncy about the absolutist and oppressive nature of the Coercive Acts. Baldwin believed that the threat to the colonists posed by the Coercive Acts was even greater than the threat posed by Edmund Andros in the 1680s. According to Baldwin,

Under the administration of Sir Edmund Andros, near ninety years ago, very gloomy indeed was the prospect to our fathers, yet in many respects, not so gloomy as at the present day. Charters, it is true, were then taken away, but they were taken away under color of law, upon trial in courts of justice. But now they are taken away without so much as a presence of law, without so much as a trial, or a hearing of the party concerned, by the almost omnipotent power claimed by the British parliament. . . . At that time the arbitrary measures pursued proceeded only from an arbitrary prince; now, from an arbitrary parliament. Then the nation was awake to the arbitrary measures pursuing, now they supinely slumber. Then Britain felt the weight of the iron hand of tyranny, while now they imagine their burdens relieved by the oppression of America. . . . It is not, therefore, without cause that the whole continent seems as it were struck with horror and amazement [and] that the attention of almost every American is roused to the present state of our public affairs.<sup>28</sup>

Although Baldwin felt that all the Coercive Acts were tyrannical and oppressive, “never was there a completer instrument of tyranny,” in his judgement, “than the Boston Port Act.”<sup>29</sup> The absolutist and oppressive nature of the British policy toward Massachusetts caused Baldwin to assert that “never was there a period so alarming to the English American colonies as the present is.”<sup>30</sup> Such a situation filled Baldwin with a sense of foreboding:

Now if the British parliament and ministry continue resolved to prosecute the measures they have entered upon, it seems we must either submit to such a dreadful state of slavery as hath been shown will be the probably issue of their measures, or must by force and arms stand up in defense of our liberties. The thought of either of

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<sup>27</sup>[Chauncy], *Letter to a Friend*, 25.

<sup>28</sup>Ebenezer Baldwin, appendix to *A Sermon Containing Scriptural Instructions to Civil Rulers*, by Samuel Sherwood (New Haven, CT: T. and S. Green, 1774), 48-49.

<sup>29</sup>*Ibid.*, 64.

<sup>30</sup>*Ibid.*, 47.

which is enough to make our blood recoil with horror.<sup>31</sup>

Such was the concern that resulted “when our lives and our property are subject to the arbitrary disposal of others.”<sup>32</sup>

A number of other clergymen in addition to Chauncy and Baldwin viewed the Coercive Acts as absolutist, oppressive, and despotic. For example, Timothy Hilliard, a Congregationalist minister in Barnstable, Massachusetts, exhorted the people of his charge to righteously bear up under “the late violent and coercive measures,” by which “thousands of innocent persons are at one stroke deprived of the means of subsistence, and left to perish with hunger if not relieved by the charity of their friends.”<sup>33</sup> With moral outrage, Hilliard continued to describe the oppressive and despotic nature of the Boston Port Act and the other Coercive Acts:

The widow and the fatherless, the aged and infirm, and the tender helpless infant are alike involved in one common calamity. If this be not oppression and persecution, it is impossible to say what is. This is a decree not to be paralleled in the history of any free people, if it was ever equaled among the most barbarous nations. . . . And as if this severe and merciless edict were not sufficient, behold, several others are passed, levelled not against a particular town, but against this whole province. Our most valuable charter rights are wrested from us without our being offered an opportunity to make any defense, and the King’s representative is vested with very extraordinary powers, utterly unknown before, either in Britain or America. And in order to put in execution these decrees, a fleet and army are sent among us that all resistance may be effectually prevented. . . . Can we help trembling for fear that our precious rights and privileges will at length be all extorted from us, and that we shall be reduced to a state of abject slavery?<sup>34</sup>

In the face of such a threat, Hilliard took the opportunity to also assert a right of resistance: “It is evidently our indispensable duty to submit to ‘every lawful ordinance of

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<sup>31</sup>Baldwin, appendix to *Sermon Containing Scriptural Instructions*, 76.

<sup>32</sup>*Ibid.*, 47. Baldwin listed common sins and failings of the colonists as a reason why God was allowing political oppression to come upon them, including the enslaving of Africans: “Are not the colonies guilty of forcibly depriving them of their natural rights? Will not the arguments we use in defense of our own liberties against the claims of the British actually conclude in their favor? And is it not easy to see there is something retributive in the present judgments of heaven? We keep our fellow men in slavery—heaven is suffering others to enslave us” (*ibid.*, 78).

<sup>33</sup>Timothy Hilliard, *The duty of a People under the oppression of Man, to seek deliverance from God* (Boston: Greenleaf, 1774), 23-24.

<sup>34</sup>*Ibid.*, 24-25.

man for the Lord's sake.' But if rulers abuse their power and invade the rights of their subjects, the obligation to submission ceases, and it becomes a duty to oppose them."<sup>35</sup>

Samuel Sherwood, Congregationalist clergyman in Fairfield, Connecticut, also responded in strong tones to the 1774 Coercive Acts. Sherwood expressed his grief over the "great numbers" in Massachusetts that were "reduced to a suffering state and [have] become real objects of charity, being turned out of the means by which they procured their daily bread."<sup>36</sup> Sherwood viewed the oppressions then being grievously suffered in Massachusetts as follows: "The port and harbor of Boston has, for some time, been shut up, their trade and commerce stopped, their charter-right invaded, the security of their lives, liberties and properties taken away; with an armed force in the midst of them, to heighten their distress, and bring on their complete ruin."<sup>37</sup> Sherwood believed that these expressions of political absolutism posed a significant threat to all of the American colonies:

All of the most judicious and sensible part of the inhabitants throughout the whole continent of America view themselves as interested and concerned in the consequences of this dispute and expect to stand or fall by the issue of it. . . . Some other colony or province will, no doubt, [soon also] be taken in hand, and so the horrid and execrable scene of tyranny and oppression [will] be vigorously prosecuted from place to place until it spread over the whole continent. . . . We are certainly threatened with the loss of our precious liberties and privileges and of all our dear valuable interests. . . . We are further threatened with being deprived of all our civil privileges and brought under a most cruel, arbitrary and tyrannical kind of government. The scheme of government planned out for Boston is in its whole frame and constitution, completely despotic and arbitrary. The will of the chief ruler is the law, and the subject holds his estate, and even life, only during his pleasure. This arbitrary government will, no doubt, be carried to its greatest extent through all the American colonies.<sup>38</sup>

This is how Sherwood viewed the "system of tyranny and oppression and the severe, unexampled acts of parliament" port forth in the Coercive Acts, which "if carried into

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<sup>35</sup>Hilliard, *Duty of a People under the oppression of Man*, 28.

<sup>36</sup>Sherwood, *Scriptural Instructions to Civil Rulers*, 32.

<sup>37</sup>*Ibid.*, 33.

<sup>38</sup>*Ibid.*, 33, 36.

execution in the full length and breadth of them will not only diminish our estates, but strip us of all our substance and reduce us to the condition of slaves that have no possession or property to call their own.”<sup>39</sup>

The 1774 Coercive Acts had a way of solidifying and provoking the opposition of the clergy unlike any previous British policy toward the colonies. The colonial clergy viewed these acts as “unjust, oppressive, and cruel,” and an undeniable expression of political absolutism that threatened the colonists’ ability to sustain their lives and live as a free people, thus reducing them to “slavery and beggary.”<sup>40</sup> The Boston Port Act, especially, had the effect of galvanizing opposition and encouraging sentiments of resistance that led to an open conflict with Britain. Such acts made arguments for political resistance increasingly based upon the justice and duty of self-defense and defensive warfare.

### **The Argument for Defensive Warfare Prior to 1765**

The right of self-defense and defensive warfare was a major part of the justification for armed resistance to the British in the 1770s.<sup>41</sup> The American clergy increasingly spoke not only of a right but a moral duty to defend the lives of themselves and the generations who would come after them in the face of the Coercive Acts, and especially of the Boston Port Act which subjected the lives of many to potential starvation. The absolutist and oppressive policies of the British government toward Massachusetts pushed colonial leaders to argue for political resistance in the 1760s and

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<sup>39</sup>Sherwood, *Scriptural Instructions to Civil Rulers*, 34.

<sup>40</sup> Samuel Webster, *The Misery and Duty of an oppress'd and enslav'd People* (Boston: Edes and Gill, 1774), 24, 28.

<sup>41</sup>John Phillip Reid has argued that natural rights and natural law arguments played a very minor role in the Revolutionary period. The only natural right that was widely agreed upon, according to Reid, was the right of self-defense. In his words: “It is possible that there was only one right that everyone agreed was natural, the right to self defense” (John Philip Reid, *Constitutional History of the American Revolution* [Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 2003], 1:89).

1770s increasingly on the grounds of self-defense.

In making an argument for political resistance on the grounds of self-defense, the Revolutionary-era clergy were acting with ample precedent from those within their own theological tradition. Reformed theologians in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries argued that laws respecting trade and possessions at times may obligate resistance to one's own political authorities in order to defend one's very life. One of the earliest Reformed resistance writers, the Marian exile to Geneva, John Ponet, argued that a wicked king was to be deposed who "spoils the people of their goods, either by open violence, making his ministers to take it from them without payment thereof, or promising and never paying."<sup>42</sup> Ponet gave an example of such oppression in 1556 that would have sounded prescient to those who were suffering under the Boston Port Act in the 1770s:

If the people are well occupied in [fruitful labor], and the people of another country live by pin making, and uttering [circulating] them: if there should be a law made that they may not sell them to their neighboring country, which is otherwise well occupied, it is a wicked and an unjust law. For taking away the means, whereby they live, a course is devised to kill them with famine.<sup>43</sup>

For Ponet, there is a moral obligation to not consent to such laws which are a threat to the lives of the innocent: "The blood of innocents shall be demanded . . . of those that [either] make or consent to wicked laws . . . to spoil them of that they justly enjoy."<sup>44</sup>

The Scottish theologian Samuel Rutherford also made self-defense a fundamental part of his justification for resisting the oppression of unjust rulers in his *Lex, Rex* (1644). Rutherford argued at length that a people may righteously "take up arms" against their civil authorities "in their own innocent defense."<sup>45</sup> Rutherford argued

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<sup>42</sup>John Ponet, *A Short Treatise of Politic Power* (1556; repr., Yorkshire, UK: Scholar Press, 1970), sec. 6.

<sup>43</sup>*Ibid.*, sec. 1.

<sup>44</sup>*Ibid.*, sec. 2.

<sup>45</sup>Samuel Rutherford, *Lex, Rex, or, The Law and the Prince* (Harrisonburg, VA: Sprinkle,

that the principle of “self-preservation” is natural to all creatures and that “self-defense is natural to man.” He grounded his argument for self-defense in both natural law and biblical precedent, citing David’s resistance to Saul, Elisha’s resistance to King Joram (2 Kings 6:32), and the eighty priests’ resistance to King Uzziah (2 Chronicles 26:17). In addition to natural law reasoning, then, Rutherford argued from the Old Testament accounts, especially from David’s resistance of Saul, for “the lawfulness of defensive wars.”<sup>46</sup> Like others in the Reformed resistance tradition, Rutherford, made self-defense a significant part of his justification of political resistance.<sup>47</sup>

Long before the difficulties of the 1760s and 1770s, the colonial clergy had consistently asserted both a right and a duty of self-defense and self-preservation in their published writings. In 1679, John Richardson, a Congregationalist clergyman in Newbury, Massachusetts, argued passionately for the necessity of keeping up the military arts in the colonies as a means of self-defense. Richardson rejected “the tenet of that abominable sect who would persuade us to a stoical apathy or stupidity and never to use any means of defense against wrong or injury.”<sup>48</sup> In contrast with the Anabaptist position, Richardson asserted that “God’s usual way of defending us [is] to make us instrumental to defend ourselves.” Christians therefore “ought conscientiously and carefully to furnish themselves with skill and ability to defend and maintain” not only

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1982), 139.

<sup>46</sup>Rutherford, *Lex, Rex*, 159-72.

<sup>47</sup>See for example Stephanus Junius Brutus, *Vindiciae Contra Tyrannos*, ed. George Garnett (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 63-66. William Reddinger has argued that Samuel Rutherford’s views on the noetic effects of the fall and, therefore, of political resistance as well, are outside of “traditional Protestantism, are “decidedly contrary to Calvin,” and “basically Thomistic” (William T. Reddinger, “Political Thought in Political Sermons of the American Founding Era” [PhD diss., Northern Illinois University, 2010], 103-104). Reddinger, in following Cornelius Van Til, denies the Reformed Protestant tradition’s close connection with the thought of Aquinas on the issue of natural law. For a counter to this, see Richard A. Muller, *The Unaccommodated Calvin: Studies in the Foundation of a Theological Tradition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000); and C. Scott Pryor, “God’s Bridle: John Calvin’s Application of Natural Law,” *The Journal of Law and Religion* 22 (2006): 225-54.

<sup>48</sup>J. R. Richardson, *The Necessity of a Well Experienced Souldiery* (Cambridge, MA: Samuel Green, 1679), 4.

“our lives, liberties, and estates,” but also the form of pure religion they were entrusted with.<sup>49</sup> For Richardson, it was “a duty and privilege for the people of God to prepare for war and to fight for their lives and liberties,” since “the law of nature, which is God’s law too, does ever bind us, so far as we can in a just way, to prevent any evil unjustly offered.”<sup>50</sup>

A number of colonial clergy argued similarly to Richardson in the eighteenth century as well. Samuel Mather, an orthodox Congregational clergyman in Boston, argued in 1739 for the lawfulness of warfare based both on biblical passages and by an appeal to natural law, which is “perpetual”: “It being eternally right and just that the innocent should be protected and the evil and oppressive repressed.”<sup>51</sup> Jonathan Todd, a Congregationalist minister in East Guilford, Connecticut, argued in 1747 that there are times when “war is just and needful,” namely, when it is necessary “for the defense of their country and people.”<sup>52</sup> Ebenezer Bridge, Congregational minister in Chelmsford, Massachusetts, also asserted the Christian right and duty of self-defense in 1752: “if life is dear and valuable, if the lives of our families are precious in our esteem, and if civil and religious privileges are sacred and much to be prized by a people, then are Men called now as much as ever they were, to secure and defend themselves and their valuable enjoyments of one sort and another.”<sup>53</sup> Given the perpetual threats to religious and civil liberties, “it appears necessary that men who profess Christianity should addict themselves to the military business and employment that so they may be in a readiness to

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<sup>49</sup>Richardson, *Necessity of a Well Experienced Souldiery*, 9.

<sup>50</sup>*Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>51</sup>Samuel Mather, *War is lawful, and Arms are to be proved* (Boston: T. Fleet, 1739), 11-12.

<sup>52</sup>Jonathan Todd, *The Soldier waxing Strong* (New London, CT: T. Green, 1747), 26.

<sup>53</sup>Ebenezer Bridge, *A Sermon Preach'd to the Ancient and Honorable Artillery Company in Boston* (Boston: S. Kneeland, 1752), 6.

go forth to war.”<sup>54</sup> John Lidenius, an itinerant minister to the Swedish Congregations in New Jersey and Pennsylvania, also argue strongly for the right and duty of self-defense in his 1756 sermon, *The Lawfulness of Defensive War*. Defensive warfare, Lidenius argued, is just, lawful, and inevitable when a people are “unjustly attacked” and must defend “their lives, religion, constitution, liberties, and properties.” “The justice of this kind of war,” according to Lidenius, “is lodged in the law of nature and reason, or in the law of God promulgated on Mount Sinai.”<sup>55</sup>

One of the strongest defenders of the right of self-defense in the colonial period was the Presbyterian clergyman and revivalist, Gilbert Tennent. Tennent was just as concerned with defending the rights and liberties of the colonists as he was with the conversion of souls. Tennent published numerous sermons justifying the right of self-defense and defensive warfare. In 1748 Tennent published a sermon dedicated to justifying the morality of defensive warfare.<sup>56</sup> In the first part of his sermon, Tennent argued from reason and nature for the morality of self-preservation and self-defense: “Self-preservation . . . is a principle so deeply riveted in human nature that it is unnatural to doubt of its lawfulness.”<sup>57</sup> Flowing from this innate principle of self-preservation is the duty of self-defense. Rooted in the law of nature, self-defense is “an important duty” and those who allow their lives to be unjustly taken away from them when they might

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<sup>54</sup>Bridge, *Sermon Preach'd to the Ancient and Honorable Artillery Company*, 6-7.

<sup>55</sup>John Abr. Lidenius, *The Lawfulness of Defensive War* (Philadelphia: James Chattin, 1756), 7. Passing references to the right of self-defense can be found in a large number of other colonial sermons prior to the Revolutionary era. See, for example, Samuel Cooper, *A Sermon Preached to the Ancient and Honorable Artillery Company* (Boston: J. Draper, 1751), 13-14; Samuel Davies, *Sermons on Important Subjects*, ed. Albert Barnes, (New York: Robert Carter, 1849), 3:216-28; Jonathan Ellis, *The Justice of the present War against the French in America* (Newport, RI: J. Franklin, 1755), 6-10; and Isaac Morrill, *The Soldier Exhorted* (Boston: J. Draper, 1755), 10-11.

<sup>56</sup>Gilbert Tennent, *The late Association for Defence encourag'd, or, The lawfulness of a Defensive War* (Philadelphia: William Bradford, 1748). Both sermons were bound together in this one publication.

<sup>57</sup>*Ibid.*, 10.

have prevented it are guilty of “the heinous sin” of self-murder.<sup>58</sup> Further, self-defense is a practical necessity, since it is, in the last resort, the only barrier that we have for “our lives [and] and liberties, both civil and religious, and all that is dear to us as men and as Christians.”<sup>59</sup> Tennent devoted the rest of this sermon to arguing from both the Old and New Testament to show the lawfulness of defensive warfare.<sup>60</sup> Tennent followed this sermon with two more published the same year.<sup>61</sup> In these two sermons, Tennent also argued for the morality and lawfulness of defensive wars, which aim to be “a means to preserve our own and others just rights and properties and to do justice to both.”<sup>62</sup> More than a right, Tennent argued here that it is a duty to resist with arms the wrongful oppression and harm to one’s person or property.<sup>63</sup> In 1756, Tennent repeated his argument for self-defense, arguing both from reason and from Scripture as the French and Indian War was heating up. Tennent argued here again that it was morally justified to take up arms to defend their “religious and civil privileges,” as well as their “estates and civil liberty.”<sup>64</sup>

So prior to the conflict with their British authorities, the American colonial clergy provided ample justification for future expressions of self-defense and defensive warfare. Clergyman of different theological backgrounds, Anabaptists, Quakers, and a

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<sup>58</sup>Tennent, *Late Association for Defence encourag’d*, 12-13.

<sup>59</sup>*Ibid.*, 15.

<sup>60</sup>Tennent hints at the right of resisting one’s own authorities in this sermon as well: “Now unless the magistrate punishes criminals in his own country and screens his subjects from a foreign force, what is his office but an empty name, a mere cypher of no moment and consequence to society, nor is it reasonable he should expect support, honor, and obedience from his subjects if they in consequence hereof do no obtain protection from him” (*ibid.*, 18).

<sup>61</sup>Gilbert Tennent, *The late Association for Defence, farther encouraged, or, The Consistency of Defensive War, with True Christianity* (Philadelphia: William Bradford, 1748).

<sup>62</sup>*Ibid.*, 3-4.

<sup>63</sup>*Ibid.*, 14-15.

<sup>64</sup>Gilbert Tennent, *The Happiness of Rewarding the Enemies of our Religion and Liberty* (Philadelphia: James Chatten, 1756), 29-30.

few High Church Anglicans excepted, united in making this case. In so doing, they stood in continuity with the theologians in the Reformed tradition like John Ponet and Samuel Rutherford. As British authorities attempted to force policies that seemed unlawful, unjust, and oppressive, the colonial clergy presented arguments for self-defense and defensive warfare in the 1770s that unfolded in continuity with their own theological traditions.

### **The Argument for Self-Defense in the 1770s**

Colonial clergy published numerous arguments for self-defense and defensive warfare in the 1770s. The British policies towards the colonies in the 1770s, especially after 1773, pushed the colonists and the colonial clergy to take an increasingly defensive position toward their British authorities. Arguments for self-defense and defensive warfare became increasingly common as the threat of absolutism became realized in Massachusetts. Prior to the 1773 Coercive Acts, many clergymen made arguments for self-defense and defensive warfare in passing. After 1773, more lengthy arguments for self-defense and defensive warfare appeared as the immediate need for organized defensive measures became more apparent.

In the months just following the Boston Massacre, Samuel Stillman, pastor of the First Baptist Church in Boston, preached a sermon before a military company elaborating on the character of a Christian soldier. Even in “a time of peace,” Stillman argued that military preparedness was a duty. It is always necessary to be engaged in “warlike preparations” so as to be able to defend the colony should the need arise. The principle of self-defense, according to Stillman, was fundamentally established in the “law of our nature” and was confirmed in Scripture:

Self-defense is an established law of our nature, and a first dictate of common sense; which has never been superseded by any written law of God or by the religion of Jesus. During the Old Testament dispensation, wars were entered into and carried on by divine authority and direction; which appears in many instances. . . . And some of the best of men were the greatest soldiers, as Abraham, Joshua, David, etc. And even in the New Testament we learn by implication, though not by any positive

precept, that what we understand by defensive war is lawful. When the soldiers as John what they should do, he did not take the opportunity . . . to inform them that their employment was unlawful . . . and exhorts them to be content with their wages; which plainly implies a continuance in their employment. . . . The same thing is taught us by Christ himself: “If my kingdom were of this world, then would my disciples fight.” . . . teaching us that to defend ourselves is lawful.<sup>65</sup>

Because of this, for Stillman, being a Christian and being “a good soldier are not inconsistent with each other.”<sup>66</sup>

Stillman was not the only one in the early 1770s to argue for the right of self-defense and defensive warfare. Eli Forbes, an orthodox Congregationalist minister in Gloucester, Massachusetts, argued similarly before a military audience in 1771 that self-defense was lawful and defensive warfare in the face of tyranny justifiable. According to Forbes,

[The military character] is necessary and useful for the defense of our lives, our liberties, property, and peace. . . . It is necessary to withstand the powers of hell, to resist the boundless ambition of tyrants, to curb the lawless pride of nations, and the impetuous lusts of men. To these, where the military character has been wanting or not well-supported, life and liberty, states and kingdoms, have fell, devoted victims.<sup>67</sup>

A perpetual preparedness for defensive warfare is a necessity, given the threat that stands against “our sacred and civil rights and liberties”:

As the present state of things is, and so long as divine providence preserves its ordinary course, the public tranquility cannot be long preserved, peace maintained at home, or our sacred and civil rights and liberties secured from foreign invasion of ambitious and unreasonable men, without drawing the sword in their defense. Though the sword is a devourer, yet . . . [it is] necessary to support and defend public happiness.<sup>68</sup>

Forbes thus deemed defensive warfare to be at times a necessity.

In the year proceeding the 1774 Coercive Acts, American clergymen continued

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<sup>65</sup>Samuel Stillman, *A Sermon preached To the Ancient and Honorable Artillery Company* (Boston: Edes and Gill, 1770), 26-27.

<sup>66</sup>Stillman, *Sermon preached To the Ancient and Honorable*, 32.

<sup>67</sup>Eli Forbes, *The Dignity and Importance of the Military Character illustrated* (Boston: Richard Draper, 1771), 13-14.

<sup>68</sup>*Ibid.*, 18-19.

to assert the right of self-defense and defensive warfare. Two clergymen in particular stand out for their expressions of the principle of self-defense in 1773. The first, Simeon Howard, a Congregationalist minister in Boston, argued at great length for the morality of defensive warfare in a substantial sermon on the subject. In this sermon, Howard argued for the lawfulness of defensive warfare and described in great detail what lawful self-defense should look like. The first step that should be taken when one's life or liberty is threatened, according to Howard, is to try "gentle methods" of self-defense, such as pleading, persuasion, or avoidance.<sup>69</sup> If these methods do not work, one is not obligated "patiently to take the injury and suffer himself to be robbed of his liberty or his life, if the adversary sees fit to take it." Howard appealed to natural law at this point, and asserted that

nature certainly forbids this tame submission, and loudly calls to a more vigorous defense. Self-preservation is one of the strongest and universal principles of the human mind, and this principle allows of everything necessary to self-defense, opposing force to force and violence to violence. This is so universally allowed that I need not attempt to prove it.<sup>70</sup>

Howard went on from here to argue for the morality of defensive war, arguing from the New Testament to prove that "it was not the design of this divine institution [i.e. the New Testament] to take away from mankind the natural right of defending their liberty, even by the sword."<sup>71</sup> While "only defensive war . . . can be justified in the sight of God," Howard argues that military preemption may be allowable as well:

An innocent people threatened with war are not always obliged to receive the first attack. This may prove fatal, or occasion an irreparable damage. When others have sufficiently manifested an injurious or hostile intention and persist in it, notwithstanding all the admonition and remonstrance we can make, we may, in order to avoid the blow they are meditating against us, begin the assault.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>69</sup>Simeon Howard, *A Sermon Preached to the Ancient and Honorable Artillery-Company* (Boston: John Boylls, 1773), 13.

<sup>70</sup>*Ibid.*, 14.

<sup>71</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>72</sup>*Ibid.*, 21.

Howard based his argument from Scripture for his position on inferences made from the following New Testament passages: John 18:36, Acts 10, Romans 12:18, and Revelation 11:7, 13:7, 14:19–20, 17:14, and 19:14–21. Howard believed it was clear from these passages that defensive warfare is not “inconsistent with the spirit of the gospel.”<sup>73</sup>

Charles Turner’s Massachusetts election sermon also asserted a right and duty of self-defense in 1773. Turner, a Congregationalist minister in Duxbury, Massachusetts, argued in this important sermon that the people have a duty to secure “a constitution, together with . . . religion and virtue” in order that “the public may not suffer.” This duty of the people to do whatever is necessary to secure a righteous government, according to Turner, “arises from the regard they owe to the great immutable law of self-preservation and . . . the laws of Christian charity.”<sup>74</sup> The principles of self-preservation and self-defense are “perfectly consonant to right reason and to the word of God” and are also implicit expressions of loyalty to the Hanoverian monarchy. Turner viewed his position as consistent with

certainly such principles as were adopted and acted upon, at the [Glorious] Revolution, and which cannot be consistently called into question by those who pretend the least regard to the continuation of our present royal family in the government. The advancement of everything of an opposite tenor is a virtual, secret, and treasonable undermining the throne of the present chief magistrate in the British dominions.<sup>75</sup>

Turner also asserted the traditional Protestant doctrine of resistance in this work, arguing from Romans 13 that when civil authorities go against God’s design for their office, do disservice to the people, and adopt measures that tend toward their ruin, “submission becomes a fault and resistance a virtue.” In light of this, Turner referred to “passive

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<sup>73</sup>Howard, *Sermon Preached to the Ancient and Honorable Artillery-Company*, 17.

<sup>74</sup>Charles Turner, *A Sermon Preached before his Excellency Thomas Hutchinson* (Boston: Richard Draper, 1773), 31.

<sup>75</sup>*Ibid.*, 31-32.

obedience and non-resistance” doctrine as “criminal” and a “high abusive scandal to the Christian religion.”<sup>76</sup>

Once the Coercive Acts were passed in 1774, more colonial clergymen published arguments for the right and duty of self-defense and defensive warfare, including Elisha Fish, John Lathrop, and Jehu Minor. Jehu Minor, a Congregationalist minister in South Britain, Connecticut, also asserted in his 1774 *Military Discourse* the “right to maintain and defend their lives and property against all encroachments.”<sup>77</sup>

Elisha Fish, a Congregationalist clergyman in Upton, Massachusetts, laid out a full justification of defensive warfare in his *The Art of War Lawful and Necessary for a Christian People*. Fish argued in this published discourse that it is a duty for Christian people to be prepared to defend themselves with arms because of the natural duty of self-preservation:

The lawfulness of acquiring art in war, by a Christian people, may be strictly proved from the nature and reason of things. For if it be in the nature and reason of things lawful for Christians to enjoy their lives, liberties and property, it must be lawful, in the same nature and reason of things, to use the means necessary to defend and preserve these enjoyments, for to suppose a right to life, liberty and property, and no right to the means necessary for the defense and preservation of the same, is one of the greatest absurdities in nature. Therefore, in the preceding view of this point, we may surely conclude, it is lawful for Christians to learn and use the art of war, for their own defense and safety, and the defense and safety of others, as the case shall require.<sup>78</sup>

Fish argued that the natural right and duty of self-preservation is not overturned by the special instructions given to Christians in Scripture, but is instead confirmed. It is

needful for Christians to use the art of war as a part of their natural, and so necessary defense, seeing they lose none of their natural rights by becoming Christians. Now, if any should allow, that it belongs to men, as men, to use all the proper and lawful means to preserve their natural rights, and as such, they may use the art of war; but allow not the necessity or propriety for Christians to use this

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<sup>76</sup>Turner, *A Sermon Preached before his Excellency*, 33.

<sup>77</sup>Jehu Minor, *A Military Discourse, wherein is considered, The Origin of War* (New Haven, CT: Thomas and Samuel Green, 1774), 11.

<sup>78</sup>Elisha Fish, *The Art of War Lawful, and Necessary for a Christian People* (Boston: Thomas and John Fleet, 1774), 8.

means of self-preservation, this is in effect to deny that the common rights of men are allowed and necessary for Christians, one of the most strange positions ever devised by mortals.<sup>79</sup>

Followers of Christ have a duty to defend themselves and to take up arms as a means of preserving and defending what rightfully belongs to them. Defensive warfare is necessary when rulers oppress their own people and threaten what is rightfully theirs.

Defense warfare is necessary

when it is considered as the only sure check on designing and ambitious rulers, who are so often attempting to enslave and oppress those for whose good they are advanced to power and authority, and only can be awed by the evidence that the people are used to the art of war, and therefore have it in their power to right themselves when the case requires it. . . . The best constitution in the world will not restrain such rulers whilst they have nothing to fear from the power of the people. . . . The art of war, for a Christian people, to preserve their own natural, civil and religious rights is most necessary and important.<sup>80</sup>

Warfare is justified, for Fish, when it is for the purpose of self-defense. A “lawful war” is one which is for “the defense and recovery of human rights,” or “an act of benevolence to human creatures,” or one which is executed “in obedience to an immediate command of God in executing his just vengeance on the wicked.”<sup>81</sup> Similarly to Fish, John Lathrop, the liberal pastor of the Second Congregational Church in Boston, argued that defensive warfare was justified in his 1774 artillery election sermon as well. Lathrop connected his justification of defensive warfare with a rejection of the doctrine of passive obedience, stating that political resistance and even warfare against one’s own rulers is justified when it is necessary as a means of self-defense.<sup>82</sup> Lathrop argued that

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<sup>79</sup>Fish, *Art of War Lawful*, 8-9.

<sup>80</sup>*Ibid.*, 9.

<sup>81</sup>*Ibid.*, 14.

<sup>82</sup>John Lathrop, *A Sermon Preached To the Ancient and Honorable Artillery-Company in Boston* (Boston: Kneeland and Davis, 1774), 8, 18. Lathrop regarded the doctrines of absolute submission, passive obedience, and non-resistance as generally discredited in his day: “About a hundred years ago, when the throne of Great Britain was held by arbitrary princes, many clergymen who, we may suppose, set a higher value on preferments than they did on civil liberty or the rights of conscience, appeared zealous advocates for passive obedience and non-resistance, and were wicked enough to denounce the punishment of eternal damnation against those who ventured to oppose the most tyrannical monarch. But that slavish doctrine is now generally exploded” (*ibid.*, 21).

we may and ought to resist and even make war against those rulers who leap the bounds prescribed them by the constitution and attempt to oppress and enslave the subjects, is a principle on which alone the great revolutions which have taken place in our nation can be justified.<sup>83</sup>

Lathrop appealed to the Reformed tradition on this point, stating that the principle of resistance was adopted by “Luther, Calvin, Melancthon, Zwingli, Augustine, and the reformers in general.”<sup>84</sup> He also appealed also to the ancient history of the church, quoting from the commentaries of Chrysostom on Matthew 26:15 and Romans 13:5, which noted that civil authorities are under God’s law and that the sword might but justly taken up as a means of self-defense.<sup>85</sup> Lathrop closed his appeal with a strong protest of the Intolerable Acts and a passionate call for unified and organized armed resistance. In his words, there was a “necessity of preparing for unavoidable war.”<sup>86</sup>

Three clergymen more orthodox than Lathrop provided strong and direct justifications of defensive warfare in the year that armed conflict broke out between British troops and colonials. John Carmichael, a Presbyterian minister from Lancaster, Pennsylvania, David Jones, a Baptist minister from Chester, Pennsylvania, and Robert Cooper, a Presbyterian also from Chester, each penned justifications of defensive warfare in 1775. These defenses were likely aimed at Pennsylvania Quakers, who generally believed that taking up arms for the purpose of self-defense was immoral. David Jones’s *Defensive War in a Just Cause Sinless* was written to persuade those influenced by

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<sup>83</sup>Lathrop, *Sermon Preached To the Ancient and Honorable*, 23.

<sup>84</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>85</sup>*Ibid.*, 24.

<sup>86</sup>*Ibid.*, 28. For another publication in 1774 protesting the Intolerable Acts, see John Lathrop, *A Discourse Preached . . . In thanksgiving to God for the Blessings enjoyed* (Boston: D. Kneeland, 1774). Lathrop here stated that the Boston Port Act had resulted in “thousands [being] reduced to poverty and distress” (*ibid.*, 21). Lathrop was not a firebrand for armed conflict with Britain, but believed that resistance to Great Britain would be used only when absolutely necessary as a means of self-defense: “Nothing but the last extremity . . . can ever prevail with us to make resistance. We glory in our attachment to the house of Hanover. We consider Britain our native land. We shall therefore bear much, we shall suffer many hardships, before we can entertain a single wish to the disadvantage of our brethren on the other side [of] the Atlantic. We *never* will rebel against the Sovereign of the British dominions. However provoked, however oppressed, however threatened with slavery and wretchedness, we will never be excited to any other resistance than what the impartial world shall judge absolutely necessary to our own defense” (*ibid.*, 14).

Quaker sentiments that “in some cases, when a people are oppressed, insulted, and abused and can have no other redress, it then becomes our duty as men, with our eyes to God, to fight for our liberties and properties; or, in other words, that a defensive war is sinless before God.”<sup>87</sup> Jones used Scriptural arguments for his position, starting with Abraham, Moses, Joshua, the judges, and David.<sup>88</sup> He also argued from the precedent of the Glorious Revolution and the resistance of the British to James II.<sup>89</sup> Jones then answered objections that were commonly brought against his position from Romans 13 and 1 Peter 2, stating that his position on political resistance and defensive warfare was consistent with the Reformed tradition.<sup>90</sup> In his words, “Calvin and Luther were of this faith.”<sup>91</sup> John Carmichael’s *A Self-Defensive War Lawful* was also published in 1775 to advance the point that war “is, at times, by reason of certain circumstances, so unavoidable that it is our duty to enter into it.”<sup>92</sup> Carmichael argued both “from the light of nature and divine revelation” that self-preservation is lawful, and therefore self-defense and defensive warfare are also lawful and at times “unavoidable and necessary.”<sup>93</sup> Through a variety of arguments, Carmichael sought to prove “from the light of nature, from the reason of things, from the Old and New Testament, as well as

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<sup>87</sup>David Jones, *Defensive War in a just Cause Sinless* (Philadelphia: Henry Miller, 1775), 6.

<sup>88</sup>*Ibid.*, 9-11.

<sup>89</sup>*Ibid.*, 11-12.

<sup>90</sup>*Ibid.*, 12-15.

<sup>91</sup>*Ibid.*, 15. By 1775 Jones believed that the time for defensive warfare was at hand: “We have no choice left to us, but to submit to absolute slavery and despotism or as free-men to stand in our own defense and endeavor a noble resistance. Matters are at last brought to this deplorable extremity. Every reasonable method of reconciliation has been tried in vain. Our addresses to our king have been treated with neglect or contempt. . . . We cannot submit to be slaves. We were born free, and we can die free. Only attend to the voice of Parliament, viz. “That they have a right to make laws to bind us in all cases whatsoever.” Even our religion is not excepted—they assume a right to bind us in all cases. Agreeable to this proposition, they may oblige us to support popish priests, on pain of death. They have already given us a specimen of the good effects of their assumed power, in establishing popery in near one half of North America. Is not this the loudest call to arms? All is at stake” (*ibid.*, 18-19).

<sup>92</sup>John Carmichael, *A Self-defensive War lawful* (Philadelphia: John Dean, 1775), 9.

<sup>93</sup>*Ibid.*, 12.

from the example of Christ and his apostles that a self-defensive war is lawful.”<sup>94</sup> Robert Cooper’s *Courage in a Good Cause* also argued from these three sources that “it may not only be lawful, but a duty to engage in war” when “the governing part of the nation attempt to abuse the power committed to them” and pursue “tyrannical designs.”<sup>95</sup>

Clergyman like Jones, Carmichael, and Cooper carried forward the justification of self-defense and defensive warfare into the phase of the colonial struggle against the British when armed conflict against the British was beginning to break out. The Coercive Acts made resistance to the British a matter of self-defense, and self-defense became a primary motive for the clergy who supported political resistance to the British.

### Conclusion

As the Revolutionary War in America was unfolding in 1779, one calling himself “A Moderate Whig” published *Defensive Arms Vindicated and the Lawfulness of the American War Made Manifest*. This pamphlet appealed to both biblical and natural law arguments and also stated that

the lawfulness of taking up arms to oppose all tyranny, oppression, and those who abuse and misuse their authority . . . is sufficiently made manifest by the most famous and learned patrons and champions for this excellent privilege of mankind, the unanswerable authors of *Lex Rex*, *The Apologetical Relation*, *Naphtali*, and *Jus Populi Vindicatum*.<sup>96</sup>

Scholars once believed that an individual named Stephen Case was the author of *Defensive Arms Vindicated*, but it has recently been discovered that this work was

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<sup>94</sup>Carmichael, *A Self-defensive War lawful*, 18.

<sup>95</sup>Robert Cooper, *Courage in a Good Cause; or The Lawful and Courageous Use of the Sword* (Lancaster, PA: Francis Bailey, 1775), 5-6, 9. Cooper recalled when such resistance was necessary in “that critical and memorable era” of “the revolution [of 1689].” He also rejoiced that since that time “the doctrine of unlimited passive obedience and non-resistance has been exploded by Britons” (ibid., 9).

<sup>96</sup>A Moderate Whig, *Defensive Arms Vindicated* (n.p., 1783), 7. All of these books are in the seventeenth-century Reformed political resistance tradition, the first being authored by Samuel Rutherford, the second by John Brown of Wamphrey (1665), and the last two by James Stewart (1669).

actually an edited reprinting of the Scottish Covenanter Alexander Shield's defense of political resistance printed in 1687 under the title, *A Hind Let Loose*.<sup>97</sup> What was presented during the American Revolution as the reasoning of a "moderate Whig" was actually and quite literally the production of a Scottish Covenanter of the seventeenth century.<sup>98</sup>

The repackaging of seventeenth-century Reformed argument for self-defense in the 1779 *Defensive Arms Vindicated* is illustrative of the strong line of continuity that existed between colonial clergy who called for political resistance in the 1770s with their pre-Lockean seventeenth-century forbearers. The argument for self-defense was a major part of the colonial clergy's justification of political resistance, and this argument was in continuity with their own theological tradition. Colonial clergy like Fish, Lathrop, Minor, Carmichael, and Jones called for armed resistance to their own British authorities when they felt pushed into doing so as an expression of self-defense. The arguments they used for self-defense in the 1770s stand in continuity with the arguments put forth by Richardson, Todd, Bridge, Lidenius, Samuel Mather, and Gilbert Tennent in the pre-Revolutionary period. All of these used biblical arguments and natural law reasoning in presenting their justification of resistance to oppression and political absolutism. While the position of the clergymen regarding self-defense and political resistance in the 1770s remained generally consistent with their inherited theological tradition, it was the increasingly absolutist policies of the British that provoked a change in the relationship between the colonists and their British authorities.

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<sup>97</sup>Ellis Sandoz, ed., *Political Sermons of the American Founding Era, 1730–1805*, 2nd ed., (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1998), 1:712-14. When Sandoz first published this collection of sermons in 1991, *Defensive Arms Vindicated* was tentatively ascribed to Stephen Case. Not until the second edition was released in 1998 was Sandoz aware of the seventeenth-century provenance of this sermon (ibid., xxv).

<sup>98</sup>In Sandoz's words: "While the question of Stephen Case's possible role in the publication of [*Defensive Arms Vindicated*] partly remains, the origin of the documents now has been established. It is certain that Case is not the author of the pamphlet. Rather, it is an edited reprinting of a chapter bearing the identical title from a volume written a century earlier by Alexander Shields, *A Hind Let Loose*" (ibid., 712).

## CHAPTER 5

### THE BRITISH CLERGY'S SUPPORT FOR AMERICAN RESISTANCE (1770-1783)

The American clergy's arguments for political resistance during the Revolution era were not distinctly American or unique to the American clergy. Historians often frame the American Revolution as a war between colonial Americans and the British, as if the dividing feature between the two sides was one of nationality or geographic identity. In actual fact, the bulk of the colonists in America viewed themselves as fully British and loyal to the principles of the British constitution. The division between the two conflicting sides began largely over the question of the extent of Parliamentary authority over the colonies. Parliament in 1766 declared that it had authority over the colonies "in all cases whatsoever," and many on both sides of the Atlantic viewed this as a dangerous expression of political absolutism. By 1775 the division had shifted slightly to the broader question of whether British colonials were guaranteed the same basic rights of free-born Englishman as those living in England. These rights included the right to be taxed only by the consent of one's representatives, the right to jury trial by one's peers, and the right to use and enjoy one's property. British policies in the 1760s and 1770s reversed the previous policy of "salutary neglect" toward the colonies and undercut the general practice of local self-governance and the relative autonomy the colonies had long enjoyed. The question of freedom of religion also hung in the air as the debate over bishops stirred the fears of many and conjured up the memory of oppressions suffered under William Laud and Edmund Andros.

As the patriots and loyalists divided in America, those in Britain similarly took differing sides as to who was in the right. There were many in Britain who spoke out to

defend the political, civil, and religious rights of the Americans, just as there were many in America who believed that the British government was well within its legal powers in all its actions.<sup>1</sup> The conflict is best understood, then, as a second British civil war.<sup>2</sup> This is in fact how many at the time understood it. When the Virginia House of Burgesses first heard news of the Boston Port Act in 1774, it passed a resolution calling for fasting and prayer, urging the people of Virginia “to implore the divine interposition for averting the heavy calamity which threatens destruction to our civil rights and the evils of civil war.”<sup>3</sup> John Carmichael, a Presbyterian minister in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, similarly opined in 1775, “Oh what an awful dark cloud, pregnant with all the horrors of civil war, hangs now over this whole continent of British America.”<sup>4</sup>

Mark Noll has argued that the clergy who supported the American Revolution and justified resistance to the British did so in a significant break from both their Christian and British traditions. Following Bernard Bailyn’s Neo-Whig interpretation of the American Revolution, Noll has emphasized the role that British libertarianism and

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<sup>1</sup>For British support of the American patriots, see Neil L. York, ed., *The Crisis: A British Defense of American Rights, 1775–1776* (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 2016); Jerome R. Reich, *British Friends of the American Revolution* (New York: Routledge, 2015); Paul H. Smith, ed., *English Defenders of American Freedoms, 1774–1778* (Washington, DC: Library of Congress, 1972); and Sheldon S. Cohen, *British Supporters of the American Revolution, 1775–1783: The Role of the ‘Middle Level’ Activists* (Rochester, NY: Boydell & Brewer, 2004).

<sup>2</sup>William Pitt stated in 1775 that the majority in the British Parliament were not just engaged in a conflict against Americans, but against many within the British Empire: “It is not merely three millions of people, the produce of America, we have to combat with in this unnatural struggle; many more are on their side, dispersed over the face of this wide empire. Every Whig in this country is for them. Ireland is with them to a man; nay, even those Englishmen who may now be temporarily inactive . . . when they come to weigh the great line of right, which their brethren in America are contending for, the sense of their own danger will instruct them to range themselves on their side” (William Pitt, *The Speech of the Right Honorable, The Earl of Chatham, In the House of Lords, Jan. 20, 1775* [n.p., 1775], 9).

<sup>3</sup>Bernard Knollenberg, *Growth of the American Revolution: 1766–1775* (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 2003), 149-50.

<sup>4</sup>John Carmichael, *A Self-defensive War lawful* (Philadelphia: John Dean, 1775), 27. For British descriptions of the conflict as a civil war, see John Wesley, *A Seasonable Address to the More Serious Part of the Inhabitants of Great-Britain* (Bristol: W. Pine, 1776), 5; John Coleridge, *Government not originally proceeding from Human Agency, but Divine Institution* (London: J. Rivington, 1777), 1-2; S. Worsley, *Serious Reflections addressed to all parties on The Present State of American Affairs* (London: J. Buckland, [1777]), 14; and John Duncombe, *The Civil War between the Israelites and Benjamites illustrated and applied* (Canterbury: T. Smith, 1778).

political radicalism played in the thought of the American patriots, including the clergy.<sup>5</sup> This becomes, for Noll, one link in his argument that Christianity in America developed in a distinctly American direction beginning at the American Revolution. For Noll, the “Christian Republicanism” that lies behind the clergy’s arguments in favor of resisting the British, together with the philosophy of Common Sense Realism, accounts for the origins of American evangelicalism, which is distinct from British Christianity and co-opted by elements of Enlightenment rationalism.<sup>6</sup>

The presence of numerous clergymen in Britain who supported American resistance to British policy in the 1760s and 1770s calls into question the assertion that the clergy’s justification of political resistance was distinctly American. Many clergymen in Britain justified political resistance to the British alongside their colonial counterparts, arguing for political resistance on similar grounds. This reality points to an overall continuity of thought that many Revolutionary-era clergy in America shared with their clerical counterparts in Britain. Far from being distinctly American, the clergy who called for political resistance in America were very much in harmony with a significant stream of British theological thought.

### **The British Clergy’s Doctrine of Political Resistance**

Many British clergymen during the time of the American Revolution continued to assert the same doctrine and arguments for political resistance that clergymen in the first half of the eighteenth century like Benjamin Hoadly and Thomas Bradbury had publicly argued for in their numerous sermons and publications. The orthodox Congregationalist Thomas Bradbury had argued in 1714 for the lawfulness of resisting

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<sup>5</sup>Mark A. Noll, Nathan O. Hatch, George M. Marsden, *The Search for Christian America* (Westchester, IL: Crossway, 1983), 81.

<sup>6</sup>Mark A. Noll, *America’s God: From Jonathan Edwards to Abraham Lincoln* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 53-113.

tyrants in one of his many November 5th sermons, and many clergymen in the 1760s and 1770s continued to argue that resistance to tyrannical, arbitrary, and oppressive rulers was morally justified and even sometimes morally required.<sup>7</sup>

Church of England clergymen did not generally advocate for the right of resistance during the 1760s and 1770s, but Richard Watson, a Cambridge professor of theology and later Bishop of Llandaff, stands out as a notable exception. Watson preached a sermon before the University of Cambridge on May 29, 1776, in which he argued that political resistance and even revolution is sometimes justified:

If the nobility, forgetting the duty they owe the people in return for the rank and distinction they enjoy above the other members of the community, should ever abet the arbitrary designs of the crown; if the commons should become so wholly selfish and corrupt, as to be ready to support any men and any measures; if lastly the king should be so ignorant as his true interest, or so ill-advised as to use such degenerate parliaments as the tools of tyrannic [*sic*] government, then we have no doubts in asserting that the people will have a full right to resume the reins of government into their own hands, to lop off the rotten gangrened members, and to purge the corruptions of the body politic in any manner they shall think most meet.<sup>8</sup>

Ultimately it is the collective body of the people who hold the legislature accountable: “Who shall be the judge, whether the legislature has violated the ends of its establishment or not? Who, but those by whose authority it was first ordained and for whose benefit it is still maintained—the people. . . . To the people, then, I repeat it, is the legislature ultimately accountable for the execution of its trust.”<sup>9</sup> The following October, Watson preached another sermon to the University of Cambridge where he argued against the doctrines of absolute obedience and non-resistance. In his assessment, “the doctrine of non-resistance has been principally founded upon a distorted interpretation of some few passages in the epistles, and, in particular, the thirteenth chapter of St. Paul’s epistle to

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<sup>7</sup>Thomas Bradbury, *The Lawfulness of Resisting Tyrants* (London: S. Keimer, 1714).

<sup>8</sup>Richard Watson, *The Principles of the Revolution vindicated* (Cambridge: J. Archdeacon, 1776), 11.

<sup>9</sup>*Ibid.*, 11-12.

the Romans has been pressed into the service of tyranny.”<sup>10</sup> Watson was chastised for his assertion of resistance doctrine by the High Church advocate William Stevens, who scolded him for obliquely giving countenance to those then “rebell[ing]” in America.<sup>11</sup>

In contrast with the bulk of Church of England clergyman, most dissenting ministers in England during the time of the American Revolution were of one mind on distinguishing between lawful authority and unlawful exertions of power. This is due to the fact that dissenting ministers in England continued to face penal laws which they themselves rejected and viewed as illegitimate.<sup>12</sup> These ministers taught that Christians were under a moral obligation from God to submit to lawful authority, but they were not obligated to submit to unlawful exertions of authority. Instead, Christians possessed a right and a duty to resist unlawful, oppressive exertions of political power. These dissenting clergy who argued in the 1760s and 1770s for the right of resistance in Britain held to a wide range of differing theological positions, and one’s adherence to a right of resistance is not linked to either theological liberalism or conservatism. What united these dissenting clergymen was their opposition to the authoritarian hierarchicalism of High Church Episcopalians and those in the British government that sought to repress the civil and religious liberty of British dissenters.

George Walker was a dissenting minister in England who upheld the right of resistance, even as British soldiers were attempting to defeat George Washington and his army across the ocean. Theologically, Walker espoused Arianism while serving as a

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<sup>10</sup>Richard Watson, *A Sermon preached before the University of Cambridge on October 25, 1776* (Cambridge: J. Archdeacon, 1776), 3.

<sup>11</sup>For Stevens’s response to Watson’s two sermons, see [William Stevens], *Strictures on a Sermon, Entitled, The Principles of the Revolution vindicated* (Cambridge: J. Woodyer, [1776]); and [William Stevens], *The Revolution Vindicated and Constitutional Liberty Asserted* (Cambridge: J. Woodyer, 1777). For Steven’s own political position, see [William Stevens], *A Discourse on the English Constitution* (London: G. Robinson, 1776).

<sup>12</sup>James E. Bradley, *Religion, Revolution, and English Radicalism: Nonconformity in Eighteenth-Century Politics and Society* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 154.

clergyman in Nottingham, England, and was a noted mathematician as well.<sup>13</sup> In 1779 Walker published a sermon entitled *The Duty and Character of a National Soldier*, in which he argued for a right of political resistance based on the uniqueness of the British Constitution and “the free and equal law” that God had divinely entrusted to the British.<sup>14</sup> In a unique way, according to Walker, the British government combined the three forms of human government, namely, government by a king, government by the nobles, and government by the people, into one system, with the power of each composite part limited and circumscribed by law.<sup>15</sup> Such a balanced system is intended to prevent “that abuse of power . . . which has ever been found to spring from the rule of one, the factions of the great, and the wild tumults of the headless multitude.”<sup>16</sup> No branch has absolute power and is limited by the prerogative of others and by law. According to Walker, it is the moral duty of Englishmen to resist anything that seeks to undermine the balance of the British constitution:

[Englishmen] should watch with a jealous eye every encroachment of power in each of them and be assured that if the smallest encroachments do not meet a timely redress, the evil will increase, the glory and the blessing of Englishmen will pass away, and they will soon be numbered with the slaves of other nations, who crawl upon the earth and hold life and every sacred property at the insolent and cruel will of an usurping superior.<sup>17</sup>

It was the duty of every citizen to resist any command or exertion of power that transgressed the bounds and designs of the English Constitution.<sup>18</sup> In this sermon, Walker also asserted his justification of political resistance in the context of English history, with the oppressive absolutism of Charles I—“that deluded prince [who]

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<sup>13</sup>Bradley, *Religion, Revolution, and English Radicalism*, 131.

<sup>14</sup>[George Walker], *The Duty and Character of a National Soldier* (London: J. Johnson, 1779), 20.

<sup>15</sup>*Ibid.*, 23.

<sup>16</sup>*Ibid.*, 22.

<sup>17</sup>*Ibid.*, 25.

<sup>18</sup>*Ibid.*, 26.

endeavored to make his arbitrary will the law to parliament and the people”—in the background.<sup>19</sup> He also wrote with the resistance shown to James II during the Glorious Revolution also in view:

In the reign of James II, when the passive and unreserved obedience, not of the soldier only but of every subject, was the courtly doctrine, and on this base theme the very pulpits preached what disgraced the New Testament as much as human nature, an English army laid down their arms in the presence of their king, rather than obey in what was forbidden by the religion and laws of their country. And on the conduct of this army in all probability turned the future fate of England. . . . Those in whom his last confidence was placed, knew the limit of obedience even to their king; loyalty to the laws and to their country was their first concern, and with decency but firmness they took back their faith from a prince who hoped by their hands to enslave three kingdoms.<sup>20</sup>

The obedience that citizens owe to their dictates of their government, then, is limited by the obedience that is due to a higher authority. Obedience is due, for Walker, first of all to God, then to one’s country, then to the laws, and lastly to the king.<sup>21</sup> Obedience to civil authority is not absolute: “When we speak of loyalty and obedience to the prince, we mean in consistence with the Constitution and the law. In opposition to these, loyalty is perfidy, obedience is treason.”<sup>22</sup>

Theologically liberal clergymen were not the only ones to argue for the moral right and duty of political resistance. Theologically orthodox clergymen in Britain also argued for a right of political resistance in the 1760s and 1770s.<sup>23</sup> In fact, one of the most

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<sup>19</sup>[Walker], *Duty and Character of a National Soldier*, 14.

<sup>20</sup>*Ibid.*, 31-32.

<sup>21</sup>*Ibid.*, 34.

<sup>22</sup>*Ibid.*, 28. Bradley names Joshua Toulmin, “a thoroughgoing Unitarian” and dissenting clergyman in Taunton, as another British clergyman who held to similar political views as Walker (Bradley, *Religion, Revolution, and English Radicalism*, 131).

<sup>23</sup>It would be a mistake to argue that simply because resistance doctrine is found among theologically liberal clergy that those who justified political resistance are somehow infected by theological liberalism or philosophical rationalism. Resistance thought was held by both liberal and conservative clergymen both in Britain and America in the eighteenth century. Mark Noll uses the example of the resistance thought of theological liberal Jonathan Mayhew to argue that the doctrine of resistance is based on Enlightenment philosophy and signals “an ideological transformation of colonial religious discourse.” In this argument he downplays the many conservatives in Britain and America who held the same position on resistance as Mayhew and entirely neglects to mention the Reformed resistance tradition of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. See Noll, *America’s God*, 79-80.

ardent defender of the right of resistance was the orthodox Calvinist minister Caleb Evans, minister of a Baptist church in Bristol.<sup>24</sup> Evans made significant statements defending the right of resistance in his November 5th sermon of 1775, entitled *British Constitutional Liberty*. In this sermon, Evans, like Walker, praised the British Constitution as being the most perfect system of government ever devised for “the preservation of natural liberty as far as ever it can be made to consist with that good order and regularity which is the very end of government itself.”<sup>25</sup> The laws and constitution of Britain preserved the liberty of the British people, and those so governed have a moral duty to preserve the liberty with which they have been specially entrusted. While the design of the British government was for the people’s good, any government that ceased to operate for the good of the people might be lawfully resisted.<sup>26</sup> Evans stated the following two arguments for this position, one from Scripture and another from reason:

It might indeed by very rationally argued [from Romans 13:4], that as all government is the ordinance of God for good, therefore when it ceases to be for good, ceases to answer the end for which it was appointed, it may be lawfully resisted. Or we might very naturally reason thus: As the origin of all power under God is indisputably from the people . . . consequently whenever the supreme law, the *salus populi*, the safety and happiness of the people, is fundamentally violated, the people have an undoubted right to resume the power into their own hands.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>24</sup>Bradley, *Religion, Revolution, and English Radicalism*, 127. According to Bradley, Evans was a thoroughgoing conservative: “Evans was a Calvinist; he was theologically conservative on the authority of Scripture, the doctrine of substitutionary atonement, the deity of Christ, the Trinity, and he wrote vigorously against Arians, Socinians, and specifically the teaching of Joseph Priestley” (ibid.). For a summary of Evans’s ministry and thought, see Kirk Wellum, “Caleb Evans (1737-1791)” in *The British Particular Baptists*, ed. Michael A. G. Haykin (Springfield, MO: Particular Baptist Press, 1998), 1:213-33. Wellum notes here that many of the Particular Baptists like Evans shared his political views (ibid., 1:228).

<sup>25</sup>Caleb Evans, *British Constitutional Liberty* (Bristol: W. Pine, T. Cadell, M. Ward, [1775]), 9.

<sup>26</sup>In developing their arguments for political resistance, Watson, Evans, Walker, Robinson, and many of the British clergymen who justified political resistance and supported American resistance also repudiated republicanism. For them the ideal system of government was the balanced government of monarch, lords, and commons all operating under law. Republican or anti-monarchical thought had nothing to do with their understanding of political resistance or their support for American resistance. This is contrary to the argument of Mark Noll, who lumps the doctrine of political resistance together with republicanism. See Noll, *America’s God*, 55-63. For Watson’s rejection of republicanism, see Watson, *Principles of the Revolution vindicated*, 5-6. On Evans’s rejection of republicanism, see Roger Hayden, “Evans, Caleb,” in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, ed. H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 18:669.

<sup>27</sup>Evans, *British Constitutional Liberty*, 20-21.

This right of resistance, according to Evans, should not always be exercised, even when a legitimate right exists. Resistance to one's government should only be offered as a last resort:

A wise and a good man would think himself bound to consider how far resistance to a bad government might be likely to produce more good in the end than a patient acquiescence in it, and a peaceable endeavor to improve it should any favorable opportunity offer for that purpose, and would never make a choice of resistance but as the last resource, and when the probable evils of resistance are over-balanced by the certain evils resulting from a pusillanimous submission.<sup>28</sup>

If an Englishman quietly accepts and submits to despotism and political enslavement, such an act is not only the rejection of a precious inheritance that has been acquired by blood, but also a cowardly and morally despicable act:

You are called to the careful preservation of your liberty. It is a trust committed to you and which you are under the strongest obligations religiously to preserve and hand down unimpaired to posterity. It is the price of blood. It has been hitherto preserved not without the severest struggles with the sons of violence and tyranny. And shall we after all be regardless of the precious gem, and unconcerned about its preservation? How can we answer it to posterity, who would then have reason to rise up not to bless but to curse us!<sup>29</sup>

Surely with the American colonists in mind, Evans voiced his opposition to the infringements being made upon their liberties:

And must it not be still more criminal to express our approbation of any injurious attempt to despoil of this liberty those who have an equal right to it with ourselves; by whomsoever or under what pretext soever such attempts be made? . . . You are not called to give your voices for the destruction of your brethren, though they should have erred! You are not called to appear as the patrons of popery and absolute power, in any part of the world! You are not called to be the abettors of those who, whether through mistake or design, are unfriendly to the rights of their fellow subjects!<sup>30</sup>

In expressing these political views, Evans believed that he was speaking on behalf of the bulk of dissenting clergymen. He and his fellow clergymen, he believed, were being faithful in their political views to the British constitution and the principles of the

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<sup>28</sup>Evans, *British Constitutional Liberty*, 20-21.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid., 28.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid., 29.

## Glorious Revolution:

The dissenters have of late been frequently held up to view as aiming at the subversion of the present government. But it is a notorious fact that they are upon deep-rooted principle so firmly attached to the constitution as it was settled at the memorable revolution, that there can be no set of people under heaven more ready than they are to sacrifice their fortunes and the lives in the support and defense of it. The only civil liberty we desire is that constitutional liberty to which we have been called and of which it is the glory of the illustrious house of Hanover to be the guardians.<sup>31</sup>

In all this Evans argued similarly to many of his clerical counterparts in North America.

Evans repeated his defense of political resistance in his subsequent November 5th sermon of 1788, entitled *British Freedom Realized*. This sermon was given to commemorate the one hundredth anniversary of the landing of William of Orange during the Glorious Revolution and demonstrates the persistence of Evans's views on resistance. It also shows how his understanding of political resistance in the eighteenth century was rooted in the historical precedent of seventeenth-century British political resistance thought. In this sermon Evans recounted both the "virtuous resistance" to "tyrannical encroachments" in the revolution which ousted James II, as well as the history of those who "madly contended for the slavish doctrines of passive obedience and non-resistance."<sup>32</sup> Evans recounted the foment caused by Sacheverell during the reign of Queen Anne and the Jacobite uprisings of 1715 and 1745, arguing that God gave his approval to the right of resistance and the Glorious Revolution by providentially securing it and establishing the Hanoverian line.<sup>33</sup> Using Ezekiel 21:27 as his text and the example of Zedekiah in the Old Testament, Evans argued that God overthrows governments, uses human instruments to do so, and approves of such lawful resistance against unfit civil authorities.<sup>34</sup> Evans stated that Christians are morally bound by God's

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<sup>31</sup>Evans, *British Constitutional Liberty*, 14-15.

<sup>32</sup>Caleb Evans, *British Freedom Realized* (Bristol: William Pine, 1788), 13.

<sup>33</sup>*Ibid.*, 14-21.

<sup>34</sup>*Ibid.*, 10-21.

ordinance to submit to “a good king or a good and lawful government,” and that resistance is not warranted by “every smaller defect in the administration of government,” for this would be to “introduce universal anarchy and confusion” and to “overturn all government, since nothing human is or can be perfect.”<sup>35</sup> Only when important principles are at stake should one resist their governing authorities:

In my opinion nothing can warrant resistance to any established government but an attack upon those principles of liberty, civil or religious, which if once destroyed must necessarily destroy all liberty and overturn the very foundations of all free and lawful government. And in such a case to resist is not only lawful but highly virtuous and praiseworthy and will most assuredly be crowned with the approbation of God and of all good men.<sup>36</sup>

The opposite view, one which made it a duty to submit to an oppressive tyranny, was to be abhorred:

Shall a tyrant rise up and strip his people of their property at his pleasure or shackle their consciences with his superstition and not suffer them to worship their God in the way they deem most acceptable to him and profitable to themselves, and plead an hereditary indefeasible right to do all this in iniquity, and that it is therefore their duty to submit to his tyranny? That he is accountable only to God, and they to him? . . . Let the glorious Revolution which a whole century of years has sanctified and established serve as a confutation of all such ignominious principles. . . . To submit to a wicked hereditary tyrant is not only not our duty, but it is our great sin.<sup>37</sup>

For Evans, a government to which one must resist is only one which has at least the implicit consent of the people and answers the end for which God designed government in the first place.<sup>38</sup>

Another orthodox dissenting minister, James Murray, was just as zealous for the doctrine of resistance as Evans was. Murray was a Presbyterian minister in

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<sup>35</sup>Evans, *British Freedom Realized*, 24-25.

<sup>36</sup>*Ibid.*, 25.

<sup>37</sup>*Ibid.*, 25-26.

<sup>38</sup>For more on Evans’s doctrine of political resistance, see Caleb Evans, *The Remembrance of Former Days* (Bristol: William Pine, [1778]), 42-46. Here Evans focused primarily on the Roman Catholic threat to civil and religious liberties and lauded the resistance that had been shown to James II and the subsequent Jacobite uprisings.

Newcastle and a strong proponent of orthodox theology.<sup>39</sup> His writings also demonstrate his strong affirmation of the morality of resisting oppressive civil authorities. Murray sought to stir up dissenters in England to resist policies in Britain that infringed upon dissenters' civil and religious rights and liberties. This is the premise behind his provocative *Sermons to Asses*, first published anonymously in 1768 and dedicated to fellow clergymen George Whitefield, John Wesley, William Romaine, and Martin Madan.<sup>40</sup> These sermons sought to shame dissenters who blithely accepted the infringements on their civil and religious liberties in Britain, likening them to the tribe of Issachar, of whom it was said in Genesis 49:14: "Issachar is a strong ass, couching down between two burdens."<sup>41</sup> Murray used this image to shame those who "loved rest more than liberty, and chose to be slaves rather than exert themselves and assert their privileges."<sup>42</sup> According to Murray, "There are many such asses as Issachar that prefer present ease and advantage to public liberty. . . . Obedience to just laws and subjection to slavery are two very different things. The first characterizes a people wise and good, the latter base, mean-spirited, and servile."<sup>43</sup> Murray asserted the right of resistance clearly as he closed the first sermon of this published collection:

Asses, and worse than asses, surely you are, who either give up the cause of your country or the rights of your own consciences to civil or religious dominators. The character of Naphtali, how different from that of his brother? Naphtali is a hind let loose, an asserter of liberty. Issachar is a strong ass, couching down between two burdens. God give all men the knowledge of their privileges and a spirit of true zeal

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<sup>39</sup>For Murray's polemical writings aimed at doctrines of Arians, Socinians, and Arminians, see James Murray, *Select Discourses upon Several Important Subjects*, 2nd ed. (Newcastle: T. Slack, 1768). For Murray's opposition to High Church formalism and hierarchicalism, see James Murray, *Sermons to Doctors of Divinity* (Philadelphia: James Dunlap, 1773).

<sup>40</sup>This dedication may have been tongue-in-cheek, as Murray was apparently an opponent of Methodism and revivalist emotionalism. See Kenneth B. E. Roxburgh, "Murray, James," in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, ed. H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 39:931-32.

<sup>41</sup>[James Murray], *Sermons to Asses* (n.p., 1768), 7.

<sup>42</sup>*Ibid.*, 7-8.

<sup>43</sup>*Ibid.*, 8-10.

to maintain them. Amen.<sup>44</sup>

Murray's second sermon contains a strong assertion of the duty of resisting an oppressive and arbitrary government:

When mankind are once instructed in their natural rights and privileges, they will not only complain but struggle to get clear of oppression. Wise men know what it is to obey just laws, but will never tamely submit to slavery and bondage. It is a base degeneracy to rest satisfied with what is contrary to nature, and nothing is more contrary to the nature of rational creatures than to want liberty. To submit to arbitrary government, without resistance, argues the want of sense of the rights of human nature. Men may yield when they are conquered, but they cannot reasonably acknowledge power to be just, when there is no moral institution. When government is not established on moral principles, but managed by the arbitrary power of one, or a few, at the expense of the liberty of the rest of the community, their acknowledgement of that power is an obedience like that of the prophet's [i.e. Balaam's] ass.<sup>45</sup>

Murray quoted Balaam's ass as saying in Numbers 22:30: "Am not I thine ass, upon which thou hast ridden ever since I was thine?" He then drew the comparison to the sayings of those who rejected the right of resistance:

All the dupes of arbitrary power that submit to slavery, civil or religious, have a thousand times uttered words of the same import. Time has been when this language was brayed out of pulpits and squeezed through the press by the patrons of passive obedience and non-resistance. Who can make anything else of such words as these: "It is not lawful to resist the king nor any commissioned by him, upon any pretense whatsoever," but "Are we not thine asses?"<sup>46</sup>

Murray would later defend his use of ridicule in print.<sup>47</sup>

Murray laid out his case for political resistance in a less provocative manner in his 1780 address entitled *An Alarm without Cause*.<sup>48</sup> In this work, Murray argued exclusively from Scripture for the proposition that "it is lawful for Christians to defend

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<sup>44</sup>Murray, *Sermons to Asses*, 31.

<sup>45</sup>*Ibid.*, 99.

<sup>46</sup>*Ibid.*, 103-4.

<sup>47</sup>See James Murray, *Lectures to the Lords Spiritual* (London: Will Hay, 1774), 205-17. Murray here relied upon Elijah's ridicule of the prophets of Baal in 1 Kgs 18:27 to argue that "it is no crime for grave men to laugh upon proper occasions and apply ridicule to things that are ridiculous" (*ibid.*, 205-6).

<sup>48</sup>James Murray, *An Alarm without Cause* (Newcastle: T. Robson, 1780). In Scotland, this same work was printed as *The Lawfulness of Self-Defense, Explained and vindicated on Scripture-Principles* (Glasgow: John Bryce, 1780).

themselves when unjustly assaulted.”<sup>49</sup> Lawful self-defense may entail active resistance to one’s own civil authorities. According to Murray, “The gospel allows all men to defend themselves and their just rights against violence and assaults and to resist even unto blood. . . . To become passive slaves is inconsistent with the character of rational creatures and is not required by the gospel.”<sup>50</sup> Murray argued for the lawfulness of self-defense and political resistance from the example and teachings of Jesus, Paul, Elisha, and the moral law, especially the sixth commandment, “which certainly implies that we are to preserve our own lives.”<sup>51</sup> Murray found Elisha’s resistance to king Jehoram in 2 Kings 6:32 particularly instructive: “It is plain that the prophet resisted Jehoram, and called him the son of a murderer. . . . There was here no passive obedience and non-resistance, but a plain and positive resistance to royal authority.”<sup>52</sup>

Rees David was another dissenting clergyman in Britain who argued for the right of resistance during the time of the American Revolution. David was the pastor of St. Mary’s Baptist chapel in Norwich and an orthodox Calvinist. James Murray likely influenced his political views, as he referenced Murray in his printed sermons.<sup>53</sup> In 1781 David preached a sermon entitled *The Hypocritical Fast*, which he dedicated “to all the friends and supporters of civil liberty.”<sup>54</sup> In this sermon, David stated his belief that oppressive governments and unjust laws are to be resisted. He likened those who submitted to oppressive and tyrannical rulers to those who carried out the wicked

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<sup>49</sup>Murray, *Alarm without Cause*, 6.

<sup>50</sup>*Ibid.*, 17-18.

<sup>51</sup>*Ibid.*, 22.

<sup>52</sup>*Ibid.* In his 1773 work *Eikon Basilike*, Murray found Ehud’s killing of King Eglon instructive as well, stating, “If Eglon was an oppressor, he met with his reward” ([James Murray], *Eikon Basilike, or the Character of Eglon, King of Moab, and his Ministry* [Newcastle: P. Sanderson, 1773], 32).

<sup>53</sup>Bradley, *Religion, Revolution, and English Radicalism*, 130.

<sup>54</sup>Rees David, *The Hypocritical Fast* (Norwich: J. Crouse, [1781]), 3.

commands of Queen Jezebel in 1 Kings 21:9-10.<sup>55</sup> In his words, “It seems that the court then [in Jezebel’s day], was as fond of the cursed doctrine of passive obedience and non-resistance as any opposers of the Glorious Revolution and the accession of the Brunswick family to the throne of Great Britain have been since, and the friends of the pretender still are.”<sup>56</sup> David styled Naboth as a supporter of the doctrine of resistance in that he refused to give up his vineyard to the king. In his disobedience to King Ahab, Naboth showed himself to be “one of the greatest enemies” in Jezebel’s day “to the courtly doctrine of passive obedience and non-resistance.”<sup>57</sup> In 1782 David followed his *Hypocritical Fast* sermon with another entitled, *The Fear of God*. In this sermon he also expressed his view that followers of Christ may lawfully resist their civil authorities when they become wicked and tyrannical. David argued here that the Hebrew midwives’ resistance to Pharaoh and the resistance of Daniel and “the three worthies” to the commands of the Babylonian kings proved that political resistance was morally permissible and that “the doctrine of passive obedience and non-resistance is anti-Scriptural and absurd to the last degree!!!”<sup>58</sup> David argued that political power is granted on the condition that it will be exercised according to law and in accordance with the rights and liberties of those who are governed. The duty to submit and obey is predicated upon these conditions being met.<sup>59</sup>

Robert Robinson, a Baptist clergyman, scholar, and author of the hymn, “Come Thou Fount of Every Blessing,” also published his rejection of absolute

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<sup>55</sup>Jezebel here ordered her officials to proclaim a fast for the ultimate purpose of killing Naboth and seizing his vineyard. The title of David’s sermon is derived from this biblical incident.

<sup>56</sup>David, *The Hypocritical Fast*, 7.

<sup>57</sup>*Ibid.*, 16.

<sup>58</sup>Rees David, *The Fear of God, the only Preservative from temporal and eternal Ruin* (Norwich: J. Crouse, [1782]), 9. The three exclamation points included here for emphasis are contained in the original.

<sup>59</sup>*Ibid.*, 15-16.

submission and non-resistance. In 1780 Robinson published a discourse entitled *Christian Submission to Civil Government*, in which he discussed the Christian duties that one ought to derive from Romans 13. In his assessment, this section of Scripture had been commonly “perverted and misconstrued” by “self-interested expositors” to extend despotism and political absolutism:

In the times of our ancestors, in the days of despotism, thousands and ten thousands have been expended in hiring pens to pervert, or in rewarding them for perverting, the sacred oracles of God, and thus St. Paul has been converted into a conspirator against the rights of mankind, and made to affirm that those Britons who resisted the unconstitutional polity of a Stuart, that such protestants as refused to practice the superstitions of a popish prince should receive to themselves eternal damnation. . . . God forbid we should think St. Paul an enemy to civil and religious liberty!<sup>60</sup>

Robinson then argued pastorally and exegetically for the general, but not absolute, duty that Christians have to submit to civil authority.<sup>61</sup>

The writings of British clergymen Watson, Walker, Toulmin, Evans, Murray, David, and Robinson amply demonstrate that justifications of political resistance during the Revolutionary period were not uniquely American.<sup>62</sup> British dissenting clergymen, along with some Church of England clergyman like Watson, maintained that political resistance to one’s civil authorities was sometimes justified. They also carried forward the rejection of the passive obedience and unlimited submission. In doing so, they based their arguments on Scripture, natural law reasoning, and the many precedents of resistance in British history, especially the resistance shown to Charles I and James II in the English Civil War and the Glorious Revolution. These ways of arguing are consistent

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<sup>60</sup>Robert Robinson, *Christian Submission to Civil Government* (Cambridge: Francis Hodson, 1780), 5-6.

<sup>61</sup>For a fuller statement of Robinson’s political thought, see Robert Robinson, *A Political Catechism* (London: J. Buckland, 1782). Robinson remarked in this work that those who held to the right of resistance were held in reproach and wrongfully “called by many ignoble souls inflammatory, republican, and seditious” (ibid., iii). Robinson, like many advocates of political resistance in this period rejected republicanism.

<sup>62</sup>See also [Alured Henry Shove], *A Letter to the Rev. Dr. Cooper on the Origin of Civil Government* (London: J. Almon, 1777).

with how American clergymen reasoned.

### **British Support for American Resistance**

Americans were not the only ones to assert that British policy toward the colonies in the 1760s and 1770s was unconstitutional and a violation of the colonists' fundamental rights. Many in Britain argued that the various acts of American resistance to British policy were therefore justified. In the 1760s, William Pitt, Isaac Barré, John Wilkes, and Edmund Burke were all outspoken supporters of American resistance in Parliament.<sup>63</sup> Other public figures in Britain believed that the Americans were justified in their resistance to British policies and that the freedoms of all British citizens were at stake, due to the principles involved in the struggle. These supporters included many of the British clergy, underscoring the fact that there was nothing distinctly "American" about the American clergy's support of colonial resistance to British policies regarding the colonies.

British clergy of many different denominations were among those who supported the American colonists in their resistance to the British in the 1760s and 1770s. Not only were dissenting clergymen generally supportive of American resistance, a few Church of England clergymen were as well. Jonathan Shipley, the bishop of St. Asaph, was the most prominent of these. As a member of the House of Lords, Shipley strongly

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<sup>63</sup>Reich, *British Friends of the American Revolution*, 21-89. Edmund Burke became one of the most outspoken and gifted orators to argue in Parliament on behalf of the Americans. Burke himself believed that the resisting colonists were animated by deeply-held theological views that grew out of their dissenting heritage: "Religion, always a principle of energy, in [the American] people is no way worn out or impaired; and their mode of professing it is also one main cause of this free spirit. The people are Protestants, and of a kind which is the most adverse to all implicit submission of mind and opinion. This is a persuasion not only favorable to liberty, but built upon it. . . . All Protestantism, even the most cold and passive, is a sort of dissent. But the religion most prevalent in our norther colonies is a refinement of the principle of resistance; it is the dissidence of dissent, and the Protestantism of the Protestant religion. This religion, under a variety of denominations agreeing in nothing but in the communion of the spirit of liberty, is predominant in most of the northern provinces" (Edmund Burke, *The Speech . . . on . . . Conciliation with the Colonies* [New York: James Rivington, 1775], 24). For other important speeches of Burke on the conflict, see Edmund Burke, *Speech of E. Burke . . . on American Taxation*, 3rd ed. (Philadelphia: Benjamin Towne, 1775); Edmund Burke, *Thoughts on the Cause of the Present Discontents*, 5th ed. (London: J. Dodsley, 1775); and *The Speeches in the last Session of the present Parliament . . . in favour of the Rights of America* (New York: James Rivington, 1775).

opposed the enactment of the Coercive Acts and put his thoughts on the Massachusetts Government Act into print. Shipley's *Speech on the Bill for Altering the Charter of Massachusetts* was quickly reprinted in Boston and became by far the most published political tract in America before Thomas Paine published his *Common Sense* in 1776.<sup>64</sup> In this speech, Shipley faulted the British for altering their policies toward the colonies and taking away their right to govern themselves and live as freemen with the imposition of the Stamp Act: "We certainly did wrong in taxing them. When the Stamp Act was repealed, we did wrong in laying on other taxes, which tended only to keep alive a claim that was mischievous, impracticable, and useless. We acted contrary to our own principles of liberty."<sup>65</sup> Shipley argued that the 1774 Massachusetts Government Act contradicted every one of the "principles of justice and national friendship" and "implies a most total and abject, slavish dependency" to a separate state: "to change the government of a people without their consent is the highest and most arbitrary act of sovereignty that one can exercise over another."<sup>66</sup> Shipley stated his belief that North America was "the only great nursery of free men now left on the face of the earth" and

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<sup>64</sup>Smith, *English Defenders of American Freedoms*, 3, 12. After Shipley, the next most published political work was by Matthew Robinson-Morris, a former member of Parliament and Baron of Rokeby, wrote a lengthy defense of American resistance entitled *Considerations on the Measures Carrying on with Respect to the British Colonies in North America* (London: n.p., 1774). See also [Matthew Robinson-Morris], *Appendix to the Considerations on the Measures Carrying . . .* (Philadelphia: Benjamin Towne, 1775); and [Matthew Robinson-Morris], *Further Examination of our Present American Measures* (Bath: R. Cruttwell, 1776). Smith also highlights John Cartwright, Catharine Macaulay, and Willoughby Bertie, the 4th Earl of Abingdon, as prominent supporters of the American colonies who contributed notable publications. See [John Cartwright], *American Independence, The Interest and Glory of Great Britain* (Philadelphia: Robert Bell, 1776); [John Cartwright], *A Letter to Edmund Burke* (London: H. S. Woodfall, 1775); John Cartwright, *A Letter to the Earl of Abingdon* (London: J. Almon, 1778); [John Cartwright], *Take Your Choice!* (London: J. Almon, 1776); [John Cartwright], *The Memorial of Common-Sense upon the Present Crisis* (London: J. Almon, 1778); Catharine Macaulay, *An Address to the People of England, Scotland, and Ireland* (Bath, UK: R. Cruttwell, 1775); Catharine Macaulay, *Observations on a Pamphlet, Entitled, Thoughts on the Cause of the Present Discontents* (London: Edward and Charles Dilly, 1775); The Earl of Abingdon, *Dedication to the Collective Body of the People of England* (Oxford: W. Jackson, 1780); and The Earl of Abingdon, *Thoughts on the Letter of Edmund Burke . . . to the Sheriffs of Bristol* (Oxford: W. Jackson, [1777]). Also see Granville Sharp, *A Declaration of the People's Natural Right to a Share in the Legislature* (London: B. White, 1774).

<sup>65</sup>Jonathan Shipley, *A Speech Intended to have been Spoken on the Bill for Altering the Charter of the Colony of Massachusetts-Bay* (Boston: Greenleaf, [1774]), 5-6.

<sup>66</sup>*Ibid.*, 9.

that by “enslaving” the colonies, the British government was guilty of “extinguish[ing] the fairest hopes [and] shut[ting] up the last asylum of mankind,” gradually setting “them together with the rest of the world under the yoke of universal slavery.”<sup>67</sup> Given what was at stake, Shipley believed the Americans were right to resist British injustices.

Shipley was unusual for his support of American resistance as a Church of England clergyman. Most Church of England clergymen believed that the Americans were wrongfully “rebell[ing]” against lawful British authority in the 1760s and 1770s.<sup>68</sup> This was not the case among dissenting clergymen. While a good number of dissenting clergymen supported the policies of the British government toward the American colonies, the majority of dissenting ministers supported American resistance by a wide margin.<sup>69</sup> Protestant dissenters were themselves involved in their own struggle for full civil and religious liberty in Britain, and they saw the American’s struggle for civil and religious liberty as akin to their own.

Richard Price and Joseph Priestly were two prominent dissenting liberal clergymen in Britain who supported the American patriots’ cause, both before and after

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<sup>67</sup>Shipley, *Speech Intended to have been Spoken on the Bill*, 11-12.

<sup>68</sup>For British clergymen that voiced their opposition to American resistance, see: East Apthorp, *A Sermon on the General Fast* (London: J. Robson, 1776); John Butler, *A Sermon Preached before the Honorable House of Commons . . . on Friday, December 13, 1776* (London: T. Cadell, 1777); George Campbell, *The Nature, Extent, and Importance of the Duty of Allegiance* (Aberdeen: J. Chalmers, 1777); Alexander Carlyle, *The Justice and Necessity of the War with our American Colonies Examined* (Edinburgh: J. Dickson, 1777); John Coleridge, *Government not originally proceeding from Human Agency, but Divine Institution* (London: J. Rivington, 1777); Myles Cooper, *National Humiliation and Repentance Recommended* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1777); Country Curate, *American Resistance Indefensible* (London: H. Gardner, [1777]); John Darwall, *Political Lamentations* (London: n.p., [1776]); Richard De Courcy, *National Troubles a proper Ground for National Humiliation* (Shrewsbury: T. Wood, 1776); *A Paraphrase on a Passage in a Sermon by the Most Reverend Dr. Markham* (n.p., [1777]); and William Vyse, *A Sermon Preached before the Honourable House of Commons . . . on Friday, February 27, 1778* (London: T. Cadell, 1778). Josiah Tucker argued that American independence was desirable and unavoidable, even while disapproving of American resistance. See Josiah Tucker, *A Letter to Edmund Burke* (Glocester: R. Raikes, 1775); Josiah Tucker, *A Series of Answers to Certain Popular Objections, against separating from the Rebellious Colonies* (Glocester: R. Raikes, 1776); Josiah Tucker, *The Respective Pleas and Arguments of the Mother Country and of the Colonies* (Glocester: R. Raikes, 1776); Josiah Tucker, *Dispassionate Thoughts on the American War* (London: J. Wilkie, 1780); and Josiah Tucker, *A Treatise concerning Civil Government* (London: T. Cadell, 1781).

<sup>69</sup>According to James Bradley, “The vast majority of Dissenting ministers were clearly pro-American” (Bradley, *Religion, Revolution, and English Radicalism*, 123-24).

independence was declared. Price published an important work in London in the early months of 1776 entitled *Observations on the Nature of Civil Liberty*. In this work, which immediately went through numerous editions, Price characterized the British policies which had provoked American resistance as motivated by a “spirit of despotism and avarice.”<sup>70</sup> The 1773 Coercive Acts were motivated by ignorance of the principled nature of colonial resistance and of their unbounded “resentment.”<sup>71</sup> Price believed that the actions taken against the American colonies were so patently against the British constitution that the rights and liberties of all British citizens were at stake. Had a wiser course of action been taken, Price bemoaned in the early months of 1776, “the liberty of America might have preserved our liberty; and, under the direction of a patriot king or wise minister, proved the means of restoring to us our almost lost constitution.”<sup>72</sup> Joseph Priestley similarly believed that British policies toward the colonies were undercutting fundamental British rights and liberties. Priestley published a short work in 1769 entitled *The Present State of Liberty in Great Britain and Her Colonies* which was highly critical of British policies toward the colonies.<sup>73</sup> He published his *magnum opus* on political theory in 1771, entitled *An Essay on the First Principles of Government*.<sup>74</sup> In 1774 he also published *An Address to the Protestant*

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<sup>70</sup>Richard Price, *Observations on the Nature of Civil Liberty* (London: Edward and Charles Dilly, 1776), 36. For the popularity of this work, see Cohen, *British Supporters of the American Revolution*, 14.

<sup>71</sup>Ibid., 37. Price also viewed the conflict as a British “civil war” (ibid., 38).

<sup>72</sup>Ibid., 40. For responses to Price’s *Observations*, see *Civil Liberty Asserted* (London: J. Wilkie, 1776); and *The Duty of the King and Subject* (London: J. Dixwell, 1776). Price expanded on his 1776 work, publishing *Additional Observations on the Nature and Value of Civil Liberty* (London: T. Cadell, 1777) the following year, and the year after that *The General Introduction and Supplement to the Two Tracts on Civil Liberty* (London: T. Cadell, 1778). For Price’s writings on the American Revolution after its conclusion, see Richard Price, *Observations on the Importance of the American Revolution* (London: n.p., 1784); Richard Price, *A Discourse on the Love of our Country* (London: T. Cadell, 1789); and Richard Price, *Britain’s Happiness and its full possession of Civil and Religious Liberty* (London: J., F., and C. Rivington, 1791).

<sup>73</sup>Joseph Priestley, *The Present State of Liberty in Great Britain and her Colonies* (London: Johnson & Payne, 1769).

<sup>74</sup>For Priestley’s rejection of non-resistance and passive obedience doctrine, see Joseph Priestley, *An Essay on the First Principles of Government* (London: J. Johnson, 1771), 27-47.

*Dissenters of All Denominations*, in which he defended the colonists for resisting arbitrary power to the defense of their civil and religious liberty. In this piece he likened the American patriots to the Puritans of the seventeenth century who resisted Stuart absolutism, seeing the cause of the Americans as connected with the cause of British dissenters for their own civil and religious liberty.<sup>75</sup> Priestley and Price were joined by other theologically liberal dissenting clergymen in voicing their support for American resistance to British policies, including Theophilus Lindsey, Joshua Toulmin, Newcombe Cappe, and John Jebb.<sup>76</sup>

Dissenting clergymen who were theologically conservative like Evans, Murray, and David also voiced strong support for American resistance, agreeing with their liberal counterparts that their own struggle for civil and religious liberty was at stake. These clergymen were clearly not advocates of republicanism, but were loyal to the principles of the British Constitution as they understood it.<sup>77</sup> According to Caleb Evans, the Americans who were bravely resisting British policies and British might were engaged in “one of the best causes of the world.”<sup>78</sup> The “great American question,” according to Evans, was deeply concerned “with the British constitution and British liberty. . . . The very being of the British constitution and British liberty is involved.” As Evans saw it, what the Americans were resisting was the imposition of an absolute power, and “to plead for the establishment of [an absolute power] over the Americans . . . would be destructive of the very vitals of the freedom of an Englishman.”<sup>79</sup> James Murray, similarly, held up the

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<sup>75</sup>Joseph Priestley, *An Address to the Protestant Dissenters of all Denominations* (London: Joseph Johnson, 1774), 3, 15. See also Joseph Priestley, *A Free Address to Protestant Dissenters* (London: G. Pearch, 1769). For the dissenters’ and Priestley’s rejection of passive obedience and non-resistance doctrine, see Joseph Priestley, *A View of the Principles and Conduct of the Protestant Dissenters*, 2nd ed. (London: Joseph Johnson, [1769]), 38.

<sup>76</sup>Cohen, *British Supporters of the American Revolution*, 15. Unlike the more conservative clergymen who supported American resistance, many of these, including Price and Priestly, became supporters of the French Revolution as well.

<sup>77</sup>Bradley, *Religion, Revolution, and English Radicalism*, 148.

<sup>78</sup>Caleb Evans, *Political Sophistry detected* (Bristol: W. Pine, 1776), 35.

<sup>79</sup>Evans, *Political Sophistry detected*, 13-14.

Americans as examples, and commended their “vigorous resistance of oppression” as something to be emulated by dissenting Christians in Britain in their struggle as well.<sup>80</sup> For Rees David, British policy toward the colonies was replete with “acts of oppression” and was “impolitical” and “contrary to the fundamental laws of our Constitution.”<sup>81</sup> Britain had engaged the Americans in “a cruel and unjust war,” and American resistance was justified, given that they were fighting for British rights, British liberties, and the British constitution.<sup>82</sup>

American clergymen were not alone in their belief that British policies in the 1760s and 1770s should be resisted. British clergymen, including many theologically conservative clergymen, believed that American resistance was justified. British dissenters especially tended to view the Americans’ struggle as intertwined with their own. In the words of James Bradley, the dissenting clergymen believed that “the Stamp Act, the Townshend Duties, the Boston Massacre, and finally the Coercive Acts, were all instigated by the same repressive regime that was undermining [their] liberty at home.”<sup>83</sup> They stood united with their American counterparts in what they viewed as a British civil

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<sup>80</sup>Murray, *Sermons to Asses*, 68. Murray authored a lengthy two-volume work that detailed the causes and unfolding history of the war in America. In this work, Murray stated that “it cannot be disputed that the legislature in Great Britain, as well as the executive power” enacted policies “which had all the appearance of selfishness and domination [and] gave sufficient ground of jealousy to the colonies” for their “rights and liberties” (James Murray, *An Impartial History of the Present War in America*, [London: R. Baldwin, 1782], 1:6). Murray also wrote a play entitled *The New Maids of the Oaks*, ridiculing the pride of British general John Burgoyne after his surrender at Saratoga in 1777. In this play, a British officer accuses an American officer of “rebellion,” since he had “renounced allegiance to the king.” The American replies with these words: “Never till once he did refuse protection, And sent an armed force to enslave us; Shed our best blood, laid waste our country; Revers’d our laws, and brought us back to nature. And where’s the blame, to use what nature gave us for our defense?” (James Murray, *The New Maid of the Oaks* [London: n.p., 1778], 58).

<sup>81</sup>David, *Hypocritical Fast*, 19-20.

<sup>82</sup>David, *The Fear of God*, 17. For a description of British cruelties and injustices toward the colonies, see *ibid.*, 10, 17-20, and David, *Hypocritical Fast*, 18-21. John Erskine, the pro-revival Scottish Presbyterian minister and friend of Jonathan Edwards, was also a supporter of the Americans. See John Erskine, *Shall I Go to War with my American Brethren?* (London: G. Kearsly, 1769); and John Erskine, *The Equity and Wisdom of Administration in Measures That have unhappily occasioned The American Revolt* (Edinburgh: n.p., 1776). Not all dissenting clergymen supported American resistance. See John Martin, *Familiar Dialogues between Americus and Britannicus* (London: J. Wilkie, 1776) and Bradley, *Religion, Revolution, and English Radicalism*, 123-24.

<sup>83</sup>Bradley, *Religion, Revolution, and English Radicalism*, 148.

war.<sup>84</sup>

### **John Wesley's Opposition to American Resistance**

The prominent Methodist leader John Wesley strongly opposed American resistance, like many Church of England clergymen. His most famous publication against American resistance was his 1775 pamphlet entitled *A Calm Address to Our American Colonies*. Wesley asserted in this pamphlet that the British government has “a legal right of laying any tax upon them for any end beneficial to the whole empire” and to make whatever laws it chooses to make over the colonies.<sup>85</sup> Wesley asserted in this publication that those who were agitated in the colonies about civil and religious liberty were misguided alarmists, whose concerns were not rooted in reality. Apparently forgetting about the limitations on trade, the loss of self-government, and the martial law then imposed on Massachusetts, Wesley berated the colonists: “After all the vehement cry for liberty, what more liberty can you have? . . . What civil liberty can you desire, which you are not already possessed of?”<sup>86</sup>

Some religious historians have highlighted John Wesley's opposition to American resistance to argue that British evangelicals were philosophically and theologically moving in a different direction than the American evangelicals of this time.

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<sup>84</sup>Ibid., 149.

<sup>85</sup>John Wesley, *A Calm Address to our American Colonies* (Bristol: Bonner and Middleton, 1775), 4.

<sup>86</sup>Ibid., 17. Wesley's position on American resistance here show some inconsistency with a previously published assertion. In 1770, Wesley stated that “I do not defend the measures which have been taken with regard to America. I doubt whether any man can defend them, either on the foot of law, equity, or prudence. But whose measures were these? If I do not mistake, Mr. George Grenville's. Therefore the whole merit of these measures belongs to him and not to the present ministry” (John Wesley, *Free Thoughts on the Present State of Public Affairs* [London: J. and W. Oliver, 1770], 26). In making this comment, Wesley sought to uphold the present administration. He asserted that the causes of “the present commotion” in British politics were not blamed upon the current North administration or any “extraordinary badness, either of the king, of his parliament, of his ministers, or of the measures they have taken” (ibid., 29). Here, Wesley blamed Grenville for the troubles in America and implies that Grenville's policies were illegal.

Mark Noll, for one, has used Wesley's denunciation of American resistance to argue that American evangelical clergymen were embracing secular, enlightenment philosophical notions in a way that was unique to American evangelicals. Noll asserts that Wesley's 1775 *Calm Address to Our American Colonies* was hated in America because Americans were embracing republicanism.<sup>87</sup> For Noll, "fear of abuses from illegitimate power and a nearly messianic belief in the benefits of liberty" were a major part of this distinctly American form of republicanism, and it was this republicanism that "provided a vocabulary for resisting British tyranny."<sup>88</sup>

In actual fact, Wesley himself did not view American resistance as something that was distinctly American. Wesley denounced those in Britain as well who were concerned about civil and religious liberty in the same way that he denounced the Americans who were resisting British policies over concerns about the same. In a 1775 sermon, Wesley disdainfully described those who were concerned about the state of civil and religious liberty both in Britain and abroad:

Thousands of plain, honest people throughout the land [of Britain] are driven utterly out of their senses, my means of the poison which is so diligently spread, through every city and town in the kingdom. They are screaming out for Liberty, while they have it in their hands, while they actually possess it . . . Therefore all those who are either passionately or dolefully crying out "Bondage! Slavery!" while there is no more danger of any such thing, than there is of the sky falling upon their head are utterly distracted; their reason is gone; their intellects are quite confounded. . . . Such is the condition of England at home. And is it any better abroad? I fear not. From those who are now upon the spot I learn in our colonies also, many are causing the people to drink largely of the same deadly wine.<sup>89</sup>

So Wesley viewed American resistance as something that was not uniquely American. He opposed Englishmen as well who were concerned about their civil and religious

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<sup>87</sup>Noll, *America's God*, 69.

<sup>88</sup>*Ibid.*, 55-56.

<sup>89</sup>John Wesley, *A Sermon Preached at St. Matthew's, Bethnal Green* (London: R. Hawes, [1775]), 13-16. See also John Wesley, *A Calm Address to Inhabitants of England*, 2nd ed. (London: R. Hawes, 1777), 4.

liberties and fearful about the expansion of political power at home.<sup>90</sup> Specifically, Wesley believed that the Americans were being duped by a particular group of British agitators who were seeking to overthrow the British monarchy:

We have a few men in England who are determined enemies to monarchy. Whether they hate his present majesty on any other ground, than because he is king, I know not. But they cordially hate his office and have for some years been undermining it with all diligence, in the hopes of erecting their grand idol, their dear commonwealth, upon its ruins. . . . They have likewise inflamed America. I make no doubt but these men are the original cause of the present breach between England and her colonies.<sup>91</sup>

Wesley believed it was antimonarchical *British* republicanism, then, which lay at the foundation of American resistance. This republicanism, though, was not something that Wesley believed the Americans shared. According to Wesley, the American agitators were not part of the “scheme” of the British republicans. Exhorting the Americans, Wesley declared,

Come to yourselves! Be no longer the dupes of designing men. I do not mean any of your countrymen in America: I doubt whether any of these are in on the secret. The designing men, the Ahithophels are in England, those who have laid their scheme so deep and covered it so well, that thousands who are ripening it, suspect nothing at all of the matter.<sup>92</sup>

For Wesley, it was not American republicanism that lay at the root of American resistance but British republicanism. Such a perspective undercuts Noll’s use of Wesley, who held an exactly opposite view regarding the causes of American resistance.

Wesley’s rejection of political resistance was based on his broader denial of the Reformed resistance tradition’s position that government power is granted by God through the consent of the governed, that is, through the people or through their

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<sup>90</sup>Wesley, *Calm Address to Inhabitants of England*, 20-21. Wesley acknowledged here that there yet remained “High Churchmen” and heirs of Dr. Sacheverell who were opposed to religious toleration and who would be “swarming on every side and gnashing upon you [religious dissenters] with their teeth” if “the present restraint [was] taken off.” Wesley believed that the measure of civil and religious liberty that dissenters enjoyed in the presence of such was proof positive of the British government’s commitment to religious toleration and civil liberty for dissenters.

<sup>91</sup>Wesley, *Calm Address to our American Colonies*, 13-15.

<sup>92</sup>*Ibid.*, 18.

representatives. He instead asserted a royalist or divine-right position.<sup>93</sup> In a lesser-known 1772 pamphlet entitled *Thoughts concerning the Origin of Power*, Wesley argued for a kind of divine-right position on political power, denying the role of the people in giving legitimacy to their government. Wesley argued in this work against the concept of government by popular consent because popular consent never includes *all* of the people; therefore, the very idea of government by popular consent is nonsensical.<sup>94</sup> In making this argument, Wesley misstates the Reformed position, which asserted that political power is *ultimately* derived from God and only *mediately* derived through human consent. Reformed political philosophers from the sixteenth through the eighteenth centuries would have agreed with Wesley that political power comes ultimately from God, but asserted that political legitimacy comes through the consent of the governed.

Many Americans reacted strongly and rejected Wesley's 1775 *Calm Address*, but they were not alone in denouncing Wesley's assertions.<sup>95</sup> Wesley's publication provoked a firestorm of response in Britain as well, with dissenting British clergymen being at the forefront in rejecting his assertions.<sup>96</sup> The loudest response to Wesley's

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<sup>93</sup>Allan Raymond, "'I Fear God and Honour the King': John Wesley and the American Revolution," *Church History* 45, no. 3 (September 1976): 316-28.

<sup>94</sup>John Wesley, *Thoughts concerning the Origin of Power* (Bristol: W. Pine, 1772), 5-12. While Wesley mentions his belief in Rom 13:1 as foundational for his view, he makes this argument on the basis of reason. Having, he believed, shown the impossibility of government by popular consent, Wesley concludes that "common sense brings us back to the grand truth, *There is no power but of God*" (ibid., 12). Wesley leaves his own divine right position undeveloped beyond this expression in this pamphlet. For another appeal to common sense in Wesley's discussion of politics, see Wesley, *Calm Address to the Inhabitants of England*, 4.

<sup>95</sup>Both Noll and Reddinger note the American rejection of Wesley's *Calm Address*, but they fail to mention the massive rejection of Wesley's views by British evangelicals in Britain as well (Noll, *America's God*, 69; William T. Reddinger, "Political Thought in Political Sermons of the American Founding Era" [PhD diss., Northern Illinois University, 2010], 89). Noll uses this in the context of his argument to imply that American evangelicals were moving in a different direction than British evangelicals. Neither Noll nor Reddinger mention British rejection of Wesley's *Calm Address*.

<sup>96</sup>For a variety of critical responses to Wesley's views on American resistance, see *A full and impartial Examination of the Rev. Mr. John Wesley's Address to the Americans* (n.p., [1775]); *A Letter to the Rev. Mr. John Wesley on his Calm Address to the American Colonies* (n.p., [1775]); [Capel Lofft], *Observations on Mr. Wesley's Second Calm Address* (London: E. and C. Dilly, 1777); William Moore, *The Addresses for Blood and Devastation* (London: T. Shaw, [1776]); James Murray, *The Finishing Stroke to Mr. Wesley's Calm Address* (Newcastle: T. Robson, 1778); *Resistance No Rebellion* (n.p., N. Maud, 1775); W. Y., *A Serious Answer to Mr. Wesley's Calm Address to our American Colonies* (Bristol: n.p., 1775); [Augustus Montague Toplady], *An Old Fox Tarr'd and Feather'd* (London: John French, 1775); *A Letter to*

work came from Calvinistic Baptist Caleb Evans.<sup>97</sup> Evans rightly pointed out that the principal arguments contained in Wesley's *Calm Address* were "taken verbatim" and "without acknowledgement" from Samuel Johnson's longer 1775 publication, *Taxation no Tyranny*.<sup>98</sup> Evans also challenged Wesley on his assertion that the British Parliament had a right to tax the colonies and on his rejection of government by consent. Evans concluded that Wesley's overall position amounted to "the old *jure divino* doctrine" that had been asserted by the Stuarts.<sup>99</sup> Wesley, according to Evans, was guilty of having "revived the good old Jacobite doctrines of hereditary, indefeasible, divine right, and of passive obedience and non-resistance" and of doing so "under artful disguise."<sup>100</sup>

Far from being a debate over any new or peculiarly American ideas, the debate, then, over American resistance between Wesley and Evans was rooted in the early eighteenth-century debate in Britain over passive obedience and non-resistance. The debate over American resistance boiled down, according to Evans, to the debate that went back to the time of the Stuarts. Evans held to the same ground that Bishop Hoadly and Thomas Bradbury held on the question of resistance in the early eighteenth century, while Wesley expressed the opinion of many High Church Anglicans on the subject. The

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*the Rev. Mr. John Wesley* (London: J. Towers, 1771); and *A Constitutional Answer to Wesley's Calm Address* (London: E. and C. Dilly, 1775).

<sup>97</sup>See Caleb Evans, *A Letter to the Rev. Mr. John Wesley* (London: Edward and Charles Dilly, 1775). One of Wesley's close associates, Joseph Fletcher, responded to Evans in Joseph Fletcher, *A Vindication of the Rev. Mr. Wesley's Calm Address* (London: R. Hawes, 1776); and Joseph Fletcher, *American Patriotism* (London: R. Hawes, 1777). See also Joseph Fletcher, *The Bible and the Sword* (London: R. Hawes, 1776). Evans responded to Fletcher in Caleb Evans, *A Reply to the Rev. Mr. Fletcher's Vindication of Mr. Wesley's Calm Address* (Bristol: W. Pine, n.d.); and Caleb Evans, *Political Sophistry detected*. See also Caleb Evans, *The Remembrance of Former Days* (Bristol: William Pine, [1778]). For more on this debate, see Bradley, *Religion, Revolution, and English Radicalism*, 128.

<sup>98</sup>Evans, *Letter to the Rev. Mr. John Wesley*, i. See Samuel Johnson, *Taxation no Tyranny* (London: T. Cadell, 1775). Evans here notes how Wesley's *Calm Address* contradicted his 1770 *Free Thoughts on the present State of Public Affairs*. Evans queried, "How comes Mr. John Wesley, who was then no politician, to commence one now? How comes he now to appear as a defender of such measures as he before admitted to be indefensible?" (Evans, *Letter to the Rev. Mr. John Wesley*, i).

<sup>99</sup>Evans, *Letter to the Rev. Mr. John Wesley*, 10.

<sup>100</sup>*Ibid.*, 11.

issue of republicanism, which was rejected by both, was not in view.

### Conclusion

The assertion of a right of resistance in the 1760s and 1770s was not distinctly American. Standing alongside of the American counterparts, many British clergymen also upheld the belief that it was sometimes morally justifiable to resist one's civil authorities. Even some clergymen in Britain who believed that the American colonists were in the wrong to resist the British government still upheld the right of resistance. In a sermon preached before the House of Commons on December 13, 1776, the Episcopal Archdeacon of Surrey, John Butler, upheld the right of a people to resist unlawful and oppressive political power and made this important statement:

No man, who breathes the air of this country and feels the benefit of it, would abruptly, or too severely, censure any exercise of liberty. There was a time when lawful resistance was treated as a contradiction in terms. Thanks to some great names, who have speculated upon the rights of mankind, and to some far greater worthies, who have struggled for them, we have discovered that resistance may not only be necessary, but that it may be lawful, that it may even be meritorious. I need not add that the discovery has produced and secured to us the happiness, religious and civil, we enjoy.<sup>101</sup>

Butler believed the Americans resisting the British were to be faulted, not for their assertion of a right to resistance, but for resisting “a legal authority, exercising none but legal powers, for the attainment of legal purposes.” Such resistance was merely “rebellion” and “not one of the privileges contended for in the last century.”<sup>102</sup> Similarly, the clergyman and scholar George Campbell, the principal of Marischal College, in Aberdeen, Scotland, published a sermon in 1777 agreeing that political resistance is lawful and even “incumbent as a duty” under certain circumstances. He also rejected “the slavish, unnatural, and justly exploded principles of passive obedience and non-

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<sup>101</sup> Butler, *Sermon Preached before the Honorable House of Commons*, 7-8.

<sup>102</sup>Ibid., 8. Butler believed that most America patriots were not “capable of deep political designs” and were in “a state of ignorance” about what they were doing, having incurred “the hazard of falling victims to the wild and daring turbulency of a few real criminals” (ibid., 8-9).

resistance, principles whose manifest tendency is the establishment and support of despotism.”<sup>103</sup> He made these comments all the while rejecting the claim that they Americans had just cause to resist the will of the British government.

Justifications of political resistance were not connected, then, with a particular position on American resistance. Neither were they connected to some overriding philosophy of political republicanism. Those who supported American resistance on both sides of the Atlantic may have been accused of being committed to republicanism, and while this may have been true of some, many who argued for the legitimacy of American resistance were simply fighting for the historic rights and liberties granted by the English Constitution. They were not fighting for republicanism, per se, and American resistance should not be interpreted as such.

Contrary to the assertions of Mark Noll, the American clergy’s justification of resistance to British policies in 1760s and 1770s is not an indicator that American theology was then shifting away from its British heritage toward a “startling” new direction.<sup>104</sup> American clergymen remained quite similar in their political views with many British clergymen, especially dissenters, during this period. The colonial clergy’s support for American resistance was not motivated by any discernable philosophical shift but simply by the new dynamic created by British policies and British actions toward them in the 1760s and 1770s.

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<sup>103</sup>Campbell, *Nature, Extent, and Importance of the Duty of Allegiance*, 8.

<sup>104</sup>According to Noll, “The startling reversal in which America’s religious leaders took up the language of republicanism was the most important ideological development for the future of theology in the United States” (Noll, *America’s God*, 93). Granted, once the American colonies became independent states, the reality of being a republic or commonwealth (as opposed to being part of a monarchy) was celebrated by Americans, including American clergymen. This does not, however, indicate a shift in political, theological, or philosophical commitments. Prior to 1763, many of the British colonies had long functioned as self-governing republics, with the king having very little to do with the internal affairs of the colonies or the day-to-day life of the colonists.

CHAPTER 6  
JOHN WITHERSPOON, INDEPENDENCE, AND  
POLITICAL RESISTANCE

The clergy who argued for independence made no significant shift in their views concerning political resistance. This is so, even though a major shift in political loyalties took place in 1776, when colonists began to publically argue for independence from Great Britain. Colonists increasingly began calling for this remedy after the dramatic events of 1775, especially the armed conflict in Lexington, Concord, Fort Ticonderoga, and Bunker Hill. These conflicts, along with the British burning of Charleston, Massachusetts, and Falmouth, Maine, made a full-blown war for independence seem increasingly inevitable. Many colonists began to feel that it would be impossible to remain loyal and submissive to a government that was engaged with them in open warfare and appeared bent on their destruction and subjugation.

Thomas Paine made a strong public case in favor of American independence with the publication of his *Common Sense* in January 1776. This pamphlet was a publishing sensation and turned colonial sentiment sharply in favor of independence.<sup>1</sup> Paine himself was a political and philosophical radical and an Enlightenment humanist, even though he used biblical language and arguments in his work.<sup>2</sup> The colonists' shift toward independence in 1776, does not necessarily indicate a widespread colonial embrace of Paine's political philosophy. Many colonists undoubtedly saw independence

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<sup>1</sup>Thomas Kidd, *God of Liberty: A Religious History of the American Revolution* (New York: Basic Books, 2010), 87-88.

<sup>2</sup>Paine would later go on to become an outspoken advocate of the French Revolution as well. For Paine's involvement in both these conflicts, see Eric Foner, *Thomas Paine and Revolutionary America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004).

and armed conflict as the inevitable and unavoidable next step in the course of the political resistance and self-defense.

A number of historians have argued that the American Revolution was not the result of shifting political philosophies, but resulted from different views of the British Constitution and of the legality of specific measures. Daniel Boorstin, for one, noted that the ideological leaders of the American Revolution produced no new political philosophy at all during this period. In his words, the Revolution “was hardly a revolution at all” and it “did not produce in America a single important treatise on political theory.”<sup>3</sup> Russell Kirk similarly argued that the American Revolution was “a preventative movement intended to preserve an old constitutional structure.”<sup>4</sup> Those who took up arms against the British generally did so for practical reasons, not because of any ideological shift on their part:

The men who made the American Revolution were not revolutionaries of the metaphysical sort. They had practical grievances; they sought practical redress; not obtaining it, they settled upon separation from the Crown in Parliament as a hard necessity. That act was not meant as a repudiation of their past, but as a means for preventing the destruction of their pattern of politics by King George’s presumed intended revolution of arbitrary power.<sup>5</sup>

While not all agree with Boorstin and Kirk, other historians have argued this perspective as well.<sup>6</sup> If these historians are correct, it was the changed ideology and policies of the

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<sup>3</sup>Daniel J. Boorstin, *The Genius of American Politics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958), 66, 68. Boorstin also argued that the American Revolution should not be interpreted in connection with the French Revolution. In his understanding, the American Revolution was caused by a dispute about legal issues and the nature of the British constitution. For this reason, the so-called “revolution” was not revolutionary at all but actually conservative in nature (ibid., 67-94).

<sup>4</sup>Russell Kirk, “A Revolution Not Made But Prevented,” *Modern Age* 29, no. 4 (Fall 1985): 302. In Kirk’s assessment, “The French Revolution was a very different phenomenon, as was its successor, the Russian Revolution. These were philosophical revolutions or, as we say nowadays with greater precision, ideological revolution” (ibid.).

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., 301.

<sup>6</sup>See also Clinton Rossiter, *Seedtime of the Republic: The Origin of the American Tradition of Political Liberty* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1953), 270; H. Trevor Colbourn, *The Lamp of Experience: Whig History and the Intellectual Origins of the American Revolution* (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1998), 232-33; Bruce Frohnen, “Revolutions, Not Made, but Prevented: 1776, 1688, and the Triumph of the Old Whigs,” in *Vital Remnants: America’s Founding and the Western Tradition*, ed. Gary L. Gregg II (Wilmington, DE: ISI Books, 1999), 275-303; and Friedrich Von Gentz, *The Origin and Principles of the American Revolution, Compared with the Origin and Principles of the French Revolution* (Philadelphia:

British government toward the colonies that produced the changed response to the British authorities, not a change in the political philosophy of the Americans.

Consistent with the broader shift toward independence in the colonies at large, the colonial clergy generally came to embrace the notion of independence in 1776 as well, especially Presbyterian, Congregational, and Baptist clergymen.<sup>7</sup> While broad clerical support for independence from Great Britain was a new development, the overall political, philosophical, and theological perspective of the colonial clergy remained in general continuity with what they held long before the troubles with Britain began. Thomas Paine's political radicalism was not widely embraced by the colonial clergy. They continued to hold political views which were in that were in continuity with their own long-standing theological traditions. Their assertions remained consistent regarding the doctrine of political resistance, the right of self-defense, the justness of defensive warfare, the limited and balanced form of government, and the rights guaranteed to them in their colonial charters and the British Constitution.

John Witherspoon, the leading clerical proponent of American independence, did not share Thomas Paine's political radicalism or his enlightenment views of man. Witherspoon rejected secular ideas of human ability, human autonomy, and human virtue in general, and called for American independence in accordance with his own tradition and with his own long-standing positions. Witherspoon's writings underscore the overall continuity that existed in the arguments for political resistance in the era of political independence.

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Asbury Dickins, 1800).

<sup>7</sup>The Presbyterian clergymen, for example, were almost unanimous in their support of American resistance and American independence. In William Sprague's encyclopedic *Annals of the American Pulpit*, only one Presbyterian minister, John Zubly, is noted as being opposed to American independence. Thirty-four were noted as being especially zealous for the Revolutionary cause. Samuel Miller notes in Sprague's work that "almost all the Presbyterian ministers in the United States" took a course "decisively in favor of the claims of the colonies" (William B. Sprague, *Annals of the American Pulpit* [New York: Robert Carter, 1858], 3:167).

## **Justifications of Resistance on the Eve of Independence**

As the pivotal year of 1776 approached, American clergymen continued to justify the morality of political resistance in certain circumstances. A wide variety of clergymen in America stated their justifications of the right of resistance in continued continuity with the standard Protestant arguments for political resistance they had inherited from their sixteenth and seventeenth-century predecessors. No discernable philosophical or theological shifts exist in these justifications, even as the prospect of an independence became increasingly likely. A large number of colonial clergyman published justifications of resistance to the British in 1775. These writings argued for this right on the basis of biblical arguments, the natural law argument of self-defense, and the precedent of previous acts of resistance in British history.

Jonathan Edwards, Jr., then a Congregationalist clergyman in New Haven, Connecticut, preached a sermon in 1775 that gave detailed consideration of Romans 13 and the question of political resistance. After considering the absolutist position, Edwards argued that Paul's intention in Romans 13 was only to "give the general rules of obedience and submission" and not to touch on the question of "whether . . . resistance be justifiable or not."<sup>8</sup> The answer to this question should instead be inferred from numerous the instances in the Old and New Testaments, which Edwards listed as providing abundant support for the justness of political resistance. While Edwards was convinced that arguments from natural reason might also shed light on the question of when such resistance might be justifiable, he restricted himself to explaining the Bible's teaching on the subject.<sup>9</sup> After surveying a wide array of scriptural teaching relevant to this question, Edwards made his rejection of non-resistance and passive obedience

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<sup>8</sup>Jonathan Edwards, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards, D. D.*, ed. Tryon Edwards (Boston: John P. Jewett, 1854), 2:240.

<sup>9</sup>*Ibid.*, 2:243-44.

doctrine explicit:

The doctrines of passive obedience and non-resistance are not the doctrines of the Bible. . . . I hope, therefore, that our text [Rom. 13] . . . will no more be quoted to prove and sustain the doctrines of passive obedience and non-resistance, especially in times like these. The truth is, and the whole spirit of scripture sustains it, that rulers are bound to rule in the fear of God and for the good of the people, and if they do not, then in resisting them we are doing God service.<sup>10</sup>

Edwards closed his sermon by urging his audience of Connecticut freemen to elect legislators who were “hearty friends of the rights and liberties of their country” and to reject candidates who were “advocates for the rights of the British parliament to tax us.”<sup>11</sup>

Samuel Langdon, an orthodox Congregationalist clergyman and the president of Harvard College, preached the annual Massachusetts election sermon in May 1775, in which he also justified political resistance. Langdon’s argument was largely based on self-defense, and he recounted the oppressions that the people of Massachusetts were suffering at the hands of the British soldiers and their cruelty. According to Langdon, Boston had been turned into a “stronghold of despotism,” and British soldiers had provoked the skirmishes at Lexington and Concord, carrying out many atrocities on their retreat back to Boston as well.<sup>12</sup> Langdon lauded the British system of government, but believed that immorality had corrupted it and reduced into a cruel and absolutist system, as far as the colonies were concerned.<sup>13</sup> Rather than accept “slavery” and despotism from such a system, Langdon argued that colonial resistance to the British government was justified:

Our late happy government is changed into the terrors of military execution. Our firm opposition to the establishment of an arbitrary system is called *rebellion*, and we are to expect no mercy but by yielding property and life at discretion. This we are resolved at all events not to do; and therefore, we have taken up arms in our own

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<sup>10</sup>Edwards, *Works of Jonathan Edwards, D. D.*, 2:244-45.

<sup>11</sup>*Ibid.*, 2:247.

<sup>12</sup>Samuel Langdon, *Government corrupted by Vice, and recovered by Righteousness* (Watertown, MA: Benjamin Eddes, 1775), 6-9, 21-22.

<sup>13</sup>*Ibid.*, 17.

defense, and all the colonies are united in the great cause of liberty.<sup>14</sup> Langdon, like many other colonial clergyman, believed that “the late measures respecting the colonies” had all “originated from popish schemes of men who would gladly restore the race of Stewart and who look on popery as a religion most favorable to arbitrary power.” He cited the Quebec Act’s establishment of Roman Catholicism in the American interior as proof of such intentions.<sup>15</sup> American resistance was justified, then, on the basis of historic Protestant resistance to the spread of Roman Catholicism.

A group of Presbyterian ministers in Philadelphia also published in 1775 a circular letter to the Presbyterians in North Carolina, explaining their view that justification to the British was warranted. This letter appealed particularly to British tradition, justifying political resistance from British precedents of resistance during the Glorious Revolution:

If we are now wrong in our conduct, our forefathers that fought for liberty at Londonderry and Enniskillen, in King James’s time, were wrong; the English Parliament and the English nation were wrong; nay, they were rebels when they opposed and set aside that bigoted prince and the Stewart family, and set the Brunswick family on the throne of England.

The Presbyterian clergy felt that the situation in America was similar to what was suffered under the Stuarts, and that any resistance offered would be offered against “the enemies of the British Constitution” who were trying to subvert their legal rights and protections and “enslave” them and their descendants.<sup>16</sup>

Other American clergymen published a large number of sermons and other writings in 1775 that argued that American resistance to the British was not only permissible but, given the actions taken by the British, the moral duty of the colonists.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>14</sup>Langdon, *Government corrupted by Vice*, 23.

<sup>15</sup>*Ibid.*, 28-29.

<sup>16</sup>*Address of the Presbyterian Ministers of the City of Philadelphia to the Ministers and Presbyterian Congregations in North Carolina* (Philadelphia: n.p., 1775), 5. The clergymen who signed it were Francis Alison, James Sprout, George Duffield, and Robert Davison (*ibid.*, 2).

<sup>17</sup>Other publications that argued for the moral legitimacy of American resistance to the British in 1775 include: Jacob Duché, *The Duty of Standing Fast in our Spiritual and Temporal Liberties*

Like the writings of Edwards, Langdon, and the Philadelphia Presbyterians above, these writings justified resistance to the British on the basis of Scriptural arguments, the natural law argument of self-defense, and the precedents of British resistance in the past. These publications rejected the doctrines of passive obedience and non-resistance as well, all the while rejecting calls for independence and proclaiming continued loyalty to their British heritage, the British Constitution, the British form of government, and the British monarchy. While not all clergy agreed with them, those who argued for resistance to the British in 1775 exhibited no discernable shifts in either philosophy or theology.<sup>18</sup>

### The Early Shift to Independence

The year 1776 was the pivotal year in which American colonists began arguing

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(Philadelphia: James Humphreys, 1775); Levi Hart, *Liberty described and recommended* (Hartford, CT: Ebenezer Watson, 1775); Moses Mather, *America's Appeal to The Impartial World* (Hartford, CT: Ebenezer Watson, 1775); William Smith, *A Sermon on the Present Situation of American Affairs* (Philadelphia: James Humphreys, 1775); John J. Zubly, *The Law of Liberty* (Philadelphia: Henry Miller, 1775); Henry Cumings, *A Sermon Preached at Billerica On the 23d of November, 1775* (Worcester, MA: I. Thomas, 1775); Elisha Fish, *A Discourse Delivered at Worcester* (Worcester, MA: I. Thomas, 1775); Dan Foster, *A Short Essay on Civil Government* (Hartford, CT: Ebenezer Watson, 1775); William Gordon, *A Sermon Preached before the Honorable House of Representatives* (Watertown, MA: Benjamin Edes, 1775); Gad Hitchcock, *A Sermon Preached at Plymouth* (Boston: Edes and Gill, 1775); Enoch Huntington, *A Sermon, Delivered at Middletown* (Hartford, CT: Ebenezer Watson, 1775); Joseph Lyman, *A Sermon Preached at Hatfield* (Boston: Edes and Gill, 1775); Thaddeus Maccarty, *Praise to God, a Duty of continual Obligation* (Worcester, MA: I. Thomas, 1775); Joseph Montgomery, *A Sermon Preached at Christina Bridge* (Philadelphia: James Humphreys, 1775); Oliver Noble, *Some Strictures on the . . . Book of Esther* (Newbury-Port, MA: E. Lunt and H. W. Tinges, 1775); Nathan Perkins, *A Sermon Preached to the Soldiers* (Hartford, CT: Ebenezer Watson, 1775); Joseph Perry, *A Sermon Preached before the General Assembly of the Colony of Connecticut* (Hartford, CT: Ebenezer Watson, 1775); Robert Ross., *A Sermon in which the Union of the Colonies is Considered and Recommended* (New York: John Holt, 1776); Ezra Samson, *A Sermon Preached at Roxbury-Camp* (Watertown, MA: Benjamin Edes, 1775); William Stearns, *A View of the Controversy subsisting between Great-Britain and the American Colonies* (Watertown, MA: Benjamin Edes, 1775); Isaac Story, *The Love of our Country Recommended and Enforced* (Boston: John Boyle, 1775); Samuel Webster, *Rabshakeh's Proposals Considered* (Boston: Edes and Gill, 1775); and Samuel Williams, *A Discourse on the Love of Our Country* (Salem, MA: Samuel and Ebenezer Hall, 1775).

<sup>18</sup>Thomas Bradbury Chandler, the Anglican clergyman in Elizabethtown, New Jersey, who also argued strongly for the establishment of bishops, argued against American resistance in 1775. According to Chandler, the American colonists were “originally placed under the absolute authority of the English Parliament” and they “never yet have been legally exempted from it” (Thomas Bradbury Chandler, *What think ye of the Congress Now?* [New York: James Rivington, 1775], 7). See also [Thomas Bradbury Chandler], *A Friendly Address to All Reasonable Americans, on the Subject of our Political Confusions* (New York: n.p., 1774); [Samuel Seabury], *Free Thoughts on the Proceedings of the Continental Congress* (n.p., 1774); [Samuel Seabury], *A View of the Controversy between Great Britain and Her Colonies* (New York: James Rivington, 1774); [Samuel Seabury], *The Congress Canvassed* (n.p., 1774); [Samuel Seabury], *An Alarm to the Legislature of the Province of New York* (New York: James Rivington, 1775); and Samuel Seabury, *St. Peter's Exhortation To fear God and honor the King* (New York: H. Gaine, [1777]).

for American independence. Thomas Paine moved colonial thought in this direction, with his *Common Sense* published at the beginning of the year. The American clergy began floating the idea of independence as well in 1776, whereas so many had explicitly rejected this in writing the year before. The clergy moved in this direction not because of any philosophical or theological shift on their part, but because the colonies had become increasingly estranged from their mother country, and colonial resistance had by this time taken the form of a defensive war.

One of the first clergyman to publically support the idea of American independence was Jacob Green. Green served as a long-standing Presbyterian pastor in Morristown, New Jersey, and also as an interim president of the College of New Jersey in Princeton after the death of Jonathan Edwards. His son, Ashbel Green, would later serve as president of the college and was also one of the key founders of Princeton Theological Seminary. Green was a New-Side Presbyterian committed to both confessional orthodoxy and religious experience. He was also an early advocate of American independence.<sup>19</sup> In 1776 Green published a pamphlet entitled *Observations on the Reconciliation of Great Britain and the Colonies*, in which he sought to remove objections to American independence and encouraged the colonists to thoughtfully consider it. Green published his pamphlet because the choice of “reconciliation or a proper separation” from Great Britain was by this time “much in the thoughts of the Americans.”<sup>20</sup> The colonists were already discussing the question of reconciliation or independence, and Green believed that both sides of the matter should be discussed openly: “These matters are now exercising the thoughts of many among us. America’s reconciliation with Britain is become a subject of conversation, and I think ought to be

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<sup>19</sup>Sprague, *Annals of the American Pulpit*, 3:135-39.

<sup>20</sup>Jacob Green, *Observations on the Reconciliation of Great Britain and the Colonies* (New York: John Holt, 1776), 3.

impartially canvassed.<sup>21</sup>

While Green called for the question to be discussed dispassionately and “with calmness, temper, and sound reasoning,” he clearly favored American independence. Green’s stance in favor of separation from Britain was then unusual for the clergy in the early part of 1776. According to William Sprague, Green’s pamphlet showed the “reasonableness and necessity” of American independence “at a period when such an opinion was very extensively branded as a political heresy.”<sup>22</sup> Even so, Green argued that Great Britain had forfeited its right to political submission and dependence when it failed to protect and defend its legal rights and liberties and instead turned against them as their enemy. Green listed a number of hypothetical examples whereby Britain would clearly forfeit its right to American submission, and he stated his essential case indirectly in the form of this example:

Suppose . . . Britain herself should act the part of an enemy, refuses us the privileges which are ours by constitution, seize our properties, and deprive us our mutual rights; in which case America expostulates, pleads, submits to all equitable impositions which are according to constitution, begs they may be relieved and not driven to extremities; but Britain proves deaf to our entreaties, seizes our properties, and deprives us of our privileges, by which means America is obliged to defend herself by force, which in the reason and nature of things she has a right to do. . . . Would America then be under obligation to submit to British government? Every rational person would say that Britain has forfeited her right to American dependence. There can be no more reason why we should submit to Britain after she had act the part of a cruel enemy herself.<sup>23</sup>

Britain had in fact treated the colonies in this way and had dispatched its troops so that “by starving and bloodshed” it might “reduce” the colonies to “an entire submission.” Britain has “acted directly contrary to all her obligations to protect and defend” the colonies and “most unjustly pronounced [them] rebels.” Because of these things, Green

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<sup>21</sup>Green, *Observations on the Reconciliation*, 15.

<sup>22</sup>Sprague, *Annals of the American Pulpit*, 3:138.

<sup>23</sup>Green, *Observations on the Reconciliation*, 6-7. It was not without the scope of Green’s argument here to justify this interpretation of Britain’s actions, but it was here assumed. Stated in a footnote to this section, Green stated, “I do not pretend to reason with professed Tories, but with those that allow that we have righteously and properly taken up arms in our defense” (ibid., 7).

asserted that the Americans had “righteously and properly taken up arms” in their own self-defense, and Britain had “forfeited her right to American dependence.”<sup>24</sup> The rest of Green’s pamphlet addressed the many practical objections and concerns that some were raising against American independence.<sup>25</sup>

Another early advocate of American independence was John Witherspoon, who was then the president of the College of New Jersey, which later became known as Princeton University.<sup>26</sup> Witherspoon, a Presbyterian minister and emigrant to America from Scotland in 1768, played a key role in moving the colonies toward independence and was the only active clergyman who was a signer of the Declaration of Independence. In the fall of 1774, John Adams met with Witherspoon and recorded in his diary that he found Witherspoon to be “an animated Son of Liberty.”<sup>27</sup> In December 1774 Witherspoon was chosen to serve on a local “committee of correspondence” to help coordinate resistance efforts against British policies with other colonies. By April 1776, Witherspoon had privately organized a public committee meeting of New Jersey delegates to press the case for independence. He was unsuccessful in this attempt, but his plea before the delegates was apparently the first time the question of separation from

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<sup>24</sup>Green, *Observations on the Reconciliation*, 7.

<sup>25</sup>Sprague noted regarding Green that “when the British troops overran the state of New Jersey in the autumn of 1776 and the beginning of 1777, it was thought that his prominence as a Whig peculiarly exposed him to hostile incursions and depredations, but he remained at his post nearly the whole time and suffered no injury and no material inconvenience” (Sprague, *Annals of the American Pulpit*, 3:138-39).

<sup>26</sup>Ashbel Green completed (c. 1840) a manuscript biography of his mentor that contains firsthand information on Witherspoon, only recently published (Ashbel Green, *The Life of the Rev. John Witherspoon* [1973; repr., Harrisonburg, VA: Sprinkle, 2007]). The standard biographies of Witherspoon include: David Walker Woods, Jr., *John Witherspoon* (New York: Fleming Revell, 1906); and Varnum Lansing Collins, *President Witherspoon: A Biography*, 2 vols. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1925; repr., New York: Arno Press, 1969). Martha Lou Lemmon Stohlman has produced a shorter biography based largely on Varnum Collins’ work, entitled *John Witherspoon: Parson, Politician, Patriot* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1976). Recent critical works on Witherspoon’s thought include L. Gordon Tait, *The Piety of John Witherspoon: Pew Pulpit and Public Forum* (Louisville: Geneva Press, 2001); Jeffrey H. Morrison, *John Witherspoon and the Founding of the American Republic* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2005); J. Walter McGinty, *‘An Animated Son of Liberty’: A Life of John Witherspoon* (Bury St. Edmunds, UK: Arena Books, 2012); and Gideon Mailer, *John Witherspoon’s American Revolution* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2017).

<sup>27</sup>Morrison, *John Witherspoon and the Founding*, 72.

Great Britain had ever been formally put before the people of New Jersey.<sup>28</sup> In June 1776 Witherspoon was chosen to serve in the provincial Congress of New Jersey and was only a part of this body a few days before being selected to serve as a delegate to the Second Continental Congress. Witherspoon arrived in Philadelphia in late June and took an active part in the debate over the resolution for independence. In this debate, he apparently argued on July 1 in favor of a declaration of independence, over against John Dickinson of Pennsylvania and other advocates of delay, stating that the country was “not only ripe for the measure, but in danger of becoming rotten for the want of it.”<sup>29</sup> Once independence was declared, Witherspoon continued his political service as a member of the Congress, serving in it to the end of the war.

Witherspoon and Green were not the only clergymen to take the lead in arguing for American independence, but they were two of the earliest and most prominent. They argued for separation from Great Britain when it was not yet popular to champion the cause of American independence.<sup>30</sup> As clergymen, they provided a moral rationale for convincing Americans that the moral duty of loyalty and submission to the British government was no longer obligatory, given the many abuses and wrongs that had severed the political relationship.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>28</sup>Elias Boudinot, *Historical Reflections of American Events during the Revolutionary War* (Philadelphia: Frederick Bourquin, 1894), 4-8. Boudinot opposed Witherspoon’s effort and successfully convinced the New Jersey Congress to vote against his proposal, which Boudinot thought was premature. Boudinot believed that it would be more prudent to await the Continental Congress’s decision on the matter. Boudinot later supported the cause of independence, and their disagreement in 1775 was quickly put away. Boudinot served for many years as a trustee of the College of New Jersey and was the president of the Continental Congress when the war ended in 1783 with the Treaty of Paris. For more on Boudinot, see George Boyd, *Elias Boudinot: Patriot and Statesman, 1740-1821* (Westwood, CT: Greenwood, 1969).

<sup>29</sup>Green, *Life of Witherspoon*, 160. Morrison gives a complete discussion of the evidence on Witherspoon’s participation in the debate for independence (Morrison, *John Witherspoon and the Founding*, 129-132). For more on Witherspoon’s involvement in the events leading up to the adoption of the Declaration of Independence, see Collins, *John Witherspoon*, 1:216-22.

<sup>30</sup>Ashbel Green noted that “many of those who took the lead in the arduous struggle which issued in the independence of our country were, as already intimated, men of decided piety; and those of opposite character yielded to their influence, from regard to popular opinion, which, at that time, was strongly in favor of religion” (Green, *Life of Witherspoon*, 156).

<sup>31</sup>For more on the task of the clergy in shaping the public mind regarding independence, see Joel T. Headley, *The Forgotten Heroes of Liberty* (New York: Charles Scribner, 1864), 40-41. Not all who

## The Moral Philosophy of John Witherspoon

A number of historians have criticized John Witherspoon's political thought for supposedly deviating sharply from the orthodox Presbyterian tradition of which he claimed to be part. While Witherspoon was not the most outspoken clergyman on this topic of American independence, he was perhaps the most influential, given his prominent position as the president of the College of New Jersey. Many of his students became important political leaders in the new nation, most prominently his student James Madison. He influenced a large number of clergymen as well.<sup>32</sup> Under his influence, Princeton became known as an important center of American resistance to the British. Given his prominence as a patriot clergyman, the historians who critique his political thought often generalize the criticisms they make of Witherspoon to indict the American clergy who supported American resistance and American independence as a whole.

Gregg Frazer has argued that Witherspoon's political philosophy, including his doctrine of political resistance, deviated sharply from his theological tradition. Frazer alleges that Witherspoon had "an apparent intellectual 'conversion' coinciding with his move to America from Scotland," whereby he turned from being a staunch defender of Christian orthodoxy to a proponent of philosophical views that had found their origin in David Hume and Francis Hutcheson."<sup>33</sup> Frazer claims that Witherspoon was "philosophically schizophrenic," in that his theological views remained basically in line with the Protestant Reformed tradition, but his philosophical method, his ethical thought,

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argued for American resistance in the 1760s and 1770s supported American independence. While initially serving as a chaplain to the Continental Congress, Jacob Duché resigned his post a few months after the congress adopted the Declaration of Independence, and Duché openly came out against American independence the following year. See Ronald Hoffman and Peter J. Albert, eds., *Religion in a Revolutionary Age* (Charlottesville, VA: The University Press of Virginia, 1994), x-xii. John Joachim Zubly also supported American resistance up until the Declaration of Independence, after which he opposed the colonial cause (Sprague, *Annals of the American Pulpit*, 3:220-22).

<sup>32</sup>Gregg Frazer notes that 114 students of Witherspoon became clergymen (Gregg L. Frazer, *The Religious Beliefs of America's Founders: Reason, Revelation, and Revolution* [Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2012], 39).

<sup>33</sup>Frazer, *Religious Beliefs of America's Founders*, 41.

and his political thought all deviated from the Reformed tradition in an Enlightenment direction.<sup>34</sup> Frazer has claimed that Witherspoon's *Lectures on Moral Philosophy* especially exhibited a type of method or approach to religion and politics that was "decidedly rationalistic and naturalistic."<sup>35</sup> According to Frazer, "Witherspoon's Calvinism . . . is not at all evident in the *Lectures*. . . . It was not Witherspoon the Calvinist, but Witherspoon the rationalist and naturalist who influenced a generation of political thinkers."<sup>36</sup> Frazer makes this critique because Witherspoon produced a series of lectures on moral philosophy, where he attempted to make moral arguments from reason and experience alone.<sup>37</sup> This attempt, according to Frazer is *prima facie* evidence that Witherspoon had adopted an Enlightenment view of man and human reason. Witherspoon's political thought contained in his *Lectures*, then, according to Frazer, was essentially secular, rationalistic, and humanistic. On the question of political resistance, Frazer concludes that Witherspoon "justified 'resistance' to 'tyranny' on the same grounds as Locke and under the same conditions." In so doing, Witherspoon "set aside the Scriptures and succumbed to the [Enlightenment] spirit of the age." Witherspoon, for Frazer, was more interested in "justifying and spurring on the cause of American independence" than on "promot[ing] a Christian perspective" and providing a "Christian and biblical" foundation for those who followed him.<sup>38</sup>

In his critique of Witherspoon, Frazer adopts the perspective that had been

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<sup>34</sup>Frazer, *Religious Beliefs of America's Founders*, 40. Frazer surprisingly claims that Witherspoon flirted with Unitarianism, and he sees this flirtation in the following quotation of Witherspoon: "As to the nature of God, the first thing to be observed is the unity of God. . . . There is a necessity for the existence of one supreme Being, the first cause, but no necessity for more; nay, one supreme independent Being does not admit any more" (ibid., 42). The unity and singularity of God are not indications of Unitarian leanings, but are attributes traditionally ascribed to God by all Trinitarian monotheists.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid., 40.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid., 41.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid., 41-43.

<sup>38</sup>Ibid., 46.

advanced previously by Mark Noll, Nathan Hatch, and George Marsden. These authors also asserted that Witherspoon underwent “an intellectual ‘conversion’ when he crossed the Atlantic” and came to America in 1768.<sup>39</sup> In Scotland, he was clearly an evangelical whose thoughts were in accordance with the Bible, but in what these authors call “a strange transformation,” once Witherspoon came to America and began justifying American resistance and calling for American independence, he abandoned his previously held evangelical outlook for views held by Hume, Hutcheson, and other philosophers of the Scottish Enlightenment.<sup>40</sup> Noll, Hatch, and Marsden asserted that Witherspoon’s political views were built on “a frankly naturalistic basis” and “present a disturbing picture inasmuch as they lack essential elements of a genuinely Christian approach to public life.”<sup>41</sup> Witherspoon “and his fellow patriots,” according to these authors, deviated sharply from the approach to political thought presented by Augustine, Aquinas, Calvin, and Knox. What this means, then, for Noll, Hatch, and Marsden, is that “the [American] Revolution marked an advance of secularism” and a significant break from orthodoxy Protestantism.<sup>42</sup> In their view, Witherspoon’s support for American

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<sup>39</sup>Mark A. Noll, Nathan O. Hatch, and George M. Marsden, *The Search for Christian America* (Westchester, IL: Crossway, 1983), 88-89.

<sup>40</sup>Noll, Hatch, and Marsden, *Search for Christian America*, 89. Noll claims in a separate work that “once he migrated to America” Witherspoon became “a strong advocate of ethical positions he had attacked while in Scotland” (Mark A. Noll, *America’s God: From Jonathan Edwards to Abraham Lincoln* [New York: Oxford University Press, 2002], 98). Noll makes this claim in connection with Witherspoon’s supposedly uncritical acceptance of Francis Hutcheson’s “new moral philosophy” in America. Noll claims that Witherspoon adopted Hutcheson’s optimistic view of man and radically deviated from an evangelical understanding of man as fallen and “the older, more strictly Christian ethics of the Puritans . . . with their restriction of true virtue to the elect” (ibid., 106). Noll’s fullest discussion of Witherspoon is found in Mark A. Noll, *Princeton and the Republic, 1768-1822* (Vancouver: Regent College Publishing, 1989), 12-58.

<sup>41</sup>Noll, Hatch, and Marsden, *Search for Christian America*, 90. According to Noll, Hatch, and Marsden, “In politics [Witherspoon] seems very much a spokesman for the Enlightenment,” and he rejected “a biblical basis in his political thought” (ibid., 90).

<sup>42</sup>Ibid., 94. Noll, Hatch, and Marsden go on from Witherspoon to argue that “the War for Independence was not a ‘just war’ as traditionally defined by the Church” and “was not worthy of unqualified Christian support” (ibid., 95). The Declaration of Independence, for these authors, was nothing less than “propaganda,” used to provide justification for the colonists who were either disingenuous or motivated by a “confidence” in their own judgment and in “their ability to discern” the intentions behind Parliamentary actions. This confidence “stemmed from an Enlightenment view of the world which had scant room for God or his revelation” (ibid., 97). Noll, Hatch, and Marsden expressed their perspective in this book in reaction to Francis Schaeffer and his positive views of the revolutionary-era clergy. See Barry Hankins, *Francis Schaeffer and the Shaping of Evangelical America* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008),

resistance and American independence clearly mark a significant shift in the political perspective of Witherspoon and his fellow American clergymen and also signal a new direction in American religious thought.

Frazer, Noll, Hatch, and Marsden, are not the only scholars to assert that Witherspoon had a boat-ride conversion to Enlightenment rationalism.<sup>43</sup> This view has been commonly asserted by a variety of interpreters of Witherspoon. William Reddinger, for example, has stated that Witherspoon's understanding of virtue and public morality demonstrate that he is best understood as "more of a disciple of [Francis] Hutcheson than of Calvin on the issue of virtue."<sup>44</sup> Reddinger noted that Witherspoon opposed Hutcheson's heterodox views while in Scotland, and yet "he nevertheless relied heavily on Hutcheson's work when preparing his *Lectures on Moral Philosophy*," which indicated, in Reddinger's mind, "a change of position . . . that occurred at some point between his time in Scotland and in America."<sup>45</sup> Reddinger believed that Witherspoon's *Lectures on Moral Philosophy* departed from Reformed theologians like Calvin, "who argued that neither ethical theory nor practice could be drawn from the nature of man since it is so negatively affected by the fall." Reddinger claimed that Witherspoon "followed Hutcheson in his downplaying of original sin," argued "that moral emotions provide a reliable guide to ethical judgment," and upheld "the capacity of the non-Christian to act inwardly virtuously and outwardly as virtuous as can the Christian."<sup>46</sup> Similarly, John Fea has stated that "Witherspoon adopted much of Hutcheson's moral

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192-227.

<sup>43</sup>In addition to the writers mentioned in this paragraph, see also Elizabeth Flower and Murray G. Murphey, *A History of Philosophy in America* (New York: Capricorn Books, 1977), 2:234-35.

<sup>44</sup>William T. Reddinger, "Political Thought in Political Sermons of the American Founding Era" (PhD diss., Northern Illinois University, 2010), 55.

<sup>45</sup>*Ibid.*, 33. Reddinger also implied in this context that Witherspoon shared Thomas Paine's enlightenment epistemology.

<sup>46</sup>*Ibid.*, 52-53.

system” and that his teaching reflected “accommodation to the beliefs of the Enlightenment.”<sup>47</sup> Specifically, Fea claimed that “Witherspoon’s decision to embrace the New Moral Philosophy of Hutcheson and others meant that he was now teaching his students that a moral life could be led without a conversion experience.” This conviction “directly influenced his politics.”<sup>48</sup> Daryl Cornett has stated how Witherspoon’s supposed conversion to Enlightenment rationalism shaped his doctrine of political resistance. Cornett argued that Witherspoon so embraced Enlightenment philosophy such that he aside Scripture and trusted his own common sense regarding the question of political resistance. This self-assured trust in his own moral reasoning abilities led Witherspoon to support American resistance, even though it was clearly unbiblical and against Christian teaching. Unlike Witherspoon, “those who kept their views closely tied to the contents of Scripture found that the cause for independence was nothing more than rebellion, which the Bible clearly condemned.”<sup>49</sup> Witherspoon, however, “simply ignored such biblical passages” such as Romans 13 and “rationalized that resistance against tyrannical government was essentially a duty of a citizens.”<sup>50</sup>

In spite of the repeated statements above, the assertion of Witherspoon’s so-called abandonment of Scripture and conversion to Enlightenment philosophy is a serious misunderstanding of both Witherspoon and the theological tradition of which he was a part. The statements on moral philosophy that Witherspoon wrote while in America, along with his views on political resistance in particular, are consonant both with his

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<sup>47</sup>John Fea, *Was America Founded as a Christian Nation? A Historical Introduction* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2011), 230.

<sup>48</sup>Ibid., 231. Fea doesn’t state how Witherspoon’s supposedly Enlightenment view of human ability affects his doctrine of political resistance, but simply asserts without support that Witherspoon’s “revolutionary principles were drawn more from the teachings of John Locke than from the Christian tradition” (ibid.).

<sup>49</sup>Daryl C. Cornett, “America Partly Christian,” in *Christian America? Perspectives on Our Religious Heritage*, ed. Daryl C. Cornett (Nashville: B&H, 2011), 285.

<sup>50</sup>Ibid., 282.

views as a leading evangelical in Scotland and also with his Reformed Protestant tradition. The concept of a mid-life “conversion” is, even by the admission of those who assert it, “surprising.” The truth of the matter is that as an evangelical leader in Scotland, Witherspoon lauded American liberty and rejected all forms of slavish submission to absolutist claims, both in the civil and religious spheres. Contrary to the assertions of Noll and others, Witherspoon’s support of American political resistance had significant precedent in positions he took while in Scotland. In 1746, Witherspoon actively sided with those in Scotland who were resisting Bonnie Prince Charlie and the Stuarts’ absolutist claims to the English throne.<sup>51</sup> This incident demonstrates Witherspoon’s concern for political affairs, his disbelief in absolutist notions of “the divine right of kings,” his opposition to Tory sentiments, and his belief in the legitimacy of the political resistance expressed at the Glorious Revolution. In a 1758 sermon before the Society for Propagating Christian Knowledge in Edinburgh, Witherspoon honored those who had resisted government authority in the defense of the rights and liberties. He spoke of America as a far-away country that “was a refuge to many of our pious forefathers, when flying from the rage of ecclesiastic tyranny.”<sup>52</sup> He also spoke that same year in a different sermon of “the noble struggle which many in England made, about one hundred years ago, for their liberties sacred and civil, [which] still bears the name of the Grand Rebellion.”<sup>53</sup> According to his biographer Collins, “These two passages indicate the historical source of his opinions in 1774. His language of 1758 was typical of the attitude

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<sup>51</sup>Varnum Lansing Collins, *President Witherspoon: A Biography* (New York: Arno Press, 1969), 1:23-24. Witherspoon’s attempted to join with the forces in Scotland in 1746 who were opposed to the Stuart Pretender “for the support of our religion and liberty and in defense of our only rightful, and lawful Sovereign King George” (ibid., 1:22). He was apparently seized and temporarily imprisoned by the forces of Bonnie Prince Charlie in the Castle Doune, near Sterling, as a result of his actions (ibid., 1:23-24).

<sup>52</sup>John Witherspoon, *The Works of the Rev. John Witherspoon, D. D., LL.D* (Philadelphia: William W. Woodward, 1802; repr., Bristol, UK: Thoemmes Press, 2003), 1:284.

<sup>53</sup>Ibid., 1:326.

toward liberty still held two decades later by colonial dissenting clergy.”<sup>54</sup> Furthermore, his 1753 *Ecclesiastical Characteristics* asserted the right of “inferior judicatories” in the Church of Scotland to resist implementation of “the sentences of superior courts, in opposition to the dictates of their own private judgment and conscience.”<sup>55</sup> He also satirized those who would assert a kind of ecclesiastical absolutism over the conscientious “scruples” of those in dissent.<sup>56</sup> Similarly, his 1763 *Serious Apology for Ecclesiastical Characteristics* lamented the times when “slavish submission in [church] politics” spread throughout the Church, and he asserted that “every man hath a natural right . . . to judge for himself in every thing that regards religion.”<sup>57</sup> Long before involving himself in American politics, then, Witherspoon asserted views in Scotland on the question of resistance to authority that are consistent with the positions he took on political resistance in America.

Witherspoon’s *Lectures in Moral Philosophy* do not betray any massive deviation in Witherspoon’s overall ethical or theological thought from Protestant orthodoxy. While Witherspoon interacted with and at times borrowed the vocabulary and concepts of the moral philosophies of Hutcheson and other Enlightenment thinkers in the elaboration of his own positions, he expressed significant disagreement with them in his lectures. Witherspoon argued that using reason and reflection to explore moral and ethical questions is a helpful exercise and is not intended to replace Scriptural truth but to illustrate and confirm the truth that is found in Scripture:

If the Scripture is true, the [true] discoveries of reason cannot be contrary to it, and therefore, it has nothing to fear from that quarter. And as we are certain it can do no evil, so there is probability that it may do much good. There may be an illustration

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<sup>54</sup>Collins, *President Witherspoon*, 1:164.

<sup>55</sup>Mary Love, “John Witherspoon in Scotland: An Eighteenth Century Evangelical,” *Princeton Theological Review* 11 (1913): 475.

<sup>56</sup>*Ibid.*, 478.

<sup>57</sup>Witherspoon, *Works*, 3:302, 310.

and confirmation of the inspired writings, from reason and observation, which will greatly add to their beauty and force.<sup>58</sup>

Scripture does not give us specific teaching on every moral and ethical question that man encounters, so moral reasoning can be a helpful exercise, especially in the area of political ethics:

I am of the opinion that the whole Scripture is perfectly agreeable to sound philosophy, yet certainly it was never intended to teach us everything. The political law of the Jews contains many noble principles of equity, and excellent examples to future lawgivers, yet it was so local and peculiar that certainly it was never intended to be immutable and universal.<sup>59</sup>

Witherspoon is well aware how Enlightenment philosophers have sought to use moral philosophy to promote views that are contrary to orthodox Christian truth:

It is true that infidels do commonly proceed upon pretended principles of reason. But as it is impossible to hinder them from reasoning on this subject, the best way is to meet them upon their own ground and to show from reason itself the fallacy of their principles. I do not know anything that serves more for the support of religion than to see from the different and opposite systems of philosophers that there is nothing certain in their schemes but what is coincident with the word of God.<sup>60</sup>

Certainly the “infidels” Witherspoon has in view here are the Enlightenment philosophers Shaftsbury and Hutcheson. This would be consistent with the strong opposition he expressed with their views while serving as a leader of the evangelical party in Scotland. While Witherspoon agreed with Hutcheson that the moral sense, or conscience, should play a role in ethical considerations, he explicitly disagreed with Hutcheson, Samuel Clark, Adam Smith, William Wollaston, Archibald Campbell, and David Hume on the foundation of virtue, arguing that it consists in what God is and what God commands. In order to know one’s moral duty, one must know the will of God.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>58</sup>John Witherspoon, *Lectures on Moral Philosophy*, ed. Varnum Lansing Collins (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1912), 1-2.

<sup>59</sup>Witherspoon, *Lectures on Moral Philosophy*, 4.

<sup>60</sup>Ibid., 2. Witherspoon knew that not everyone believed that explorations in moral philosophy were helpful, but he challenged them to consider the apologetic aspect of it and study it anyway: “They must know what it is, if they mean ever to show that it is false” (ibid., 4).

<sup>61</sup>Ibid., 23-30. Witherspoon’s understanding of virtue here is less speculative and philosophical on the face of it that what is presented in Jonathan Edwards’s foray into moral philosophy, *A Dissertation Concerning the Nature of True Virtue*, where Edwards argues that virtue consists in “benevolence to being in general” (Jonathan Edwards, *A Jonathan Edwards Reader*, ed. John E. Smith,

Witherspoon's view of human depravity and the noetic effects of the fall as expressed in his *Lectures on Moral Philosophy* is also consistent with his Reformed theological convictions. In spite of what others have claimed, Witherspoon did not adopt a view of human ability that is at odds with his confessional tradition. In the first lecture of his *Lectures on Moral Philosophy*, Witherspoon discussed how difficult it is for man to know himself and the moral duty that God requires of him because of our fallen nature:

The knowledge of human nature . . . is either perplexed and difficult of itself, or hath been made so by the manner in which writers in all ages have treated it. Perhaps this circumstance itself is a strong presumption of the truth of the Scripture doctrine of the depravity and corruption of our nature. Supposing this depravity, it must be one great cause of the difficulty and confusion in giving an account of human nature as the work of God. This I take to be indeed the case with the greatest part of our moral and theological knowledge.<sup>62</sup>

Human depravity makes the pursuit of moral and theological knowledge filled with “difficulty and confusion.” Even so, man still retains a moral sense, “the remaining power of natural conscience,” which is to be consulted regarding moral duty, even though it is corrupted. Witherspoon believed that the Bible teaches that fallen man yet possesses a moral sense: “This moral sense is precisely the same thing with what, in scripture and common language, we call conscience. It is the law which our Maker has written upon our hearts and both intimates and enforces duty, previous to all reasoning.”<sup>63</sup> This moral sense, however, is only able to indicate our duty before God and does not entail moral

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Harry S. Stout, and Kenneth P. Minkema [New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1995], 246). Witherspoon only briefly mentions Edwards's view in his own discussion (Witherspoon, *Lectures on Moral Philosophy*, 26).

<sup>62</sup>Witherspoon, *Lectures on Moral Philosophy*, 5.

<sup>63</sup>Ibid., 18. In his extensive analysis of Witherspoon's *Lectures on Moral Philosophy*, Jack Scott asserted that Witherspoon had a “fundamental disagreement with Shaftesbury and Hutcheson” and that “Witherspoon's ethical philosophy owes more to [Joseph] Butler than to any other thinker” (John Witherspoon, *An Annotated Edition of Lectures on Moral Philosophy*, ed. Jack Scott [East Brunswick, NJ: Associated University Presses, 1982], 37-38). Scott pointed out that both Witherspoon and Butler built their understanding of conscience on Rom 2:14-15, which Butler explicitly cites and Witherspoon alludes to his discussion of conscience (ibid., 58). Scott noted that Witherspoon borrowed, at times, the language of Hutcheson in his *Lectures*, and yet “in all of his discussion of philosophical issues, Witherspoon never strayed far from his religious moorings. . . . His commitment to the Reformed tradition is clear. Steeped in the Presbyterianism of Scotland, Witherspoon remained faithfully in the mainstream of Calvinism until his death” (ibid., 27, 38).

ability.<sup>64</sup> Ashbel Green, one of Witherspoon's students and successors, in 1840 directly challenged the claim that Witherspoon taught that "unsanctified men possess natural ability to love God and keep his commandments" by quoting from Witherspoon's fifteenth lecture on divinity, wherein he spoke of "the inability of man to recover himself by his own powers" and stated that "man by nature is in fact incapable of recovery without the power of God specially interposed."<sup>65</sup>

Witherspoon's use of reason in his *Lectures on Moral Philosophy* is generally consistent with his Reformed tradition, in spite what has been so often claimed.<sup>66</sup> Even though Witherspoon interacted with the Enlightenment philosophers of his day, Witherspoon did not "convert" to Enlightenment philosophy. Many Enlightenment philosophers did in fact advance various forms of anthropocentrism which minimized the effects of sin on human ability and reason that diverged sharply from the Reformed tradition. The Reformed tradition itself, however, did use natural law reasoning and was also concerned with the promotion of civic virtue in the temporal-political realm.<sup>67</sup> John

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<sup>64</sup>Hutcheson's position was quite different. He argued that individuals have the ability to attain morality and virtue through the cultivation of the inner moral sense. In his words, "Those who cultivate and improve this sense find that it can strengthen them to bear the greatest external evils, and voluntarily to forfeit external advantages, in adhering to their duty toward their friends, their country, or the general interest of all: and that in so doing alone it is that they can thoroughly approve themselves and their conduct" (Francis Hutcheson, *Philosophiae Moralis Institutio Compendiaria*, ed. Luigi Turco [Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 2007], 40).

<sup>65</sup>Green, *Life of Witherspoon*, 265. Gideon Mailer's recent and important study of Witherspoon asserts that Witherspoon left "a certain degree of ambiguity regarding the association between moral action and the reception of grace" in his writings. Mailer does believe, however, that there is "much continuity between Witherspoon's evangelical statements and his private American lectures," including those on moral philosophy. Mailer says that Witherspoon primarily borrowed "philosophical terminology" from Enlightenment moral philosophers, and not its concepts or substance. His immediate successor at Princeton, Samuel Stanhope Smith, however, developed his moral philosophy in a clearly Enlightenment direction. In Mailer's words, "Witherspoon's use of philosophical terminology led Smith to extrapolate conceptual assumptions from the intellectual systems that his teacher had mined for descriptive vocabulary" (Mailer, *John Witherspoon's American Revolution*, 381).

<sup>66</sup>As Mailer puts it, "Even if we choose to focus on Witherspoon's American moral philosophy lectures rather than on his public sermons, therefore, it is not as easy to identify their repudiation of evangelical ideas as scholars have suggested" (Mailer, *John Witherspoon's American Revolution*, 32).

<sup>67</sup>For more on the place of the natural law in the Reformed tradition, see Stephen J. Grabill, *Rediscovering Natural Law in Reformed Theological Ethics* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006); David VanDrunen, *Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms: A Study in the Development of Reformed Social Thought* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009); and David VanDrunen, *Divine Covenants and Moral Order: A Biblical*

Calvin himself pointed to the role that reason was to play in the ordering of a civil society. In the final section of his *Institutes*, Calvin addressed the topic of “Civil Government,” which he said pertains to “the establishment of civil justice and outward morality.”<sup>68</sup> Calvin recognized that one of the roles of civil government is to “to form our social behavior to civil righteousness.”<sup>69</sup> That Calvin himself would advance a notion of “outward morality” and “civil righteousness” should call into question whether or not historians have rightly understood the Reformed tradition and its category of civic virtue. What is further, Calvin also valued the role that natural reason plays in the establishment of human government and human laws. In commenting on 1 Corinthians 1:20, Calvin stated,

For what is more noble than man's reason, in which man excels the other animals? How richly deserving of honor are the liberal sciences, which polish man, so as to give him the dignity of true humanity! Besides this, what distinguished and choice fruits they produce! Who would not extol with the highest commendations civil prudence (not to speak of other things) by which governments, principalities, and kingdoms are maintained? A solution of this question, I say, is opened up to view from the circumstance, that Paul does not expressly condemn either man's natural perspicacity, or wisdom acquired from practice and experience, or cultivation of mind attained by learning, but [only] declares that all this is of no avail for acquiring spiritual wisdom.<sup>70</sup>

From this quotation, it is clear that Calvin himself would not have been opposed to Witherspoon’s use of reason in his discussion of political ethics.<sup>71</sup>

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*Theology of Natural Law* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014).

<sup>68</sup>John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), 2:1485 (IV.XX.1).

<sup>69</sup>*Ibid.*, 2:1487 (IV.XX.2).

<sup>70</sup>John Calvin, *Commentary on the Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians*, ed. John Pringle (Edinburgh: Calvin Translation Society, 1848), 1:83. Pringle notes in a footnote here how Calvin expanded the words “civil prudence” in his French edition to read: “*La prudence civile, c’est a dire, la science des lois*” [civil prudence, that is to say, the science of laws].

<sup>71</sup>David VanDrunen’s masterful work on the place of natural law reasoning in the Reformed tradition fits with my overall assessment of Witherspoon’s moral philosophy. VanDrunen says that Witherspoon’s understanding of the enterprise of moral philosophy “seem[s] basically consistent with traditional Reformed views” (VanDrunen, *Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms*, 270). He also notes that Witherspoon’s discussion of reason, conscience, human depravity, and political ethics in his *Lectures on Moral Philosophy* “reflect the Reformed natural law tradition” (*ibid.*, 270-71). Regarding Witherspoon view of the moral sense, or conscience, VanDrunen concludes that “Witherspoon’s understanding of

## John Witherspoon's Argument for Political Resistance

Witherspoon's argument for political resistance was in continuity with the resistance thought of his many predecessors on both sides of the Atlantic who argued that resistance to one's political authorities is sometimes justified. Just as his overall perspective on ethical reasoning was in general continuity with his Reformed tradition, so was his understanding of political resistance. Witherspoon spelled out his general understanding of political resistance in his *Lectures on Moral Philosophy*. He here asserts the general duty that subjects have to submit to their political authorities. This duty is not absolute, however. If political power "comes to be exercised in a manifestly tyrannical manner, the subjects may certainly, if in their power, resist and overthrow it."<sup>72</sup> Such resistance should take place in extreme situations, for the right of resistance does not mean "that any little mistake of the rulers of any society will justify resistance. We must obey and submit to them always, till the corruption becomes intolerable."<sup>73</sup> Resistance should take place only "when it becomes manifestly more advantageous to unsettle the government altogether than to submit to tyranny. . . . It is not to be attempted till the government is so corrupt as that anarchy and the uncertainty of a new settlement is preferable to the continuance as it is."<sup>74</sup>

Witherspoon believed in 1776, if not earlier, that America had reached the point where political resistance and even a declaration of independence was justly warranted. On May 17, 1776, Witherspoon preached a fast day sermon entitled, *The*

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conscience was very similar to the older Reformed view" (ibid., 271).

<sup>72</sup>Witherspoon, *Lectures on Moral Philosophy*, 95. Like others in his theological tradition, Witherspoon based his doctrine of resistance on his concept of government by consent. See James L. McAllister, "John Witherspoon: Academic Advocate for American Freedom, in *A Miscellany of American Christianity: Essays in Honor of H. Shelton Smith*, ed. Stuart C. Henry (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1963), 199-206.

<sup>73</sup>Witherspoon, *Lectures on Moral Philosophy*, 96.

<sup>74</sup>Ibid., 95-96. Witherspoon stated here that "the once famous controversy on passive obedience and non-resistance seems now in our country pretty much over." This sentence shows the historical awareness Witherspoon had in expressing his views in favor of a right of resistance.

*Dominion of Providence over the Passions of Men*, which left no doubt as to his political convictions.<sup>75</sup> In this sermon Witherspoon asserted that the contest with England was ultimately one of “freemen [acting] in defense of their property and right.”<sup>76</sup> His *Dominion of Providence* sermon harkened back to the Puritan resistance against King Charles I and called to mind the providence of God in keeping John Hampden and Oliver Cromwell in England so that “one of them [became] the soul of the republican opposition to monarchical usurpation during the civil wars, and the other in the course of that contest, was the great instrument in bringing the tyrant to the block.”<sup>77</sup> He also reflected on the original Puritan settlers of New England who resisted tyranny by fleeing the Stuart oppression.<sup>78</sup> Witherspoon believed the colonists’ situation was similar to that faced by the Puritans in the 1640s, where not only civil but religious liberties were at stake.

According to Witherspoon,

The cause in which America is now in arms, is the cause of justice, of liberty, and of human nature. . . . I am satisfied that the confederacy of the colonies has not been the effect of pride, resentment, or sedition, but of a deep and general conviction that our civil and religious liberties, and consequently in a great measure the temporal and eternal happiness of us and our posterity, depended on the issue.<sup>79</sup>

Echoing a “pastoral letter” he wrote on behalf of the Presbyterian Synod of New York and Philadelphia, Witherspoon asserted that “there is not a single instance in history in which civil liberty was lost, and religious liberty preserved entire. If therefore we yield

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<sup>75</sup>Witherspoon stated that this was “the first time of [his] introducing any political subject into the pulpit” (Witherspoon, *Works*, 3:36). In 1775, Witherspoon wrote on behalf of the ministers of the Synod of New York and Philadelphia: “It is well known to you . . . that we have not been instrumental in inflaming the minds of the people, or urging them to acts of violence and disorder. Perhaps no instance can be given on so interesting a subject, in which political sentiments have been so long and so fully kept from the pulpit” (ibid., 3:11).

<sup>76</sup>Ibid., 3:34.

<sup>77</sup>Ibid., 3:30.

<sup>78</sup>Ibid., 31. As a further hint of the continuity of Witherspoon’s historical and political perspective between what he held in Scotland and what he held in America, Witherspoon himself noted in a footnote that this “whole paragraph [on New England resistance] was copied from a sermon . . . prepared and preached in Scotland, in the month of August, 1758” (ibid.).

<sup>79</sup>Ibid., 3:36-37

up our temporal property, we at the same time deliver the conscience into bondage.”<sup>80</sup> “The true and proper hinge of the controversy between Great Britain and America,” according to Witherspoon, was the threat to these civil and religious liberties posed by the absolutism expressed in the 1767 Declaratory Act, with its assertion that Britain has a right to “bind [the colonies] in all cases whatsoever.”<sup>81</sup> In a later sermon, Witherspoon elaborated on the belief that American resistance was necessary for defending these basic rights and liberties:

If [the Americans] had yielded to the claims of the British parliament, they would have been no better than a parcel of tributary states, ruled by lordly tyrants, and exhausted by unfeeling pensioners under commission of one too distant to hear the cry of oppression and surrounded by those who had an interest in deceiving him. . . . They have united for common defense and resolved that they will be free and independent, because they cannot be the one without the other.<sup>82</sup>

American resistance was necessary, for Witherspoon, for the simple conserving of their traditional rights and for defending themselves against tyranny. Independence was necessary, simply as a practical necessity: “Such is [Britain’s] distance from us, that a wise and prudent administration of our affairs is as impossible as the claim of [absolute] authority is unjust.”<sup>83</sup>

Even though Witherspoon became a zealous advocate of American independence, he did not share the philosophical and theological perspective of the political radicals of his day. In fact, he was critical of them. Even while advancing the

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<sup>80</sup>Witherspoon, *Works*, 3:37. Witherspoon’s hope was that “God [would] grant that in America true religion and civil liberty may be inseparable, and that the unjust attempts to destroy the one, may in the issue tend to the support and establishment of both” (ibid., 3:46).

<sup>81</sup>Ibid., 37.

<sup>82</sup>John Witherspoon, *An Address to the Natives of Scotland Residing in America* (London: Fielding and Walker, 1778), 9-10.

<sup>83</sup>Witherspoon, *Works*, 3:37. Witherspoon elaborated his point: “Such is and must be their ignorance of the state of things here, so much time must elapse before an error can be seen and remedied, and so much injustice and partiality must be expected from the arts and misrepresentation of interested persons, that for these colonies to depend wholly upon the legislature of Great Britain, would be like many other oppressive connexions, injury to the master, and ruin to the slave. . . . There is a certain distance from the seat of government, where an attempt to rule will either produce tyranny and helpless subjection, or provoke resistance and effect a separation” (ibid., 3:37-39).

cause of independence in his *Dominion of Providence* sermon, Witherspoon criticized the then-unknown author of *Common Sense*, Thomas Paine, for “represent[ing] the doctrine of original sin as an object of contempt and abhorrence”:

Was it modest or candid for a person without name or character to talk in this supercilious manner of a doctrine that has been espoused and defended by many of the greatest and best men that the world ever saw, and makes an essential part of the established creeds and confessions of all the Protestant churches without exception? . . . Was it prudent, when he was pleading a public cause, to speak in such opprobrious terms of a doctrine which he knew or ought to have known was believed and professed by, I supposed, a great majority of very different denominations? Is this gentleman ignorant of human nature, as well as an enemy of the Christian faith? . . . Or shall we suppose this author so astonishingly ignorant, as to think that all men now, whose favor is worth asking, have given up the doctrine of the New Testament? If he does, he is greatly mistaken.<sup>84</sup>

Witherspoon maintained his orthodox and confessional view of original sin, total depravity, and human nature, and distanced himself very sharply from the philosophy of Paine.<sup>85</sup> He also distanced himself from Paine’s strong antimonarchical position, arguing in his *Lectures on Moral Philosophy* that a good government has mixed elements of monarchy, aristocracy, and democracy.<sup>86</sup> Witherspoon held up the British form of government as an example, in that it was a mixed government with separated powers.<sup>87</sup> Witherspoon also expressed his disagreement with John Wilkes, the British radical known for his extreme views pertaining to liberty. While Wilkes sided with the colonial cause, Witherspoon rejected his political radicalism as well. According to Witherspoon,

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<sup>84</sup>Witherspoon, *Works*, 3:23-24. John Adams described how Witherspoon vehemently opposed Adams’s desire to give Paine a place of official responsibility on behalf of the Continental Congress in 1776. Adams came quickly to share Witherspoon’s low assessment of Paine. See John Adams, *The Works of John Adams*, ed. Charles Francis Adams (Boston: Charles C. Little and James Brown, 1850), 2:506-10.

<sup>85</sup>This is contrary to William Reddinger’s suggestion that Witherspoon’s agreement with Paine’s *Common Sense* was more wholesale and uncritical (Reddinger, “Political Thought in Political Sermons,” 52). See also Jeffrey H. Morrison, *John Witherspoon and the Founding of the American Republic* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2003), 60-61.

<sup>86</sup>Thomas Paine, *Collected Writings*, ed. Eric Foner (New York: Library of America, 1995), 12-20.

<sup>87</sup>Witherspoon, *Lectures on Moral Philosophy*, 92-94.

“the American cause . . . was as different from that of Wilkes as light is from darkness.”<sup>88</sup>

In contrast with British libertarians like Wilkes, Witherspoon did not view civil liberty as essential to either virtue or happiness. In his words,

A virtuous mind and virtuous conduct is possible, and perhaps equally possible, in every form of government. . . . We [also] see the subjects of arbitrary governments . . . not only happy, but very often they have a greater attachment to their form of government than those of free states have to theirs. And if contentment be necessary to happiness, there is commonly more impatience and discontent in a free state than in any other. . . . Perhaps in free governments the law and the mob do more mischief to private property than is done in any absolute monarchy.<sup>89</sup>

Witherspoon’s statements here set him apart from many of the secularists and radicals like Paine and Wilkes who supported American liberty and independence. Even while supporting the American cause, Witherspoon and the many clergymen in America like him avoided such radical philosophies.

### **Conclusion**

The writings of John Witherspoon give no indication that his doctrine of political resistance marks a shift in his overall theology, philosophy, or ethics. This is consistent with the continuity in Witherspoon’s overall political philosophy. Contrary to the assertions of Frazer, Noll, Hatch, Marsden, Cornett, and Reddinger, Witherspoon did not fundamentally alter his moral epistemology or his political ethic when he crossed the Atlantic in 1768. Even though he interacted extensively with seventeenth-century moral philosophers and even borrowed some of their vocabulary, there is no substantive deviation from the Reformed tradition in his *Lectures on Moral Philosophy*.

Witherspoon’s justification of political resistance falls squarely within the Reformed resistance tradition. While to modern ears Witherspoon and the American clergy may sound Lockean in their arguments for resistance, it is important to remember

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<sup>88</sup>Witherspoon, *Address to the Natives of Scotland*, 6.

<sup>89</sup>Witherspoon, *Lectures on Moral Philosophy*, 98-99.

that Locke himself was predated in his resistance thought by the Reformed resistance tradition, and the defenders of resistance did not distinguish between Locke and the Reformed theologians on the question of resistance. As Jeffry Morrison helpfully states,

Witherspoon, like other Reformed Americans, saw himself as the inheritor of a sturdy tradition of Protestant resistance to the divine right of kings and civil tyranny that antedated Locke and Sidney by a century. . . . English, French, Scottish, and Swiss reformers developed a sophisticated body of literature arguing against the divine right of kings and, more important to Witherspoon, articulating a case for resistance to arbitrary or tyrannical government.<sup>90</sup>

It is in this vein of resistance thought that Witherspoon carried forward the doctrine of political resistance with an overall philosophical continuity with his theological predecessors.<sup>91</sup>

After the Continental Congress declared American independence, the debate over political resistance continued. Nathaniel Whitaker, the orthodox Congregationalist in Salem, Massachusetts, who had deeply admired George Whitefield, published his defense of political resistance in 1776 entitled *An Antidote against Toryism*.<sup>92</sup> On the others side, Charles Inglis, the Anglican rector of Trinity Church in New York, published his rejection of political resistance in 1780, *The Duty of Honoring the King*.<sup>93</sup> Both of these works covered the same ground that had been fiercely debated in British circles since the days of the Stuarts. As Inglis assessed the principles behind the colonial

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<sup>90</sup>Morrison, *John Witherspoon and the Founding*, 79.

<sup>91</sup>The nineteenth-century Presbyterian theologian Thomas Smyth stated, “The separation from Great Britain involved no change in the political theories they [the colonists] had entertained. It was placed upon clear and definite grounds. The general and vague idea of liberty, that dazzling image with the face of a goddess and the heart of a prostitute, entered not into the question. The colonists had enjoyed the substance from the day they put their feet upon American ground. And it was not the desire to change, but the desire to keep and secure, which produce their Independence” (Thomas Smyth, “The Mecklenburg and National Declarations,” *Southern Presbyterian Review* 1 [September 1847]: 34-35).

<sup>92</sup>Nathaniel Whitaker, *An Antidote against Toryism, or, The Curse of Meroz* (Newbury-port, MA: John Mycall, 1777). See also Josiah Stearns, *Two Sermons Preached at Epping* (Newbury-port, MA: John Mycall, 1777).

<sup>93</sup>Charles Inglis, *The Duty of Honouring the King, explained and recommended* (New York: Hugh Gainé, 1780). See also Charles Inglis, *The Christian Soldier's Duty Briefly delineated* (New York: Hugh Gainé, [1777]); and Samuel Seabury, *St. Peter's Exhortation To fear God and honor the King* (New York: Hugh Gainé, [1777]).

resistance to the British, he tellingly pronounced their resistance to be in continuity with the Puritan opposition to King Charles I exhibited in the English Civil War. His *Duty of Honoring the King* sermon, preached January 30 to explicitly mark “the anniversary of the martyrdom of King Charles I,” stated the continuity between the English Civil War and the American Revolution in this way:

Need I tell you that the unnatural rebellion which, at this day, desolates and disgraces America, bears the strongest resemblance to the former rebellion [i.e. the Puritan resistance to Charles I]? The one is the exact counterpart of the other, begun on nearly the same principles and carried on by the very same methods.<sup>94</sup>

Even opponents of the Revolution like Inglis rightly understood the fundamental continuity between the political resistance thought behind the American Revolution and the political resistance shown against Stuart absolutism in Britain’s past. Both sides recognized the deep historical roots of political resistance thought in the Revolutionary era.<sup>95</sup> This is the one thing that both sides agreed on.

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<sup>94</sup>Inglis, *Duty of Honoring the King*, 24-25.

<sup>95</sup>Josiah Stearns, in his 1777 argument for political resistance against “the unreasonable doctrine of the divine right of kings,” noted that the rejection of “the doctrine of passive obedience and non-resistance” had deep roots in arguments expressed in the past as well. The rejection of a right of resistance, in his words, had been “so often, so solidly, and so clearly confuted by many worthy treatises, written some in these times and some in former unhappy times similar to these” (Stearns, *Two Sermons Preached at Epping*, 11).

## CHAPTER 7

### CONCLUSION

Mark Noll, George Marsden, Nathan Hatch, Gregg Frazer, William Reddinger, Daryl Cornett and others have argued that American religious thought deviated from its historical roots starting at the American Revolution. They argue that the introduction of non-Christian political and moral philosophy seeped into the general thinking of the American clergy of this time, which explains the unique development of an American variety of evangelicalism. The American clergy's doctrine of political resistance and support of resistance to the British are supposedly evidence of this shift toward a new variety of American Christianity that contains heavily synthesized elements of Enlightenment thought.

Contrary to this argument, the American clergy's justification of political resistance during the American Revolution is not an indication of a shift in clerical thought. While liberal clergymen like Jonathan Mayhew did support resistance to the British, the assertion of the right to resist one's own political authorities in certain circumstances is not a uniquely liberal or Enlightenment notion. Mayhew's argument for political resistance had its immediate roots in the conflict against the claims of Stuart absolutism in the early eighteenth century. British clergymen like Benjamin Hoadly and Thomas Bradbury put forth strong arguments in the early eighteenth century against the so-called doctrine of "passive obedience" and non-resistance thought in order to counter the lingering Stuart doctrine of the divine right of kings. The biblical and natural law arguments they used, which were carried on by Mayhew and the subsequent revolutionary-era clergy in America, had deep roots in the well-developed tradition of Reformed resistance thought. This tradition dates as far back as the mid-sixteenth

century and provided precedent for subsequent clergy in the Reformed Protestant tradition, which included the majority of Revolutionary-era clergymen in America. While some historians have tried to posit a sharp distinction between John Locke and the Reformed tradition on the question of political resistance, or between Anglo and Continental varieties of Protestant resistance thought, such distinctions fail to hold up under scrutiny and are alien to how the tradition was received by the Revolutionary-era clergymen in America.

Colonial resistance to the British in the 1760s and 1770s also had significant precedent in the resistance activities of the colonial clergy in the seventeenth century. The colonial clergy's involvement in the New England revolution of 1689 provided a memorable precedent for colonial resistance to subsequent instances of government oppression. The memory of the New England tyrant Edmund Andros and his overthrow did not fade in the eighteenth century. The example of principled resistance to Andros, along with the resistance of the Glorious Revolution in England, and the Puritan resistance to Charles I prior to this, provided ample precedent for the belief that resistance to one's political authorities was sometimes justifiable and even at times a moral duty. They did not have to look outside their own history or their own tradition for their assertions of a right of resistance. The clergy who justified political resistance during English Civil War and the Glorious Revolution provided all the justification that was needed.

An underappreciated aspect of the Revolutionary era was the threat that colonists felt not only to their civil liberties but to their religious liberty also. The effort of High Church Anglicans like Thomas Bradbury Chandler to see resident bishops installed in America gave American clergy great concern about the future of colonial religious liberty. When coupled with the deeply offensive Quebec Act of 1774, the specter of religious absolutism inflamed the religious sentiments of those who had long opposed the spread of Catholicism, which was threatened by the French prior to 1763. Many

Protestant clergy came to view their struggle with British absolutism as a part of the long-standing spiritual struggle against the power of Rome and all it represented. The American clergy did not shift their concerns away from spiritual matters to political ones, but they viewed the political events of the day as consequential for the cosmic spiritual struggle they saw themselves engaged in.

Instead of asserting any new Enlightenment principles or political philosophies, the colonial clergy generally argued that their efforts of resistance to the British in the 1770s were simply acts of self-defense. Justifications of self-defense and defensive warfare were common leading up to 1776, especially after the Coercive Acts of 1774. In the effort to defend colonial rights and liberties, it is often underappreciated how many British clergymen also published defenses of American resistance. This fact minimizes the strength of any argument that wants to see American political resistance as somehow unique or distinct from British forms of thought. The widespread arguments in defense of American interests made on both sides of the Atlantic also underscore the fundamentally conservative aims of those who were resisting the shifts in British policy toward the colonies.

The way in which Mark Noll and other historians like him present John Witherspoon's moral philosophy and doctrine of political resistance fails accurately to understand his thought in the context of his own Reformed tradition. The Reformed tradition was not opposed to using arguments from reason and experience, especially in the realm of politics. The Reformed tradition also gave a significant place to the role of conscience and natural revelation, even while asserting total depravity and the noetic effects of the fall. Witherspoon's interaction with the moral philosophers of Scotland do not set him at odds with his own theological tradition in terms of either doctrine or method. While he did borrow conceptual language from philosophers like Francis Hutcheson, his mid-life "conversion" in America to philosophical views he explicitly rejected in Scotland is best understood as not only implausible but fictitious.

There is no compelling evidence for interpreting the resistance thought of the American clergy during the American Revolution as marking any sharp deviation in theological, philosophical, or ethical thought. The numerous lines of continuity in their resistance thought are compelling. When the American clergy's arguments for political resistance are read against the backdrop of the broader colonial, British, and Protestant perspectives, they appear less distinctly "American" than some of have claimed. Whatever differences have come to define American and British evangelicalism cannot be convincingly traced back to the American clergy's support of the American Revolution. Such explorations should probe the much later developments of the two nation's evangelical traditions.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>As an alternative to Noll's argument for the development of a uniquely American form of evangelicalism beginning at the Revolutionary period, see David Bebbington, "Evangelicalism and Secularism in Britain and America from the Eighteenth Century to the Present," *Post-Christendom Studies* 1 (2016): 5-30. Bebbington argues that "the intellectual formation" of "the evangelical communities east and west of the Atlantic" in both the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries "took place in a common mold," and that British and American evangelicalism remained quite similar until the early twentieth century (ibid., 9, 21). Bebbington explicitly rejects that "democratization thesis" of Nathan Hatch as well, arguing that British evangelicalism also moved in a populist direction for much of the nineteenth century (ibid., 13). In his words, "The United States had no monopoly of democratic enterprise in religion" (ibid., 14). Bebbington believes that significant divergences between American and British evangelicalism did not take place until the early twentieth century. Bebbington originally presented a previous version of this article to the SBTS 1892 Club on October 22, 2014.

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ABSTRACT

JUSTIFYING REVOLUTION:  
THE AMERICAN CLERGY'S ARGUMENT  
FOR POLITICAL RESISTANCE, 1763-1783

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The colonial clergymen who justified political resistance to British authorities from 1763 to 1783 did so in continuity with previous justifications of political resistance found within Reformed Protestantism. Clergymen such as Jonathan Mayhew who justified a right of resistance in the eighteenth century did not rely upon new varieties of Enlightenment or Lockean rationalism in formulating their arguments for political resistance. They instead reasserted common arguments found in traditional Protestant views of political resistance. The colonial clergy followed the theological precedents that were found not only in seventeenth-century resistance to Stuart absolutism and but also to the Stuart-imposed government of Edmund Andros over New England. The clergy tended to justify resistance to British policies on the basic grounds of self-defense as conflict with Britain intensified in the mid-1770s. The protests and arguments used by American clergymen were not uniquely American, as the same positions were held by many of the British clergy as well. The American clergy like John Witherspoon supported a final break between Britain and America not because of any newfound theology or philosophy but from a deep desire to conserve the traditional rights and liberties that American Protestants had long enjoyed.

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