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Disestablishment in Connecticut: 1816-1818

By

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Disestablishment in Connecticut: 1816-1818

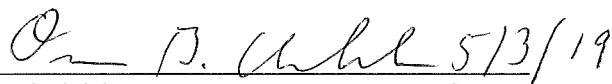
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Under the Supervision of Dr. Oscar Chamberlain

Abstract

Disestablishment of the state and church in Connecticut proved to be rich in political and religious history. For years religious dissenters decried the forced support of religion in the state. As the Republican Party gained more support from religious dissenters desiring religious liberty, a war between Federalists and Republicans, establishmentarians and disestablishmentarians, began. The war was not simply political, however, rather more of a religious war waged on political battlefields. Newspaper articles of the day reveal that both sides attempted to prove they were the defenders of true religion and the other the enemy. Federalists argued Republicans were Atheists, infidels and irreligious and that support of religion and the Gospel itself was vital and necessary; Republicans argued Federalists corrupted religion and that Christianity would be free to prosper under Republican rule. Through each political season and issue, starting in 1816 and ending in 1818 with the ratification of Connecticut's first state constitution, religion - Christianity - dominated the conversation. It was a significant factor and most vociferously contested aspect of the battle between Federalists and Republicans including the creation and ratification of the state's first state constitution.


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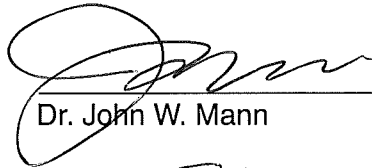
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Introduction

“I remember seeing father, the day after the election,” said Catharine Beecher of her father Lyman, “sitting on one of the old-fashioned, rush-bottomed kitchen chairs, his head drooping on his breast, and his arms hanging down. ‘Father,’ said I, ‘what are you thinking of?’ He answered, solemnly, ‘THE CHURCH OF GOD.’”¹

In 1817, under the banner of ‘Toleration’ the Republican Party finally and irreparably loosened the Federalist grip on Connecticut politics with the election of their governor, Oliver Wolcott Jr.² Subsequent successes in Connecticut’s General Assembly elections represented a revolutionary political change culminated by the ratification of Connecticut’s first state constitution in 1818. But to both staunch federalists such as Lyman Beecher and ardent Republicans the political revolution effected in Connecticut in 1818 signified much more than just an exchange of power amongst rival political factions, rather an irreparable change in the relationship between the church and the state. As Beecher so despondently noted, the downfall of pious Federalists at the hands of irreligious Republicans signified to Federalists an assault on religion, on the church, on Christianity. To Republicans, their political success carried equal spiritual significance,

¹ Lyman Beecher, Edited by Barbara M. Cross, *The Autobiography of Lyman Beecher*, vol. I (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press), 1961. Page 252.

² For the purposes of this thesis there are some generalizations used for clarity and, at times, to simply facilitate reading. The term ‘federalist’ implies both Federalists as a political group and those that believe in and defend the effects and purposefulness of a church establishment. As for the opposing camp, ‘republican’ will be used for Republicans as well as religious dissenters and all others that desired the principle of voluntarism to support religion. When necessary the specific name of the religious dissenting group will be used i.e. Baptist, Methodist, or Episcopalian. Also, Federalist and Republican will still be used to refer specifically to the party or representative delegates at the constitutional convention. Moreover, despite the established church being Congregational, which will be the term predominantly used here, various sources use the term Presbyterian in reference to the same establishment, thus the two terms will be used interchangeably for the purposes of this paper, depending on the use within the particular source being cited.

exclaiming “Religious tyranny is at an end.” The newly formed Constitution gave equal right to all Christian religious dissenters, effectively sundering the union of church and state in Connecticut.

An establishment had been a reality for the colony of Connecticut since its founding and formalized through legislative action following the gathering of ministers at the Saybrook Synod in 1708. The American Revolution’s emphasis on liberty spurred national changes in the relationship between the church and the state, Connecticut following suit. After an increasingly vocal dissenting minority clamored for religious liberty, Connecticut’s state legislature disestablished the Congregational Church as the officially recognized state church in 1784, but an establishment through compulsory taxes and religious tests for public office remained. The discussion for complete disestablishment among Connecticut’s citizens and politicians grew gradually in the early Nineteenth Century, but escalated starting in 1816 and ending in 1818. The discussion between Federalists and Republicans, Congregationalists and dissenters starting in 1816 was a clear and dramatic political and religious battle, one that is at once historically rich and important to our understanding of the history of religion, politics, the church and the state in Connecticut, New England and the Nation at large.

Discussion of disestablishment in Connecticut in historical scholarship varies, with only a handful of historians giving the topic appropriate treatment. Richard J. Purcell’s *Connecticut in Transition* and William McLoughlin’s *New England Dissent: 1630-1833* set the standard with the most in-depth and comprehensive scholarship on the national stage. McLoughlin’s discussion of disestablishment in Connecticut in *New Eng-*

land Dissent: 1630-1833 is even more extensive than Purcell's, discussing it over seven chapters to Purcell's two. Although several chapters are devoted to the initial "propping up" of the establishment and the initial union of dissenters and democrats, he spends two chapters dealing directly with the rise of the Toleration Party and disestablishment. Similar to Purcell, McLoughlin provides a thorough discussion of the salient facts pertaining to the political affairs of both Federalist and Toleration Parties, noting election results starting in 1816, the first signs of success for the Democrats due directly to the Hartford Convention and Bishop's Fund controversy, and the details the arguments advanced by both sides. Especially noteworthy is McLoughlin's use of the impassioned and partisan newspaper articles, which serve to demonstrate sufficiently the length and significance of the debate, as well as its contentiousness.³ The mere fact that some historians have appropriated significant efforts at discussion of disestablishment further bolsters my contention that this is an issue worthy of extensive discussion. At the very least it deserves a proper characterization, if the extended discussion is not possible.⁴ For such discussions

³ William McLoughlin, *New England Dissent: 1630-1833* Vol. II (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1971), 915-1043 *passim*.

⁴ M. Louise Greene's book "The Development of Religious Liberty in Connecticut" is an excellent contribution to the story of disestablishment in Connecticut, released in 2005, first published in 1905. Greene in "The Development of Religious Liberty in Connecticut" starts from the beginnings of the colony. From early Congregationalism through disestablishment, Green thoroughly takes the reader through the religious, theological, political and social dynamics of Connecticut's church and state relations and its eventual sundering. Her treatment informs how establishment came to be, the nature of the establishment, the establishment during historic periods e.g. The Great Awakening, Revolution, and the political circumstances that led to its ultimate demise. The last chapter, "Disestablishment" serves the last two years of establishment, 1816-1818, effectively, giving access to how Connecticut's political revolution came to be. In all, her work is the lodestar for Connecticut's religious and political history from the beginnings of the colony to the ratification of the Constitution.

Worth mentioning in this discussion is an economic investigation by Kelly Olds in her article "Privatizing the Church: Disestablishment in Connecticut and Massachusetts." In it, Olds looks at the effect of "privatizing" the once public church in both Connecticut and Massachusetts. While strictly an economic impact study, her research indicates a depth and richness to this history. The significance further bolstered by the areas of disciplines used to approach the issue: political science, religion, social science, and economics.

and characterizations, the core elements touched upon in Purcell and McLoughlin's discussions of disestablishment in Connecticut serve as the model for future scholarship.⁵

Unfortunately, the majority of historical scholarship regarding disestablishment in Connecticut is quite terse. The historiography on church and state relations in the early national period frequently glosses over Connecticut, giving an incomplete, if not inaccurate portrayal of the actual history. In fact, many scholars simply acknowledge the date of disestablishment and continue in their larger discussion, leading readers to believe mistakenly that disestablishment was a simple process not warranting further discussion. The treatment of disestablishment in Connecticut in the majority of national scholarship, however, is cursory at best. Some acknowledge merely the date of disestablishment while most provide only slightly more information, which consequently serves to misrepresent disestablishment in Connecticut and mislead the reader.⁶

Other scholars tend to over-generalize and subsume Connecticut into a broader discussion of disestablishment in New England generally leading to assume a type of uni-

⁵ Included would be M. Louise Greene's work, *The Development of Religious Liberty in America*.

⁶ Willard Sperry, *Religion in America* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1963), 45. In *Religion in America*, Willard Sperry briefly touches on Connecticut in his discussion concerning the causes of separation of church and state in America. He asserts that national separation came directly from the First Amendment and the Seventh Article of the Constitution which served to abolish religious tests for officeholders. Sperry notes that individual states, however, were not bound by these provisions and were allowed to establish their own practices concerning church and state. His discussion ends by noting that church establishments "lingered on," citing that Congregational Churches in Connecticut were supported by state taxes until disestablishment in 1818.

Sperry's use of the phrase "lingered on" insinuates a weakness in Connecticut's establishment as though it meekly held on and gradually and unceremoniously faded from existence. An acknowledgement of the contentiousness of the battle between the establishment and the dissenters or the closeness of the vote for both election and ratification would prove the strength of the establishment, thus illustrating the inaccurate and misleading nature of the words "lingered on." A complete discussion of the pertinent facts of the case would also show that even after the Episcopalians deserted Federalist ranks following the Bishop's Fund controversy, the debate was still contentious and the vote was still close. Had the Episcopalians not deserted Federalist ranks or had the Federalists conceded financial support to them, the establishment would have "lingered on" much longer. Considering the actual facts (and counterfactual arguments) surrounding Connecticut's disestablishment, Sperry's implication of weakness severely misrepresents the nature of establishment thus showing his discussion to be inadequate.

formity of history. Few mention the impact Religion had on the reform movement, as well as it being a major and significant driving force for the constitutional convention. Indeed, it was as much of a religious battle as it was political.⁷

William Warren Sweet in *The Story of Religion in America* misrepresents disestablishment in Connecticut by merely providing its date and gross generalizations. In his discussion of the nationalization of American churches, Sweet generalizes about the entrenchment of congregationalism in New England following the American Revolution,

⁷ John Sassi also glosses over the issue of disestablishment in his article "The First Party Competition and Southern New England's Public Christianity." He casually mentions the "major gains" made by the Democratic-Republicans in the 1816 election under the banner "Toleration Party" and concludes by noting that they seized both houses of the General Assembly and eventually disestablished Congregationalism through a constitutional convention and subsequent ratification of a new state constitution. Sassi's disregard for the pertinent facts of the issue and oversimplified statements are quite deceiving.

Evarts Greene in *Religion and the State: The Making and Testing of an American Tradition* delves slightly deeper into the story of disestablishment in Connecticut, at least beyond a simple date. He posits that separation came "much less easily" than in Virginia (which he previously discussed at length) and only after a longstanding controversy. He also notes "the issue was substantially determined in 1818" when they adopted their first constitution. Greene errs, however, by over-generalizing the issue using Massachusetts' story as representative for New England disestablishment as a whole. Greene asserts that the catalysts for separation were essentially the same in Massachusetts, Connecticut and New Hampshire, as was the union of Federalism and Congregationalism, hence the contention that Massachusetts is sufficiently representative of New England. His assertion that "forces at work" regarding separation were essentially the same belies the much more complex story in, and unique to, Connecticut. Although there are similarities between the New England states, the details in Connecticut are vastly different and significant and deserve discussion.

In *Religious Liberty in America: History and Prospects*, Glenn Miller also touches disestablishment in Connecticut in his discussion of New England disestablishment. Similar to Greene, Miller posits that separation was a "long-drawn-out" affair in both Connecticut and Massachusetts. He notes the alliance of the Congregationalist clergy and the Federalist Party and how the future of Congregationalism, thus the future of the church-state union, lay with the Federalist Party. But Miller asserts "Federalism was a dying cause" and the victory of the Democratic Party followed in 1817 resulting from the Anglicans withdrawal from the party. A thorough discussion of Connecticut's disestablishment would illuminate the arduous nature of victory obtained by Democrats, over both Federalists and the Standing Order, and that the death of both, especially the Standing Order, was neither gradual nor natural.

David Roth's regional study of Connecticut entitled *Connecticut*, does recognize and discuss, albeit cursorily, the salient facts regarding the Federalist downfall and disestablishment. His discussion, however, tells the story from the victor's perspective making disestablishment appear easily accomplished. In his discussion of the Hartford Convention and the Bishop's Fund controversy and the subsequent Democrat-Episcopalian political alliance, the contentiousness of the battle over disestablishment goes unacknowledged, Roth taking for granted the "Tolerationist" victory. Also unacknowledged is the debate over religion and disestablishment as one of the salient issues for the constitutional convention, not to mention the debates that arose in both the General Assembly and public. Moreover, in his discussion of the actual constitutional convention of 1818 Roth gives no treatment to the vociferous debates amongst the delegates as well as the resultant citizens' vote for ratification. His neglect of the debate and portrayal of disestablishment - as though its course was without difficulty for the Democrats- belies the true complexity and querulous nature of the debate.

notes disestablishment was led by Baptists and then concludes his discussion of New England disestablishment with the dates of separation for Massachusetts, Connecticut and New Hampshire.⁸ Although certain characteristics were uniform throughout New England such as Federalism, congregationalism and religious dissenters (mainly Baptists), the history of disestablishment in Connecticut is quite different than the rest of New England. The battle for disestablishment in Connecticut was hard fought, engendered passionate debate, and resulted in a slim margin of victory in both elections and ratification. An acknowledgement of Connecticut's unique and complex story of disestablishment, as well as Massachusetts and New Hampshire's, would disabuse readers of any misconceptions regarding New England similitude.

In *Faith of our Fathers*, Edwin Gaustad pays slightly more attention to Connecticut the prevailing national Scholarship, but nonetheless glosses over the issue. In his discussion of 'religious vitality and the churches' Gaustad notes the assiduous, albeit unsuccessful, resistance of Lyman Beecher to disestablishment in the beginning of the nineteenth century. He also notes that the citizen's vote for ratification of the new Constitution was "very close" with 13,918 for and 12,364 against.⁹ Although Gaustad acknowledges the closeness of the vote he leaves out information as to why it was close, leaving readers unaware of the contentious elections and the Federalist blunders i.e. Bishop's Fund controversy, which made the votes in both elections and ratification close. Moreover, Gaustad would do well to recognize the public nature of the debate over the issue.

⁸ William Warren Sweet, *The Story of Religion in America* (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1950), 189-190.

⁹ Edwin Gaustad, *Faith of our Fathers* (San Francisco: Harper & Row Publishers, 1987), 120.

His acknowledgement of the famous congregational minister Beecher does not illustrate the nature of this hotly contested public issue, debated for years in the newspapers and not limited to religious or political authorities or arenas. A more complete discussion by Gaustad would illustrate the significance of the issue of disestablishment to all the people of Connecticut at the time and that the vote was close even after the weakening of the Federalist Party.

In all of historical scholarship concerning disestablishment in Connecticut, however, including McLoughlin and the few historians that have mined the historical ore of Connecticut's road to disestablishment, there is fundamental lack of discussion regarding the nature of the issue and the significance of religion and the religious argument that animated both sides of the fight. With this lack of discussion comes a mischaracterization, hence misunderstanding. Historian Richard J. Purcell called Disestablishment "the greatest single result of the reform movement" in Connecticut and historians who have waded into the deeper waters of the issue acknowledge the debate surrounding the amendments and article concerning religion were the most vociferous and hotly contested. There is still, however, a dearth of scholarship acknowledging the purport of religious argument and the significance of religion in driving the reform movement and the eventual call for a Constitutional Convention.¹⁰

The battle has largely been written as political and social, with detailed understanding of the political parties, the political and social issues, and even the religions of the protagonists. But nowhere in the national scholarship is there a discussion of the

¹⁰ Richard J. Purcell, *Connecticut in Transition: 1775-1818* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1918), 11.

“religious” nature of the argument, specifically from 1816-1818, that animated both sides of the political and religious divide. It is the contention of this thesis that religion was *the* political issue and a major driving force for the Constitutional Convention. Few mention the impact Religion had on the reform movement, as well as it being a major and significant driving force for the convention. It was as much of a religious battle as it was political.

It was at its core a war between two political parties battling over the title of defender of the true religion. The political lobbying, the elections and the constitutional convention were, in part, political avenues for religious purposes. Sincerity of belief is inherently unprovable in history, but the preponderance of articles dealing specifically with religion, the consistency of the messages from both camps, and the stridency with which they were argued illuminates an animating spirit in Connecticut politics in the early Republic. To be sure, a simple study of human nature would reveal the politicization of religion in this affair, anything to garner votes. But the campaign for votes took on a markedly “religious” tone, both sides maneuvering to prove their approach to religion was pure. What is more, the nature of the religious debate took a peculiarly Christian tone not simply acknowledging God, Creator, Christianity and Christian morals, but invoking Christ himself and His Gospel.

Chapter 1

The History of Disestablishment in New England

Each of the original thirteen colonies in America has a unique history of church and state relations, but some generalities are still appropriate. At the opening of the American Revolution nine of the thirteen British colonies established churches, Rhode Island, New Jersey, Pennsylvania and Delaware the four that did not. Six of the colonies established the Anglican church, five of the southern colonies and New York, while the Congregational church held sway in the three New England colonies. As the newly formed states began to draft their own separate state constitutions during the Revolution, however, the spirit of religious liberty pervaded. Every state outside of New England ceased state-sponsored compulsory tax support for religion, granting religious “equality” to all dissenters; at least all Christian dissenters. That was only the first step in disestablishment, however. All state constitutions with the exception of Rhode Island (who, similar to Connecticut operated under a charter granted by Charles II) and Virginia retained an establishment of Christianity, Protestantism or Theism in some form, most often by way of religious tests for public office or clauses requiring belief in at least one doctrine of the Christian religion or in more generally, God. For the states which the Episcopal (formerly Anglican) church was established, disestablishment of their exclusive privileges came with “relative ease,” though often remained the preferred church.¹¹ The process for com-

¹¹ Sweet, 190.

plete legal disestablishment was gradual. Even in the states that never had a State church, Delaware and Pennsylvania notably, still retained religious tests for public office in their first state constitutions. Such tests were gradually abandoned in the thirteen original states following the Revolution, especially following Article VI of the Federal Constitution removing religious tests for public offices as well as the passage of the First Amendment of the Bill of Rights. By the turn of the Nineteenth Century, official, legal establishment through compulsory taxes or religious tests for public office continued only in New England.

Connecticut and indeed, all of New England have unique histories of the bond formed, desperately maintained and seemingly inevitably broken between politics and religion; histories that vastly diverge from the early Republic mainstream. Most states in the fledgling United States (post revolutionary America) either retained or legally instituted an establishment of religion in their Revolutionary constitutions; most choosing to swiftly disestablish following the war. The ratification of the Federal Constitution sided by the first amendment expressions coupled with the widely disseminated (discussed) Jeffersonian separationist philosophy were heavily influential to the newly forming state constitutions. Furthermore, when the death knell of the national Federalist Party sounded with the chimes of political victory for Jefferson in 1800, chimes of Republican dominance that rang for nearly a quarter-century, they tolled for much more than simple political change. Federalism was all but dead throughout the union, with only a handful of states left to defend its heritage.

New England embodied a war between the old Calvinistic colonial concept lived through a corporate state and the new and “enlightened” nineteenth-century one of an individualistic, voluntaristic, and evangelical state. The old coterie with its elitist proclivities clung to its “paternalistic view of political theory” battled the irrepressible tide of Jeffersonian America and led its states to a history all their own.¹²

With its puritan foundation stretching back to the colony’s very beginnings, New England became the bulwark of Federalism and Congregationalism. The Congregational Church and its schismatic denominations dominated New England’s religious landscape entrenching itself as the Standing Order of New England, its official church establishment.* Allied with Congregationalists and defenders of puritan theocratic principles, Federalists maintained political control election after election throughout New England, with few interruptions.

Persecuted and oppressed through compulsory taxes towards a church and belief not of their own choosing, penalized for refusal to pay such taxes, systematically kept out of political power, and generally discriminated against, religious dissenters languished for more than a century and a half in New England, unable to wield any influence or seriously challenge the Standing Order. Not until well into the nineteenth century did the voices of dissenters hold sway. Among them, Baptists grew to the most prominence amongst religious dissenters, in number and in vocal opposition, accompanied by a panoply of

¹² *Ibid*, 1159.

* The phrase “Standing Order” is peculiar to Connecticut, referencing the civilly established Congregational clergy, but historians also use it to reference the general establishment of religion in New England states.

Christian and religious sects i.e. Methodist, Episcopalian, Quaker, and Universalist, to name a few.

Political opposition matured slowly in New England as well as Federalists and the Standing Order reinforced each other's position, continuously delaying the disestablishment sweeping the country; inroads finally – and typically – made through religious dissenters. Jefferson's fledgling party, the Democratic-Republicans, found their way into only one New England state in the beginning of the nineteenth century, Vermont. Its political scion the Republican Party, however, coming in diverse forms with different constituencies, various platforms, and generally evolving idiosyncratically, pertinent to the needs of the particular state in which they found themselves, eventually deposed Federalists and consequently succeeded in disestablishing religion from the state – at least as far as tax laws were concerned.

Despite those basic congruities, the stories of New England disestablishment played out quite differently. Rhode Island, maintaining their anomalous *modus operandi* never established a church-state union, thus never dealt with the issue. The rest, however, availed themselves of an establishment and consequently were obliged to deal with the tumult of disestablishment. Because of the late settlement date of Vermont in the colonies, 1768, the major issues of church and state had already been hammered out in Connecticut and New England's founding a century earlier thus it did not deal with the initial throes of establishment, helping to expedite the disestablishment process. The speed and the ease with which disestablishment came can also be explained by Vermont's peculiar nature. As was the case throughout New England, Federalism and Congrega-

tionalism were prominent in Vermont, but its “frontier climate” fostered much more religious equality and tolerance than its sibling states thereby avoiding the divisiveness endemic to Massachusetts and Connecticut.¹³

Vermont officially established the protestant religion in its constitution’s Declaration of Rights in 1777 accompanied by its constitution’s prescription for religious tests for officeholders. Compulsory tax laws supporting religion were not passed until 1781. Unlike those in Massachusetts and Connecticut however, Vermont’s laws did not favor the Congregational Church for the laws were designed as “an honest attempt” to support more broadly the Protestant religion (Vermont tended to be hostile to the extant hierarchies prevalent in Connecticut and Massachusetts). And with a liberal certificate system dissenters had little reason to complain about the establishment.¹⁴

Due to its “frontier radicalism” and its high proportion of dissenters, Vermont was the first New England state to abandon Federalism and its establishment ethos. Vermont’s constitution’s Declaration of Rights was effectively de-Christianized in 1786, and after Democratic-Republicans captured Vermont’s legislature in 1801 and subsequently liberalized the states’ certificate laws (each dissenter could now write his own certificate, something Connecticut had done a decade earlier) disestablishment was in the offing. Complete disestablishment finally came with the Republican Party in 1807 when,

¹³ William G. McLoughlin, *New England Dissent: 1630-1833, The Baptists and the Separation of Church and State* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1971), 790.

¹⁴ *Ibid*, 799. Vermont’s certificate laws required only a one-time submission rather than annual submission as required by much of New England, and needed to be signed only by a deacon or elder whom did not have to attest to the conscientiousness of the adherent.

contrary to the other New England states, Baptists and other dissenters became prominent within the party's ranks and ended compulsory tax support for religion in Vermont.

New Hampshire saw Federalism and the Congregational church strongly united as well. Federalists and the Congregational clergy were strongly united in New Hampshire too. But, similar to Vermont, despite the slowness of their start the Republican Party in New Hampshire won control of its congress by 1804. Like Massachusetts and Connecticut, the party was made up of disgruntled Congregationalists and dissenters, but unlike Vermont, did not treat Baptists as equals. For the first two decades of the nineteenth century, Republicans consistently retained power in New Hampshire, but "felt no strong urge" to disestablish. They recognized that the Standing Order actually aided in the maintenance of political loyalties and simultaneously attracted discontented Congregationalists who disliked Federalist policies but favored an establishment.¹⁵ Thus, uninterested in raising the religious issue, Republicans did everything short of disestablishment until the voice of religious dissent could no longer be ignored.

The Dartmouth College affair in 1815 started the wheels in motion for disestablishment in New Hampshire. When Federalist trustees of Dartmouth College fired the founder's son John Wheelock as President of the college, Republicans pounced on the issue, in part promoting it as a "clerical plot." Considering the Wheelocks were not Congregationalist, Republicans accused Federalists and the larger Congregational cohort of a 'counter reformation' with intent to keep dissenters' children out of Dartmouth.¹⁶

¹⁵ *Ibid*, 880.

¹⁶ *Ibid*, 890. Republicans proclaimed the "clerical plot" to be a conspiracy against religious liberty.

Subsequent favoritism showed to the Congregationalist clergy by the Superior Court of New Hampshire, which enacted a law that exempted only ministers of the Standing Order from civil taxes, spurred Republicans to call for disestablishment.¹⁷ Moreover, at this point in New Hampshire's history religious dissenters were estimated to be the majority of voting public, thus Republicans were no longer beholden to patronize establishment-supporting Congregationalists anymore. After a three year legislative and judicial battle, the Toleration Act of 1819 ended the system of compulsory religious taxes in New Hampshire.¹⁸

Massachusetts resembled Connecticut more so than the other New England states. A corporate Christian commonwealth, Calvinistic, and aristocratic, Federalists and the Congregational Church had firmly entrenched themselves, enough to protract the battle over disestablishment another fifteen years after Connecticut disestablished, leaving Massachusetts to be the last state in the union to officially separate the state from the church.¹⁹ Massachusetts' custom laws required taxes for the support of religion since nearly the beginning of the colony starting in 1632. The Cambridge Platform of 1648, off of which the Saybrook Platform is modeled, "firmly established" compulsory tax laws for the support of religion in the Bay colony. It also served to further codify the Puritan based Congregational Church as the Standing Order of Massachusetts.²⁰

¹⁷ *Ibid*, 730, 883.

¹⁸ *Ibid*, 910. Disestablishment was not entirely complete as New Hampshire's constitution still maintained that it was a protestant Christian commonwealth. There remained a religious test which limited officeholders to be "of the protestant religion" until 1876. The "major aim" of Baptists however, namely ridding the state of compulsory religious taxes, had been accomplished.

¹⁹ *Ibid*, 1065.

²⁰ *Ibid*, 118.

Dissenters in Massachusetts chafed under the Standing Order for nearly a century and a half, finally seeing the “successful climax” to their battle to sunder the state from the church between 1800 and 1833.²¹ Unlike Connecticut, Massachusetts’ Republican Party’s main constituency consisted not of religious dissenters, but of Congregationalists, Unitarian and Trinitarian whose very theology espoused establishment, not to mention it was their church that was established.²² Congregationalists were simply “more numerous and more important” to Massachusetts’ Republican Party, thus it did not make disestablishment a political issue as Connecticut’s party had.²³

Despite Federalist control of the legislature, a party dominated by Unitarians who staunchly defended “their time honored ways,” religious dissenters managed to chip away at the church-state edifice whenever political power lay in Republican hands.²⁴ Certificate laws were modified in the Religious Freedom Act of 1811, followed a decade later by the constitutional amendment passed in 1820 that changed the word “protestant” to Christian and abolished religious tests for offices and oaths of allegiance; to the dismay of religious dissenters religious tax laws remained unchanged, the church still legally tied to the state.²⁵ The knell for establishment in Massachusetts first sounded with the Ded-

²¹ *Ibid*, 1065.

²² *Ibid*, 1066. Not only did Republican support predominantly come from establishmentarian Congregationalists, but Massachusetts also retained their state constitution from 1780, eliminating any potential political guise by which dissenters could complain about the establishment, as had been the case in Connecticut.

²³ *Ibid*, 1067, 1084.

²⁴ *Ibid*, 1065. Republicans held office in Massachusetts in 1807-1808 and 1810-1811.

²⁵ *Ibid*, 1102. The act did for Massachusetts what would be done several years later in Connecticut by the Toleration Party. Amongst other revisions, the act allowed for the taxes to be paid to the minister of the taxpayers’ sect.

ham Case, a judicial decision that sundered the Congregational denomination into “two irreconcilable camps” and permanently and irrevocably altered the relationship of the church and the state in the Bay state. In short, the squabble began over a Unitarian minister; the Unitarian parish approved of the selection, but the Trinitarian church over which he would preside rejected the selection. Much to the chagrin of Trinitarians In 1820 the court ruled in favor of Unitarians. In essence, the case was a question over sovereignty and the Trinitarians believed the decision passed down contradicted Trinitarian Puritan history of individual church sovereignty.

Trinitarians moved slowly towards disestablishment as they still favored an establishment, just not of Unitarianism. It was only after series of judicial decisions favoring Unitarians, elucidating to Trinitarians that the decision in the Dedham case was not an aberration, that Trinitarian-Congregationalists switched their votes to the Republican Party. But even after joining Republican ranks in 1823-1825, Trinitarians yet clung to the idea of an establishment; quite simply they hoped their defection to the Republican Party might provoke changes favorable to them, not Unitarians. The desired changes, however, remained just those - desires.²⁶

The failure of the Religious Liberties Act passed by the Republican legislature in 1824 to mollify Trinitarian frustration, the failure of both the legislature and courts to overturn the decision in the Dedham case, and the continued and increasing gains made by Unitarians led Trinitarians to completely abandon the Unitarian-controlled Federalist

²⁶ *Ibid*, 1203-1204. Similar to Connecticut, the Republican Party restyled itself, this time as a moderate and flexible Union Party designed to attract discontented Federalists as well as Republicans and religious dissenters. McLoughlin avers that the Union Party became the basis for the Whig Party. Moreover, McLoughlin notes that religion was of central importance in the 1824 political campaign between Republicans and Federalists.

Party and join the fight for disestablishment. After all, Trinitarian disgust with an establishment of Unitarianism far outweighed their own establishmentarianism. The initiative for a disestablishment movement, however, was not started by an evangelical movement as was the case in Massachusetts' neighbors, but rather by the anti-Calvinist, humanitarian rationalist, Universalists. With the cooperation of the Trinitarians, as well as other dissenters i.e. Baptists, the Universalist effort to disestablish starting in 1830 carried enough weight to finally nullify compulsory religious taxes.²⁷ The church and state bond was forever sundered in Massachusetts when, in 1833, the eleventh constitutional amendment passed, officially ending the forced support of religion in New England and indeed, the entire United States.²⁸

Notably, the impetus to disestablish for Trinitarians cannot be solely attributed to an anti-Unitarian ethos. The Second Great Awakening - at its spiritual peak during Massachusetts' fight for disestablishment - the various moral reform societies and "dynamic leadership" i.e. Lyman Beecher, encouraged Trinitarian-Congregationalists of the status of religion in America, in turn obviating state supported religion.²⁹

²⁷ *Ibid*, 1204-1207. The split in polity between the new Whig Party and the Jacksonian Democrats sufficiently divided religious dissenters, especially Baptists; it actually kept them from leading the assault on the establishment. Despite the differences in purposes, which, in fact, contradicted each other, as Baptists and Trinitarians desired a Christian nation, not a nation of Universalism and spiritual relativity, all coalesced to bring down the establishment and let religion stand independently.

²⁸ *Ibid*, 1258-1259. The voters of Massachusetts approved the eleventh amendment by an overwhelming majority; it passed 32,234 to 3,273. At the end even most Unitarians favored the amendment and an abolishment of religious taxes and Massachusetts' protestant distinction.

²⁹ *Ibid*, 1207. At this point disestablishment was a *fait d'accompli*. The Federalist Party had been virtually dead since 1824 without victory, and once Trinitarians joined the Union Party and Universalists in their quest to disestablish, it was just a matter of time. 1833 was simply the formal end and little was written in the newspapers.

Connecticut's history of establishment stretches back to the beginnings of the colony. Its laws contained compulsory taxes for the support of religion since the foundation of the colony. Despite efforts to maintain their ministers by a system of voluntarism, in 1644 Connecticut's Puritans found it impossible to support their clergy through voluntary contributions thus reluctantly conceded to compulsory tax laws.³⁰ In 1708 a synod of congregational ministers produced the Saybrook Platform, which "became the official basis for the established church system in Connecticut." It established the congregational church and its doctrines in each society and consequently the state, which, in turn, codified congregational ministers as "the Standing Order" in Connecticut.³¹

Under the Connecticut Toleration Act of 1708 all religious dissenters in Connecticut were given the right to worship as they chose, without fear of banishment or exile "so long as they preserved good order."³² Since the inauguration of the Saybrook Platform of the same year, however, all citizens of Connecticut were required to attend Sunday church services and support the local Congregational church with their taxes.³³ In 1784, Connecticut passed a general toleration act allowing dissenters to file a certificate with

³⁰ William McLoughlin, *New England Dissent: 1630-1833 The Baptists and the Separation of church and State* Vol. I (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1971), 116-118, 247. Compulsory tax laws supporting religion were changed several times at the end of the seventeenth century and on into the eighteenth.

³¹ *Ibid*, 264. The Cambridge Platform of 1648 in Massachusetts was the Puritan foundation for compulsory religious taxes used by Connecticut's Puritans in the Saybrook Platform. McLoughlin, 118. Societies in Connecticut acted like parishes, only under a different appellation.

³² *Ibid*, 361. Connecticut's Toleration Act was modeled specifically after the English Toleration Act of 1689, McLoughlin, 249.

³³ *Ibid*, 247-248. See also Wesley W. Horton, <http://www.cslib.org/cts4ch.htm>, August 1988. Connecticut's tax laws concerning religion had been changed frequently throughout the end of the seventeenth century and on into the eighteenth. The Toleration Act and the Saybrook Platform allowed dissenters to attend their own dissenting church services, but were nonetheless taxed to support the local congregational church and minister. An excellent discussion of these changes can be found in Greene's, *The Development of Religious Liberty in Connecticut*, Chapters 6 and 7 for discussions of the Saybrook Platform and Toleration Act specifically.

the state declaring their intention of supporting a church outside of the establishment, thereby freeing them from the compulsory tithe to the congregational church. They were, however, still required to support the church to which they certificated.³⁴ If no certificate was lodged, every citizen by default was compelled to pay the congregational tithe.

The Certificate Law, as it was called, vexed religious dissenters for years as it represented civil favoritism of the Congregational Church. If a dissenter wished to join and support a denomination of Christians, which had formed themselves into a legally recognized church or congregation, they were required to lodge a certificate with the clerk of the settled ecclesiastical society signed by an officer of that dissenting church acknowledging the residents' attendance and support of that church.³⁵ Amendments were made to the law in 1791 enabling dissenters to be the signatory to their certificate but still were required to lodge the certificate with their ecclesiastical society. When Republicans wrested political power from Federalists in 1817, one of their first bits of legislation altered the Certificate Law, allowing those lodging certificates to do so with their town clerk, not their located societies'.³⁶

The political scene in Connecticut at the end of the Eighteenth and beginning of the Nineteenth centuries can be described only as Federalist entrenchment. Up until 1800, Federalists virtually had no opposition. Political competition essentially non-existent, with participation at a minimum. Elections went uncontested while only about two

³⁴ Richard J. Purcell, *Connecticut in Transition: 1775-1818* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1918), 11.

³⁵ *Ibid*, 225; Horton; *Columbian Register*, April 26, 1817.

³⁶ Many complained about the certificate law simply due to the distance traveled to lodge a certificate with their society's clerk.

percent of the entire population voted. Federalism dominated to such an extent that only one Assistant was turned out of office between 1783 and 1801.³⁷

This continuous political success of Federalists was due, in part, to the election system of Assistants.³⁸ In the annual September town meetings voters wrote the names of twenty men to be nominated as an Assistant. A list of the twenty names who received the most nominations was then submitted to the voters at the following April town meetings. Regardless of the number of votes received, the twelve incumbents were listed first. At the town meeting twelve pieces of paper were given to each voter, one to be publicly handed in for each vote. The list of Assistants was read off in order and voters were expected to cast all of their votes for the first twelve; to have a sheet of paper after the first twelve names were called “was virtually to proclaim oneself in open revolt.”³⁹ Federalists further impeded oppositional success in 1801 by shrewdly arranging the election law so that nominations for Assistants were made orally and votes of freemen were made by standing.⁴⁰ The Stand-Up Law became a thorn in the side of the Republican Party and was another Federalist law quickly repealed once Republicans gained power. When Jefferson’s Republican Party made their way into Connecticut’s politics they received scant votes and fewer seats. Unlike their New England neighbors, the anti-Federalists Congre-

³⁷ Horton.

³⁸ Assistants along with the *ex officio* governor and lieutenant governor made up Connecticut’s upper house called the Council. Purcell and Horton both give adequate explanations of Connecticut’s political system in the early Nineteenth century; Purcell’s being more extensive and thorough.

³⁹ Purcell, 125.

⁴⁰ *Ibid*, 125.

gationalists and dissenters were not numerous enough to have any political weight, thus Republicans had virtually no political success from 1800-1816.

In 1784 the Connecticut legislature passed a law nullifying the Saybrook Platform and effectively disestablishing the Congregational Church as the officially recognized state church. There remained, however, a *de facto* partnership between the Federalist Party and the Congregational clergy – the Standing Order - which further bolstered the Federalist hold on Connecticut's politics, not to mention the position of Congregational churches.⁴¹

Congregational ministers had been the recipients of Federalist favoritism well after the state no longer legally recognized the Congregational. At the annual election night dinner all “standing” ministers were invited with the newly elected legislators to dine “at public expense, a fitting symbol of the unity of church and state;” dissenting ministers never received an invitation nor allowed to preach the election sermon, honors given only to Congregational ministers before 1818.⁴² Federalist laws also exempted Congregational clergy from militia duty and civil taxes, generally protected the advantages of their position, and served to bolster the respect shown by their duties in the community.⁴³ They were, indeed, the established ministers, other ministers simply were tolerated.

The favored status of the Congregational church and clergy led to various and sundry duties and privileges, in turn allowing their influence to extend much further than simply their own congregants and parish. Congregational clergymen prayed at freeman's

⁴¹ McLoughlin, 1021.

⁴² *Ibid*, 1018.

⁴³ *Ibid*, 1019; Purcell, 195.

meetings, aided in the voting process, and often acted as a local physician, judge, or lawyer in cases where they might have been the only person of education. They held a high social position, secured by their Federalist brethren.⁴⁴

Undoubtedly in part to perpetuate the politically and spiritually contrived status quo, the Congregational clergy played a prominent role in Connecticut's educational system. Lower schools essentially acted as parochial schools while parish schools – schools that instructed children of all faiths in religion and morals – operated under the control of Congregational clergy, whose responsibilities included examining the morals of the teacher.⁴⁵

Yale College too felt the guiding hand of congregationalism. It was, in fact, a Congregational institution. From its incipience the government of the college lay in the Congregational ministry's hands with Congregational ministers acting as presidents. They taught Congregational doctrine and controlled the education in law, divinity, and medicine.⁴⁶ Under the leadership of the uncompromising Calvinist Congregational minister - and staunch Federalist - Timothy Dwight, the congregationalism of the college, as for the whole state of Connecticut, remained militant throughout his whole presidency through 1817. Even after disestablishment in 1818 the ministry retained control of the college, continuing to safeguard its congregationalism.

The only institution of higher education in Connecticut, Federalists jealously guarded it, repudiating any and all petitions for additional colleges and forcing all to sup-

⁴⁴ Purcell, 195.

⁴⁵ *Ibid*, 62-63. Before law of 1798 all schools were legally under control of congregational society.

⁴⁶ *Ibid*, 41.

port it; the notion of more than one college was anathema to Federalists believing the state could only support one college, not to mention the danger in having alternative denominational colleges. To be sure, Republicans considered it part of the Federalist machine.⁴⁷ Because of his ardent partisanship, Republicans accused “Pope” Dwight of preaching politics, not simply Christianity as Federalists maintained.⁴⁸

To many, Yale propagated the federalist system of politics, with Dwight acting as its “clerical prophet.”⁴⁹ Yale’s faculty, all Federalists; representatives in the General Assembly, many graduates of Yale. In fact, of the committee commissioned to draft the constitution during the convention, twelve of the twenty-four graduated from Yale.⁵⁰

Conscience and interest contributed to the ardent partisanship of the Congregational Clergy. To be sure, Federalist perquisites left Congregationalists if not beholden at the very least inclined to cast a Federalist vote.⁵¹ But self-interest alone did not actuate Congregational support of federalism. Congregationalism found much common ground within the tenets of Federalism. Federalism represented the wealthy, wellborn, and educated men of society, the class in which Congregational ministers found themselves.

Federalism also guaranteed stability of the existing order, a church-state union, an ecclesiastical tithe, the sacredness of clergy position, the existing school system, and the secu-

⁴⁷ *Ibid*, 191.

⁴⁸ *Ibid*, 22-23. Upon accession to the presidency of Yale in 1795, Dwight began assiduously crusading against the infidelity so rife in Connecticut, New England, and indeed, the whole nation. Because Democrats (or Republicans) were synonymous with deism, atheism, and everything irreligious, and “federalism the politics of the godly and of the Standing Order in church and state,” Dwight undoubtedly, if only incidentally, “propagated the federalist system.” Purcell, 20-23.

⁴⁹ *Ibid*, 22.

⁵⁰ *Ibid*, 239-240.

⁵¹ *Ibid*, 199-200.

riety of class for all clergy.⁵² By Adams' presidency, the Congregational clergy were predominantly Federalist.⁵³

Personal and religious conscience also influenced Congregational ministers. That Republican ideals of equal rights, universal suffrage, disestablishment, and Episcopal colleges threatened the social position and influence of the Congregational minister there could be no doubt, but Republican principles generally vexed Congregationalists. Congregational clergy loathed Republican ideals, seeing only ruin for the country in the factional struggle instigated by the party. They believed the party of Jefferson sought to subvert morals and brought only Jacobinism, deism and atheism; when they preached against Jefferson in 1800, despite their pro-Federalist position, it was done through religion, not political preaching.⁵⁴

Congregational aversion to Republicans also emanated from the party's perceived connection with the French Revolution. In fact, congregational accusations of Jacobinism could be attributed to the connection between the Republican Party and the French Revolution. The French Revolution profoundly affected religious thought in Connecticut and the United States. It was believed to give an impetus to Jacobinism and Deism in the United States, while concurrently uniting clergy – specifically the Congregational clergy – in opposition to all enemies of religion, including and perhaps most notably Republicans.⁵⁵ Radicals and the extreme element were dubbed Jacobins, an insulting epithet to

⁵² *Ibid*, 199-200.

⁵³ *Ibid*, 197, 199-201.

⁵⁴ *Ibid*, 197-198.

⁵⁵ *Ibid*, 13.

any defender of virtue, morality, and religion; the true republican principles.⁵⁶ Deism and religious dissent connoted the downfall of the Standing Order to Congregational clergy thus because deists and religious dissenters were almost to a man Republican, the Republican Party signified political, social, and spiritual doom.

General disaffection with the French Revolution and its concomitant effects in America coupled with the perceived and actual religious nature – or lack there of – of those supporting the Republican Party added weight to Federalist and Congregationalist accusations and claims of French atheism, deism and general irreligion. Thus, in addition to the Federalist “machine,” the entrenchment of the Standing Order, and the overall puritan foundation of the colony, Federalists dominated politics in Connecticut out of a default political position. Under charges of irreligion and “French atheism” the Republican Party languished in Connecticut’s political system. In addition to their self-designed manipulative and beneficent political system, Federalists quite simply benefited from the lack of a viable political opponent considering early republican voter principles.

Consistent with the nation at large the Democratic-Republican party in Connecticut succeeded the Anti-Federalist, a party that had attempted constitutional reform in the “Land of Steady Habits” as early as 1786.⁵⁷ While religious dissenters allied themselves with the anti-federalists, their antagonism towards the establishment stopped short of attacking the Fundamental Orders, effectively their constitution. As the Democratic Republican party took shape in the late 18th century the religious dissenters in Connecticut

⁵⁶ *Ibid*, 147.

⁵⁷ Greene, 529.

began to ally themselves with the party of Jefferson. The dominance of the Standing Order left the party on unequal ground. At the opening of the nineteenth century Republicans “were treated as a degraded party, and this treatment was extended to all the individuals of the party however worthy or respectable; in fact as the saxons [sic] were treated by the Normans, and Irish by the English government.”⁵⁸

The national approach of the Democratic-Republican party to religious liberty attracted religious dissenters, chiefly Methodists, Baptists “and a few radical thinkers” but the growth of the party outside of those sects was very slow.⁵⁹ Their ranks flowed following the adopting of the obnoxious “Stand-up Law” and ebbed with the national party’s attitude toward the French Revolution. As the leaders in the new republic of France cast off “religious bonds and trammels” Connecticut citizens, especially long-tenured conservatives, retracted support for the once interesting fight for “liberty, equality and fraternity.” Connecticutites considered it to be “radicalism of the most destructive character.”⁶⁰

As a defense to this “influx of irreligion” Christian sects, notably the Baptists, Methodists and Congregationalists, turned to revivals. These revivals added to the numbers of each sect, especially Baptists and Methodists thereby increasing the population of religious dissenters and ipso facto the ranks of the Democratic-Republican party. Though

⁵⁸ *Ibid*, 539. Quoted within text, cited: “Judge Church’s Manuscript, deposited with New Haven Historical Society.”

⁵⁹ *Ibid*, 542.

⁶⁰ *Ibid*, 545-546. The very name of the Democrat - Republican Party stems from the Anti-Federalist exultation with the French Revolution. “As the Federal party lost its sympathy with the French cause the attitude of the nation changed. The consolidated factions of the Anti-Federalists, however, increased their ardor for the French republic, and took from 1792 the name Democratic-Republican.”

politically powerless in Connecticut at the turn of the 19th century, Democratic-Republicans established themselves as the party of the dissenter, establishing strong leadership and a voice for their dissent through the *American Mercury* newspaper.⁶¹ Though a minority in the extreme to begin, the party nonetheless began to combat the Federalist machine, calling for constitutional conventions and disestablishment as early as 1802.

Even political Goliaths however, meet their proverbial David. After American victory in the War of 1812, the denunciation of the war at the infamous Hartford Convention, for which they were labeled seditious and unpatriotic, plagued Federalists throughout New England and severely weakened their grip on Connecticut politics. They retained power in 1815, but under the new "Toleration Party" banner - and after the defection of their longtime ally the Episcopalians - the Republican candidate for Lieutenant Governor, Jonathan Ingersoll, himself an Episcopalian, was elected in 1816. They also made considerable gains in the General Assembly and in the gubernatorial race in 1816, with their moderate Federalist candidate Oliver Wolcott Jr. receiving the most votes ever earned by a Federalist opponent. Subsequent successes by the "Toleration and Reform Party" and "Constitution and Reform Party" in 1817 and 1818 respectively, gave the opposition to the Federalist Party control of Connecticut's government including the seats of Governor, Lieutenant Governor and a majority in the General Assembly. Power in hand, republicans called for a constitutional convention in order to complete their political revolution by sundering forever the church from the state. Following a narrow margin of ratification of the new constitution by the voting public, republicans ended compulsory

⁶¹ Pierpont Edwards was first leader, son of Jonathan Edwards

taxes in support of religion, effectively disestablishing the church from the state in Connecticut.

Disestablishment was not the only issue of import, but it weighed so heavily on the political scales that the publicized spirit of this political revolution proved to be religious in nature. It was in many ways the culmination of a religious war fought between federalists and republicans, a crusade to prove who was the true defender of religion, and more specifically, of the Gospel itself. Both parties competed for sovereignty over the appropriate relationship between the state and church in Connecticut using every medium of traditional early nineteenth century politics. Conventional political tools were used by both camps in defense of their religion: town meetings, speeches, sermons, editorial articles *et al*, all served to wage this religious war. Because newspapers were the primary communication medium – and consequently the primary medium for political propaganda – all of the above-mentioned methods of propaganda and political influence were publicized to all of Connecticut through newspapers. Hence, the examination of newspaper articles is an integral part of this thesis.

The prominence of religion in the newspapers and the ardency with which it was discussed, evident in both word and action, evinces the true nature of Connecticut's political road to disestablishment. Republicans used Baptist and Episcopalian literature to show their Christianity, using the language of 'establishment' and 'rights of conscience' to show the corruption of religion by their Federalist adversaries and *ipso facto* show a Republican righteousness. Federalists employed the 'irreligious and atheistic' language of the French Revolution to frighten the voting public away from republican ideas to

maintain the political (and therefore the spiritual) status quo, a status that, in the eyes of federalists, defended the Gospel. Republicans were denounced as Jacobins, infidels and purveyors of irreligion proving that true religion was the demesne of the Federalist party. It was a war between two competing parties to hold the title of “true” religion, politics acting as a battlefield. The language used throughout the political campaigns starting in 1815 and ending with the constitutional convention sought to prove which party was corrupt and which the defender of the true faith.

Newspaper articles, actions and events concerning religion were politicized during key election seasons, all with a purpose to prove the faith of one party or the faithlessness of the other, and sometimes both. Nothing was idly published by either camp. All had their purpose. Those articles whose focus was religion were undoubtedly published with a political purpose and those that were specifically political almost always carried with them a religious tinge, if not focus.

Proving belief is by nature problematic, and political hyperbole and political motivations notwithstanding, the consistent and ardent messages defended by both camps illustrates, as far as historically possible, a genuineness of belief in their respective arguments. Federalists believed establishment, specifically of Christianity, not only served God, but society. Republicans too, believed man had no right to legislate on religion and that complete and absolute freedom of religion, without state support, served God, the Gospel, and his people, the best.

Chapter 2

The Political and Religious Season of 1816

I

The Bishop's Fund and Episcopalian Defection

A longtime ally of the "Standing Order," Episcopalians were given more favorable treatment in the Connecticut Legislature than many of their dissenting brethren. In 1799 the Federalist controlled Connecticut legislature granted the "churchmen" a charter to start a fund for their bishop. Around that time Yale College conferred, for the first time in the august College's history, the title of Doctor of Divinity upon an Episcopal clergyman. For such privileges granted to them by Federalists and the Standing order, Episcopalians, in turn, offered their political support. It was, in fact, a *de facto* union between the Episcopalian church and the Standing Order.

Though more favored than other dissenting sects in Connecticut at the time, Episcopalians were still "dissatisfied at the treatment they received as political allies of the Standing Order."⁶² But two sleights proved to be the tipping point for Episcopalian support of the Standing Order and consequently, in Connecticut's political revolution. The first, after repeated petitions Federalists denied Episcopalians a charter to operate their

⁶² Greene, Louise M., "The Development of Religious Liberty in Connecticut," (The Project Gutenberg EBook, 2005.) 542.

academy in Cheshire as an Episcopalian college.⁶³ Time and time again Episcopalians petitioned for a charter to found their own institution of higher education in Connecticut, Cheshire Academy, only to be refused with each petition. Episcopalian petitions were denied in 1804 and 1810, when, after the House approved the petition, the Council (Senate) rejected it. Though the petition was rejected once more in 1812, Episcopalians still remained loyal to the Federalist machine clinging “to the spoils of office for their partisans” remaining “disdainful of the dissenters and of the Republican Minority.”⁶⁴

The second perceived sleight, and the tipping point for Episcopalians, proved to be the Federalist handling of the Phoenix Bank charter and the Bishop’s Fund. In 1814 a group of wealthy men from Hartford, many of whom were Episcopalians, petitioned the Connecticut Legislature for a charter to form the Phoenix Bank. As was custom in such matters, they promised to grant \$50,000 to the state with their petition, to be purposed by the legislature upon granting the charter. The petitioners suggested however that the bonus should be designated for the Yale Medical School as well as the Episcopal Bishop’s support fund, generally referred to as the Bishop’s Fund. After granting the charter though, the legislature granted \$20,000 to Yale Medical School but placed the rest in the

⁶³ McLoughlin Vol. II, 1026. Federalists and the Standing Order jealously guarded Yale College, which was not only a Congregational institution but a bastion of federalism as well, as the only institution of higher education in Connecticut. Repeated petitions by Episcopalians to establish their own college, Seabury College, were rejected by Connecticut’s General Assembly and Council on the grounds that one institution of higher education, Yale, sufficiently provided Connecticut’s higher educational needs.

⁶⁴ *Ibid*, 578

state treasury, giving nothing to the Bishop's Fund. Frustrated and believing they were defrauded, many Episcopalians would eventually throw their lot in with Republicans.⁶⁵

This controversy garnered much debate in Connecticut's press surrounding the Springtime elections of 1816. Federalists and Republicans alike knew the importance of the Episcopalian vote in the upcoming April elections and both tried actively to woo their vote by proving which party could lay claim to the party of "true" religion.

In the spring of 1816 federalists were resolved to retain the Episcopalian vote. Through the *Connecticut Journal* federalists attempted to clarify and mend the growing rift between the two denominations, namely the Bishop's Fund controversy, establishing them as the defenders of true religion thereby proving Republicans to be irreligion. Federalists likened the Republican Party with "Jacobinism," which had always been defied by Presbyterians and Episcopalians while other denominations "alike destitute of the form as of the substance of religion," follow the Jacobins. For years Episcopalians had petitioned for a charter for an Episcopal college, Seabury College, a financial appropriation for the support of an Episcopal bishop. Federalists however actively tried to convince Episcopalians of not only their misconceptions regarding the Bishop's Fund, but also the impracticality of an additional college. They noted to their Presbyterian friends (one of many subtle hints to the desired union between Presbyterian and Episcopalian

⁶⁵ *Ibid*, 1026-1027. Timothy Dwight's account of the Phoenix Bank Bonus affair differs from historical scholarship. Dwight, who served in Connecticut's legislature at the time of the Phoenix Bank petition, noted that no specific appropriation of the premium was initially made by the petitioners. After the legislature commenced three men from Hartford added a passage delineating where the money should be appropriated. They named Yale College, the Bishop's Fund or "to be otherwise disposed of for the use of this state, or to any purpose whatever which to your honours may seem best." The lower house and council "negatived" the petition, but after a series of events, they passed a petition that stated the premium should be put into the state treasury for the use of the state. Hence, to Dwight, Episcopalians had no grounds for complaint. Timothy Dwight, "From the Albany Advertiser," *Connecticut Journal*, June 25, 1816.

denominations) that their petition had been heard but denied it because they believed one institution of higher education – Yale – was enough. Federalists believed an Episcopal college should be established where the dominant religion is Episcopacy, not where the majority adheres to Presbyterian doctrine. It was also noted to the Episcopalians that advocates for the fund to support a Bishop were told any such support would violate the act which secures “equal rights and privileges to Christians of every denomination in this state” thus starting a dangerous precedent of unjust discrimination between denominations.⁶⁶

In the same article where federalists addressed the aforementioned issues, a federalist author noted a conversation he had with a “churchman” whom he called ‘friend.’⁶⁷ In their conversation, the churchman, of course, played the part of an irascible and ill-informed dissenter while the federalist author remained the calm and conversant voice of reason. The dialogue between the two was simply a reiteration of the points already made by both sides. Episcopalians claimed the denial to their right to the Bishop’s Fund money was oppressive while federalists maintained there was no such right for the legislature “deliberately discussed” the petition and rejected it.

This written dialogue reveals both the political issue and the potential repercussions of this denominational rift. The author asked the churchman why he rested the entire fault upon the Presbyterians and ally with Baptists, Methodists, or Jacobins, “those

⁶⁶ “For the Journal. The Times – a Fragment. Chap. XXI,” *Connecticut Journal*, April 2, 1816. The law came into effect in May of 1817.

⁶⁷ *Ibid*, The term churchman here refers specifically to an Episcopalian. Also, the dialogue in the article consisted of an Episcopalian and Presbyterian, but as noted, for the purposes of this paper Presbyterian falls into under the term ‘federalist.’

who for many years have hated and abused you and...almost to a man voted against you,” to “revolutionize the state?”⁶⁸

Episcopalians complained of federalists on several issues including the tests of Yale College, toleration, and the Phoenix Bank. They believed the consistent rejection of their claims by the legislature revealed an intolerance and intention of removing Episcopacy from the state. They proclaimed religious intolerance pervaded the federalist government, evidenced by the fact that no Episcopalian had been entrusted with the duties of a prominent position such as Chief Magistracy, Lieutenant Governor or as the head of Yale College or even so much as a professor. Episcopalians asserted they must leave the state in order to enjoy his church and religion undisturbed as they were forced to subscribe to the Presbyterian creed and comply with “every wind of doctrine.”⁶⁹

The core issue, at least for the federalists, was the predominance of their particular religion, their Christianity, against “much that is Pagan.” Federalists maintained that toleration of an Episcopal college would only lead to an Episcopal, Baptist, Methodist, Jewish, and Mahometan college, “and much that is Pagan in all your colleges.” Furthermore, federalists asserted that the cause of religion and learning would be disadvantaged “by multiplying and degrading Collegiate Honors.”⁷⁰

Episcopalians believed and maintained that the petition for the Phoenix Bank stipulated where the money should have been appropriated. They believed the money

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶⁹ Timothy Dwight, “From the Albany Advertiser,” *Connecticut Journal*, June 25, 1816. Dwight attached a copy of the publication from the *Albany Register* entitled “Connecticut Election,” and signed “An Episcopalian.” Dwight’s article was in fact a response to it.

⁷⁰ “For the Journal. The Times – a Fragment. Chap.XXI,” *Connecticut Journal*, April 2, 1816. The law came into effect in May of 1817.

should have been appropriated by the legislature to Yale Medical Institution – which it was – Seabury College, and the Bishop’s fund. Federalists asserted however, that the Episcopalian representation of the situation was “erroneous in every material point.” According to Federalists, the legislature denied the suggestion attached to the petition, which appropriated the money to Yale and Seabury Colleges and the Bishop’s Fund. Furthermore, noted federalists, the suggestions made by the Episcopalians were not conditions of the petition and the overall petition was rejected.⁷¹

Federalists tried to persuade Episcopalians that their complaints against their “brethren” had “been breathed into them by the insidious artifices of a few ambitious individuals.” Without ever specifically referring to Republicans, federalists made clear to Episcopalians those who sought to “revolutionize the state” had fed all of them the lies and misrepresentations.⁷²

The importance of the Episcopalian vote is evident in the thorough attempt by federalists to dissuade Episcopal readers from abandoning their friends. Federalists asserted that the differences between the two denominations (Episcopalians and Presbyterians) were insufficient to justify separation and removal of a man from office simply because he failed to act precisely as his constituents supposed for he would be “impolitic and unreasonable...and of jacobinic origin.”

Intending to prevent a Republican and Episcopalian union, not to mention attempting to sustain their own union with Episcopalians, federalists noted the religious

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

⁷² *Ibid.* In the dialogue between the Presbyterian and Episcopalian, the Episcopalian in the end was convicted of the error in his thoughts and conceded to every point made by his ‘friend,’ the federalist.

nature of the issue. Haranguing against republican religion, something they would continually do in order to prove their own fealty and their opponent's treachery, federalists claimed "this proposed combination, there is something so corrupt, so base, so treacherous, such a bare faced violation of every principle of religion, morality, and even common decency, that like some of the abominations of the heathen, 'it ought not to be even so much as named among Christians.'" ⁷³ They likened the dissenters and republicans' "pretensions to religion" were simply an attempt to wrest power from the federalists and Presbyterians to the attempt of Jacobins to revolutionize Great Britain in 1793 by subverting the government and destroying the Church. ⁷⁴

Federalists tried in dramatic fashion to illustrate to Episcopalians the effects of an alliance with Republicans. They posited that men of voting age could join "any Congregation of heretics," and all support to ministry and preaching of the gospel would be left prostrate.

In their "peep behind the curtain" federalists demonstrated that a revolution of the state which divested Federalists from power, supplanting them with Jacobins would only serve to inaugurate a government based on principles anathema to all friends of federalism; Religion, colleges, and government would all be corrupted in the minds of federalists and the public treasury empty due to the panoply of colleges started by various religious dissenter churches, a direct result of the funding of an Episcopal college. The political repercussions weighed heavily on federalists, but they clearly make evident a battle

⁷³ *Ibid.*

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

over religion; a battle, as perceived by federalists, between heretics and true Christians.⁷⁵

In defense of his own honor as well as the federalist cause, the renowned Congregational Minister Timothy Dwight responded to Episcopalian claims in the spring of 1816, in the heart of election season.⁷⁶ His response simply re-clarified federalist (and his own) interpretation of the Phoenix Bank Bonus and Bishop's Fund controversy, but defended the charges of religious intolerance in Connecticut as well.

Dwight repudiated Episcopalian claims partially based on their timing. Episcopalians published their articles denouncing federalist intolerance and betrayal during an election season. But Dwight's focus remained Episcopalian cries of religious intolerance. He cited various "venerable" and "distinguished Episcopalians" who have served Connecticut on the Council or as Lieutenant Governor. He also noted that, with the exception of the forms of worship and church government, the doctrines of the Presbyterian and Episcopal Church were the same as they were both based on the bible.⁷⁷

⁷⁵ *Ibid.* A concise and pithy story near the end of the article dealing with this issue captures the thought process and argument of the federalist concerning Episcopalian dissent and separation from the federalists: Two Friends were traveling among strangers. A. furnished the money; and B. shared in his bounty. A highwayman met them, and presenting a pistol, demanded their purses- B. with much composure, observed that he had none; A. refused to deliver his, and called on B. to assist him. I will says B. on condition you give me half; otherwise I shall help the other gentleman, who I dare say will do what's rights.

Tired with resentment at the treachery of his perfidious friend, A. throws off his coat and hat; and so heartily belabored him with his cane, that he very readily repented of all his sins, and renounced his errors. Turning to the highwayman who had all this time been a quiet spectator of this merited chastisement of perfidy, baseness and ingratitude; here said A., is my purse; take half as an acknowledgement of your generosity in not accepting the offer of this mercenary wretch – and with it, I give you what is of more importance, a word of advice. You seem not lost to honor; leave your present calling, and seek your livelihood in some better employment. "I thank you," said the Robber as he rode off, the money I shall not take; your advice I'll think of."

⁷⁶ Timothy Dwight, "From the Albany Advertiser," *Connecticut Journal*, June 25, 1816. The article from the Albany Register, to which Dwight responded, had, in Dwight's perception, essentially called him a liar, thus his response is in part defense of himself as well as the federalist cause. Dwight's pedigree lent the issue particular gravity, being the grandson of Jonathan Edwards.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

Dwight subtly demonstrated the religious element to the battle in this particular controversy with his repudiation of Episcopalian claims of intolerance or “illiberality.” He contended only two possible reasons for Episcopalians existed to want an Episcopal college. One was to either have a college exclusively under the rule of the Episcopal Church or to have a place to exhibit “toleration and liberalists.” Referring to the latter reason, Dwight sarcastically and derisively asked if the head of such an institution “should sometimes be an Episcopalian, and sometimes a Presbyterian, or a Methodist, or a Baptist; or, as the case might be, *a Roman Catholic?*” Dwight’s italicization of Roman Catholic illustrated the ridiculousness of the Episcopalian notion of tolerance. To all Christian denominations, especially, Presbyterians and Episcopalians, the Catholic Church was completely abhorrent. Hence, Dwight equated tolerance and liberality with the Catholic Church to show how objectionable a college of that nature could become. Most telling, however, he depicted an “us” versus “them;” those of “true” religion i.e. Presbyterians and Episcopalians, and those of false religion.⁷⁸

The controversy surrounding the Bishop’s Fund and the Phoenix Bank Bonus instigated, if not accentuated, a seismic rift between two Christian denominations, Presbyterians and Episcopalians, and revealed *the* political battle between federalists and republicans. Both parties understood the importance of the Episcopalian constituency to maintain in the case of Federalists, or obtain in the case of the Republicans, control of Connecticut’s government. But the ‘us versus them’ and ‘good versus evil’ attitude demonstrated by both sides illuminates the veiled attempt, by both republicans and federalists,

⁷⁸ *Ibid.* Dwight also maintained that the legislature rejected the petition that appropriated a sum of money to the Bishop’s Fund, leaving Episcopalian claims unfounded.

to woo Episcopalians through religious sentiments. The battle, however, became less subtle as the political atmosphere became more religiously charged.

II

Springtime Elections of 1816

Elections in Connecticut in the early part of the nineteenth century were biannual, occurring in the Spring and Fall of each year. Elections for the Lower House (The House of Representatives) were semi-annual, held in the Spring and the Fall with elections for the Upper House, also called the Council (Senate), annually in the Spring. By 1815 the Republican party was gaining ground in the Lower House but still unable to penetrate the well fortified Federalist bulwarks known as Governor, Lieutenant Governor, and the twelve Council seats. The perceived treachery of the Hartford Convention still clinging to the Federalist Party, along with Bishop's Fund debacle in late 1815 and the subsequent defection of the Episcopalian vote, resulted in considerable gains for the Republican ticket in the Spring of 1816.⁷⁹ Their candidate for Lieutenant Governor, Jonathan Ingersoll, won election and their candidate for Governor achieved a modicum of success, albeit in a losing effort, receiving a substantial increase in votes compared to previous republican candidates.

⁷⁹ Nine-tenths of their vote swung to the Republican Party. The Republican ticket was first styled the American Party, then the American and Toleration Party. Notably, Jonathan Ingersoll, an Episcopalian, was a long-time Federalist who came over to the "toleration" aspect of the party, not Republican principles per se.

In a newspaper publication following the election the republicans announced a festival to celebrate their partial success. In it, Republicans acknowledged the aid of the Episcopalians who, due to the above-mentioned Bishop's Fund controversy, defected from their long-standing union with federalists in favor of republicans. But discussion quickly turned to religion as republicans recognized the Episcopalian's appreciation for republican "regard for all Religion." Moreover, the Episcopalians recognized, according to Republicans, "the horrid persecution" under the Standing Order, Yale College, and the government in general, and were "duly sensible of the superior piety, talents, liberality, and political integrity of our Great Men...[who]...generously discard all mean and narrow sectarian prejudice."⁸⁰

The religious nature of the battle often expressed itself through attacks and criticisms of the religion of the opposition. Following the April elections of 1816 – and only months away from the upcoming fall elections – an article was published by the *American Mercury*, a newspaper affiliated with the Republican Party, entitled "Force of Habit." In it, the editor assailed federalists as hypocrites and those who boast of their piety around election time. He noted that federalists were "great dealers in religion" as they disseminated their holiness through printing bibles, psalm books, and missionary tracts. It is sheer "political religion" that federalists have profited from, according to the federalist author, as it had become a force of habit to vote for "federal holiness." Noting that

⁸⁰ "A Republican Festival," *American Mercury*, April 23, 1816. By the election of 1816, The Republican Party had christened themselves the "Toleration Party." Despite their defeat in the gubernatorial race, they earned more votes than any oppositional candidate to the Federalists had ever earned.

piety had nothing to do with federalism, the author averred that “True religion has nothing to do with parties” and “the gospel denounces them.”⁸¹

One week after the publication of “Force of Habit” the American Mercury published another article fulminating against federalist religion. Again, the editor of the Mercury denounced federalists as a party “under the *semblance* of a Religion *cold, lifeless, formal, selfish*, subservient to their *intrigues*, and prostituted to their worldly purposes.” The attack, however, was a response to an article published that excoriated the religion of the Republicans and warned readers of the danger in their election. In that article, the federalist author asserted that if Federalists were divested of power in favor the Republicans, Connecticut “will most assuredly witness the reign of licentiousness and Infidelity – Imitating the infidel philosophers of France.” Moreover, “Death will be proclaimed an eternal sleep – Vice will be seated in high places – Virtue trampled in the dust, and Religion, Liberty, and Law, sacrificed on the Altar of ATHEISM.” The stated purpose in publishing the excerpt was to present the writer of such invective as a villain, to which the Republican editor noted “We design not to notice the abuse the poor Devil has heaped on us.”⁸²

Allusions to religion abound in these articles. According to federalists, all of the principles held dear to the Presbyterian religion, and indeed Christianity itself would be abandoned; death would replace the foundational Christian tenet of eternal life and atheism and all its caustic accompaniments would rule. Republicans on the other hand de-

⁸¹ “Force of Habit,” *American Mercury*, May 28, 1816.

⁸² *American Mercury*, June 4, 1816.

picted the religion of the federalists as perfunctory and used only for selfish gain; as noted, they were even referred to as the devil.

Attacks from federalists and republicans often came through appraisals of certain revered principles, values or characteristics. The virtue of the opponent would be impugned and thus denounced as irreligious or corrupt. Inherent in every attack, regardless of its particular thrust, was religion. All of the values pre-eminent to early republican America – patriotism, piety, morality, virtue etc., were, in some way, and at some point connected with religion.

Both camps used any message that could be construed to attack the opposition, even when the message was not explicitly political. They would frequently manipulate commonly revered principles to favor their particular cause. Federalists published a sermon by Jacob Rush of Pennsylvania entitled “Observations on Patriotism” in which Rush denounced, at least implicitly, the republican ethic. Rush declared no party allegiance in his sermon, and whether or not he intended his message to rebuke republicans and extol federalism is beside the point; the contents of the sermon were the exact sentiments and arguments of federalists and thus were published to judge republicans and praise federalists. Furthermore, at this point in Connecticut politics, no publication in either federalist or republican newspaper was printed idly; every message had a purpose.

In his sermon Rush claimed an inherent and indefeasible connection between the principles of religion and patriotism. He averred that the responsibility to select rulers was a God-given privilege to the people; a privilege that must not be abused by exalting those who did not fear God and were only out for self-aggrandizement. Consequently, to

Rush and certainly to federalists, there was an intrinsic connection between religion and patriotism. He asserted a Patriot was “a man who sincerely loves his country, and whose object it is to promote its welfare as far as is in his power” and those that seek office out of selfish motives are no patriots. Rush noted that given the definition of a patriot, infidels could not be patriots for infidels denied “the truth of the religion of his country.” Opponents of Jefferson’s party often used the epithet infidel against them, as had Connecticut’s federalists. Thus Rush’s ambiguous language became simply another denunciation of republicans.⁸³

Most every point made by Rush aligned itself with federalist doctrine. According to Rush the infidel “who laughs at the doctrines, who contemptuously neglects the institutions of this religion, and who would banish it from the land” could not be a patriot. Furthermore, immoral men could not be patriots as morality and patriotism were intrinsically linked, a message federalists desperately tried to disseminate. Among various issues of morality denounced or forbidden by the laws of the country mentioned by Rush i.e. drunkenness, blasphemy, perjury etc., the “profanation of the Lord’s day,” one of the key issues concerning religion between Federalists and Jefferson’s party and one of the reasons by which Federalists labeled them as infidels and atheists. To Rush and consequently federalists, any man in violation of such laws despised the very laws of the country which united society and should not be elected to any “important offices.”⁸⁴

⁸³ Jacob Rush, “Observations on Patriotism,” *Courier*, September 11, 1816.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

Rush's patriotism struck at the heart of the battle between republicans and federalists. It questioned the relationship between government and religion; a relationship republicans wished to sunder and federalists to prosper. True patriotism, asserted Rush, was one of the principles of obedience to both God and country, "manifesting itself in the discharge of our religious, moral and social duties." Rush accurately defined the relationship between government and religion desired by federalists when he said a republican government "can be securely held by nothing but the principles of religion," and if that foundation was destroyed "by the storm of irreligion and licentiousness, it will be quickly overwhelmed by the waves of popular fury and violence."⁸⁵

Those that sought to sunder the relationship between government and religion that existed in Connecticut – namely republicans – were labeled revolutionary infidels and atheists. Since Thomas Jefferson became President, Federalists labeled Republicans as infidels and atheists; appellations that were ardently pronounced in Connecticut. Newspapers in Connecticut claimed Republicans intended to "down with the platform."⁸⁶ The *Connecticut Mirror* actually claimed Republicans "would GLADLY OVERTHROW THE FAITH OF BOTH PARTIES and DETHRONE THAT BEING on whom their faith is founded."⁸⁷

Despite being an inherently political goal done through political means, separation of church and state was seen as nothing less than the destruction of religion

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

⁸⁶ "The Saybrook Platform," *Columbian Register*, March 8, 1817. The platform referred to is the confession of faith used by Connecticut's Congregationalists.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

and happiness. Logical or not, Federalists saw the political goals of Republicans largely in religious terms; it was a religious war between the defenders of the Christian faith and those that wished to oppress it.

Federalists consistently endeavored to illustrate the benevolent effects of religion, the connection between patriotism and religion, and the essentialness of those principles for a prosperous society and government. They pointed to the absence of religion in their atheistic opponents, as perceived by the Federalists; that the infidelity of republicans would lead Connecticut only to moral depravity and consequently the destruction of its prosperous society and government.

Declaring Republicans to be prostitutes of religion who only intended “to sow the seeds of jealousy and dissention among the different denominations of Christians” in order to gain office, Federalists attempted to defend themselves and their laws to the increasingly vociferous cries of intolerance coming from the Republican camp.⁸⁸

All the republican assertions of unequal civil and religious privileges, made especially to Episcopalians, federalists claimed to be false. To prove their case Federalists tried to show to the public the history of equal religious rights and privileges that not only Episcopalians had enjoyed, but all Christian dissenting denominations. They noted past Episcopalians who served in Connecticut’s legislature as well as the delegates to the Federal Constitutional Convention from Connecticut Samuel Johnson, Oliver Ellsworth, and Roger Sherman, who were all Episcopalians. Federalists also defended the extant laws regarding religion, including the Certificate Law declaring that the “law rests entirely on

⁸⁸ “From the *Connecticut Courant*,” *Connecticut Journal*, September 10, 1816.

the simple principle that it is the duty of every citizen to contribute to the support of ypo-
crite institutions because of their civil benefit.”⁸⁹

Republicans saw the issue very differently. They saw only forced support of religion and impingements on religious liberty. Thus, the battle between Federalist and Republicans, the Standing Order and religious dissenters was not just over the religious nature of the political parties, but also the perception of establishment. While Federalists claimed compulsory support to be a “simple principle” beneficial to society thus one that everyone should support, republicans cried intolerance.

In a letter to then Governor John Cotton Smith, republicans not only decried the intolerance they believed federalists showed to them, but defended their own religious convictions as well. The author of the letter, signed “Reform,” rejected the superiority of morality and religion claimed by the Federalists and the Standing Order and avowed Republican regard for “the sacred rights of religion, and a due observance of the Sabbath, as essentially important to the well-being of community.”⁹⁰ But the republican author also attacked the Standing Order and their intolerant and public claim to exclusive piety by noting that “religion consists not in clamoring ostentation, but derives its growth from the feelings and sentiments of the heart.” Federalist labels of Deists, Atheist, and infidels simply because they disagreed with the Standing Order grew tiresome to republicans, so

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

⁹⁰ “From the *Hartford Mercury*, LETTER IV, To his Excellency, John Cotton Smith, Esq,” *Columbian Register*, March 29, 1817.

they took pains to affirm to the public that religion would be encouraged under their rule “but not for the purpose of strengthening a party.”⁹¹

Republicans frequently maligned the religion and those laws that dealt with religion of the Federalists and Standing Order. They averred the laws of Connecticut impinged on the rights of conscience and legally established an ecclesiastical hierarchy that all others were forced to support. Republicans believed clergy outside of the congregational churches were excluded from preaching at state-sponsored ceremonies and only those educated at Yale College were qualified to preach. They also accused federalists of using their various missionary and bible societies for political purposes by educating young men in their ways.⁹²

Republicans took issue with the religion of the Federalists. They claimed federalists practiced political religion; that religious liberty meant the pre-eminence of the Congregationalists; federalist claims that religion was in danger really meant they feared losing their political offices and power. Furthermore, Republicans claimed Federalist denunciations of Republicans as enemies of religion actually meant they were enemies to federalism. To be sure, the contest between federalists and republicans was not between two political parties, rather between the friends and enemies of true religion, at least their particular versions. ⁹³

‘Rights of conscience’ became a prominent concept in the religious discourse of the Republicans and they consistently declared how federalism violated those rights

⁹¹ *Ibid*

⁹² “For the Mercury, The Council – No. VIII,” *American Mercury*, September 10, 1816.

⁹³ *Ibid*.

showing again, the corruption of Federalist religion and the purity of their own. To validate their own credibility, republicans used outside sources, just as federalists had done by using Rush's sermon, to convey the desired message. In a publication of the *Times*, Republicans did so through a speech given to the House of Representatives in New Hampshire. The speech concerned a bill for ministerial taxation in New Hampshire, an irrelevant subject in Connecticut at the time, but undoubtedly was published for its comments on church and state relations as well those regarding rights of conscience. As the speech said, the control of man's conscience was a "nefarious design," brought on by the "marriage" of church and state, which sufficiently summed up the argument propounded by the Republicans for years.⁹⁴

In an attempt to convince the New Hampshire legislature to reject the bill laid before them, which would have exempted ministers from taxation, Representative Joseph Boodey enumerated the reasons why ministers should not be exempted from taxation. Impertinent though the topic may have been, the arguments were not. They echoed republican sentiments; Boodey noted the South once released ministers from taxation only to realize the effects of such laws were pernicious to society as the power of ministers over layman was too great and too easily corruptible. Thus, noted Boodey, the south abolished such laws and "held in utter abhorrence any interference with the prerogative of Jehovah; and have righteously guaranteed to every citizen the rights of conscience." Boodey also noted that those who sought a "marriage between church and state" did so

⁹⁴ "From the New Hampshire Gazette of Dec. 31," *Times*, February 4, 1817.

from the motivation to “control the consciences of man at will and pleasure.”⁹⁵ Republicans ostensibly printed the speech because of Boodey’s comments regarding rights of conscience and church and state relations. The timing of the publication – the article was published in early 1817 as the war was picking up steam – not to mention the contents of the speech, are too coincidental. Republicans in Connecticut had long decried the perceived violation of rights of conscience and, as shown above, had attempted to convince freemen of such violation while rallying religious dissenters to their cause of religious liberty. Thus, just as the publication of Rush’s sermon proved, any pertinent commentary on religion, especially when it served the party’s interests, became political and religious ammunition.

Throughout their battle with federalists, starting in 1816 and ending with the constitutional convention in 1818, republicans frequently denounced federalist interference with rights of conscience. But as protests concerning religion abounded in the press, they were not limited to the standard editorials or opinion articles; they were prevalent and even primary in the political advertisements for the Republican candidates as well. Even in the simple listing of the names of candidates, republicans continued to fight in the religious battle. They rhetorically asked readers if they esteemed the “liberty of conscience” and if they wished to worship their God “without reproach or molestation?” They also touched on establishment, the most contentious issue between federalists and republicans in their church and state dialogue. Republicans again asked rhetorically in their political advertisements if the people of Connecticut would like to appropriate their money in sup-

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

port of the Gospel as they desired “without an Executive brief or Legislative interference.” Corruption permeated the union of church and state in Connecticut in the eyes of republicans and through their political advertisements they called all religious denominations and dissenters who were discontented with certificates and supporting the “Platform Clergy,” to vote for “Liberty.”⁹⁶

Religion was not the only issue of importance offered to the public in republican political advertisements, but as shown above, remonstrations against the perceived interference with conscience and pocketbook - establishment - permeated all aspects of political propaganda and more generally, republican argument.

III

The Bill for the Promotion of Religion and Literature

The stigma of sedition following the infamous Hartford Convention followed by the defection of their Churchmen friends following the Phoenix Bank and Bishop’s Fund affair ultimately cost the Standing Order one of the high offices in Connecticut. *For the first time in the history of Connecticut elections*, a member of a party other than the Federalists was elected as Lieutenant Governor. What is more, the Tolerationists, as the Republicans newly styled themselves, were only a few hundred votes away from seating their governor, Oliver Wolcott. Following the Fall elections of 1816 the Standing Order held the majority in the Lower House by the slimmest margin in their elective history,

⁹⁶ “Toleration Ticket,” *Columbian Register*, March 29, 1817.

merely 30 seats. Obligated to assuage the political damage and retain the lost Episcopalian support Federalists tried to show them, and the Connecticut public, not only the justice of the Bishop's Fund resolution but also the contemptible nature of the Republican Party and its religion.

In an effort of appeasement to all dissenting religious sects Federalists proposed a bill for the promotion of religion and literature, which would have granted to each Christian denomination a sum of money.

Act for the support of literature & religion, authorizing agents of this state, appointed to obtain balance due from the U. S. on account of advancements made by this state for general defense during the late war to receive the-same in cash, stock of he U. S. or other public securities, one- third of what is received to be appropriated for benefit of the Presbyterians or Congregational denomination of Christians, one- seventh to be for he benefit of the Episcopalian denomination for support of a bishop, one- eighth for the benefit of the Baptists & incorporating trustees of said society, one twelfth for the benefit of the Methodists & incorporating trustees of said society, one- seventh for the benefit of Yale college, for the purpose of erecting necessary buildings & the unappropriated balance to remain in the treasury of the state.

In November of 1816 the House of Representatives in Connecticut deliberated over the bill, producing lively debate. While all delegates unanimously agreed there was no better purpose for a bill than the promotion of religion and literature, some delegates objected to its promotion due to the bill's provisos. Republicans mostly avowed their aversion to wealthy "Ministers of the Gospel." Daniel Burrows averred doubt "whether a divine was rendered more useful to his flock, or his ecclesiastical diligence increased, by an independent support." He noted the "fat livings" of the English clergy were the primary causes of their depravity and corruption, "Formerly they had wooden pulpits and gold-

en preachers” but clerical wealth reversed the situation and thus “had golden pulpits and wooden preachers,” to which he asserted his preference for the former.⁹⁷

Federalists though, were prone to defend establishments. Roger Whittlesey balked at Burrows’ criticism of the English clergy and argued they were responsible for the charitable and religious institutions, as well as the Bible Society of England, not to mention the “great and glorious work of enlightening the heathen.”⁹⁸

Federalists concluded by implicitly touching on the fundamental issue between federalists and republicans at stake in the bill – the issue alluded to and debated by Burrows, Whittlesey et al: state supported religion. The principal object of inquiry regarding this bill to federalists was whether or not religion and literature – principally religion – were “worthy of public patronage,” to which they responded that the Religious and Literary Institutions (Yale College – the bastion of Congregationalism – preeminent) were responsible for giving the “enlightened State of Connecticut...so distinguished a rank among the states of the union.” In the minds of all federalists such institutions produced virtue and intelligence and prepared everyone for civil society and “happiness hereafter.” “Where are our youth, to acquire this character?” they questioned the legislature; the answer, of course, manifested itself in religious and literary institutions. Federalists scornfully added, “faction alone...will raise its voice against it” (a subtle reference to republicans).⁹⁹

⁹⁷ “Connecticut Legislature,” *Courier*, November 20, 1816.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.* Burrows responded to Whittlesey’s comments by rescinding his criticism of the English clergy and noted his comments were produced “involuntarily by the heat of debate,” just as Whittlesey had publicly surmised. His acknowledgement of Whittlesey’s point and subsequent concession shows us how politics should be. That is, without ego.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

In the debate, federalists continued to expound on the beneficent effects of religion, which necessitated government encouragement. That idea, however, became THE crying point for religious dissenters and eventually, and perhaps inevitably, the catalyst for the irrevocable separation of church and state in Connecticut. It would also become the traditional argument proffered by federalists in the religious war. Federalists extolled the principles and effects of religion, asserting the spiritual power of religion. “It is religion – that principle which teaches us how to live, and how to die – which enlightens the mind and purifies the heart – moderates our grief, & heightens our joys.”

The bill, to federalists, provided for all denominations of Christians thereby disproving any intolerance suggested by “friends abroad.” They declared that the laws of Connecticut protect and secure the rights of every sect and denomination of Christians and did not exclude some for the favor of others; a refrain that would become familiar through the course of federalist discourse and vehemently denied by republicans. Federalists also attempted to appeal to the spiritual sensibilities of the delegates by asking them to “consider the situation in which Providence has placed him...of cherishing and promoting the most noble of all earthly objects.” And for just a bit of old-fashioned and stereotypical Christian fear and guilt, a Federalist delegate ended his speech stating: “How the opportunity, which is now offered, of dispensing happiness to his fellow men, was improved? – An answer must be given at the throne of Eternal Justice!”¹⁰⁰

The debate over the bill and its appropriations of money - and more largely over establishment - spilled over into public discourse too. Members of the second Baptist

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

Society in Ashford convened a meeting to discuss the bill recently passed by the legislature in order to effectively and formally declare their positions regarding the matter.

They resolved that it was the duty of freemen “to oppose all measures adopted by our legislature, calculated to oppress the people & destroy free toleration in matters of religion.” More, they declared in another resolution that the legislature had no right to use the money of Connecticut’s citizens for anything other than for government expenses. The Baptists also promulgated that civil law should not interfere in matters of religion as “it is inconsistent with the doctrine of the gospel” and such uses of money were intended to “bind the consciences of posterity” and “place them in the power of some ecclesiastical tyrant.”¹⁰¹

In a “united meeting” of Baptists, Episcopalians, and Methodists – Connecticut’s largest minority denominations and the states most vociferous dissenting sects – convened to discuss the “extraordinary” act of the legislature. Two resolutions were adopted at the meeting, both of which dealt with the dissenting sects’ primary issue – establishment. Implicit in their message was the intent for the declarations to be heard by the Connecticut Legislature. The first resolution stated it was the duty of good citizens to submit to the authority and laws of their rulers “so far as they act upon just and equal principles, and do not intermeddle with the affairs of Christ’s church and kingdom.” Secondly, the groups resolved that it was their “wish to have the Gospel stand on its own immortal foundation...and that kingdom which is not of this world wants no other sup-

¹⁰¹ *Hartford Times*, March 4, 1817.

port than that man should believe in it." Any human law made to enforce such support, to these dissenters, "is contrary to the spirit of the gospel."¹⁰²

Discussion of establishment, symbolized by the bill in question, crept into newspaper opinion pieces and editorials as well. Republicans assiduously lobbied dissenting sects in order to gain support and curb the support for federalist establishment. They openly appealed to Methodists in the newspapers not to accept the money appropriated to them by the bill and avowed that no appropriation of money would have been made had a constitution been in place to guide the legislature. Making their plea nearly a year and half past the passage of the bill, the republican plea came at a time when the subject of a constitution was gaining increasing importance. Hence, the discussion of establishment and constitution became interconnected. Republicans averred that if a constitution was able to appropriate money to support religion, as had been done, "then does it not authorize the legislature to establish a religious hierarchy?" Hence, to Republicans Methodist acceptance of such money would demonstrate a participation in that hierarchy and acceptance of establishment, to which republicans reminded them of their opposition to such a union and hierarchy.¹⁰³

Republican appeal to the Methodists articulated a correlation between acceptance of the appropriated money and religious hierarchy. Any acceptance would signify acquiescence to civil authority's jurisdiction in ecclesiastical matters. The bill represented establishment to republicans and the acceptance of money from the bill became tantamount

¹⁰² *American Mercury*, April 1, 1817. Meetings of the Baptists can only be found printed in Republican newspapers i.e. the *Mercury*, *Times*, etc.

¹⁰³ "Communication," *American Mercury*, April 7, 1818. Also printed in the *Columbian Register* and *True Republican* on April 18, 1818, with the title "Please to answer the following questions."

to the acceptance of an establishment and thus created, in the minds of republicans, a dangerous precedent, “if a legislature are in duty bound to appropriate money for the support of religion among the Methodists, are they not in duty bound also to dictate how they should live?”¹⁰⁴

The ardent and almost monitory appeal to the Methodists in this case underscores religion, and more specifically the union of church and state in all its forms, as the salient and predominant issue in Connecticut politics at the time. Even though the purpose of the article was to illustrate the need for a constitution and persuade Methodists, the argument steered toward religion. And as we shall see, the *cris de coeur* for a constitution often found its way back into an argument of religion.¹⁰⁵

The bill for the promotion of religion and literature engendered lively debate in the legislature and touched a nerve with many dissenters and dissenting sects. The meetings of Baptists and other dissenting sects illustrate the participation of the religious sects in political dialogue, more importantly, though, was that that participation and action was spurred by what the bill embodied and signified: government supported religion. That idea, anathema to Baptists and other dissenting sects and religions while favorable to Federalists and the Congregational Church, produced arguments that, while taking various and distinct forms, keenly illustrate the religious nature of the political battle.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.* The *Columbian Register* (New Haven), another Republican newspaper, published a terse article that characterizes republican thought on the bill. The article noted that the bill appropriating the money created “a sort of Monarchical head” for the Baptist and Methodist denominations adding sarcastically “Who wants a Constitution, whilst we have such staring evidence of the benefits derived from the Old Charter?”

Despite the variety, arguments that constituted the religious war in Connecticut politics can be encapsulated in the larger theme of church and state relations or 'establishment'. The reputation of establishment, however, cannot be so neatly encapsulated; depending on the political persuasion of the person its definition and character changed. The question of the existence of a church establishment in Connecticut was frequently debated, as was the idea of publicly supported ecclesiastical societies done through compulsory taxation. Many debates on the matter took a moral form. Dissenters argued the immorality of the union of church and state and its detestable accompaniments i.e. Certificate Law, compulsory taxes supporting ministers, etc., while federalists defended the positive influence and effects of religion on society. But subsumed in these larger themes of church-state union were very particular and nuanced arguments, proffered by both pro and anti positions that help to define this religious war. It did not mean the same to everyone, as shown by the arguments, even if the overall position was the same. Furthermore, despite a variety in the focus of arguments, the consistency with which each argument was put forth coupled with the fact that every particular argument offered by a certain camp coalesced around a fundamental sentiment or sentiments illustrates that religion was the currency of Connecticut's political economy, and that one party betrayed true religion, the other defended it.

Chapter 3

Springtime Elections of 1817 and the Republican Offensive

The Bill for Promotion of Religion and Literature in October of 1816 was meant to conciliate a larger number of the dissenting sects. Its actual effect proved to be the opposite. The act was protested by “every dissenter and political come-outer.” It was denounced across the spectrum of disagreement, from being called unnecessary to “a lasting curse.”¹⁰⁶ In fact, in early 1817 Episcopalians, Baptists and Methodists met together in Andover to denounce the Act with one united voice. The umbrage of the Methodists cost Federalists their long held vote, the “whole” of it going to the Republican “Toleration and Reform Ticket” of 1817.¹⁰⁷ This, coupled with the defection of the Episcopalians and the increased support from other dissenters, was enough to hold on to the lieutenant-governor seat and unseat the governor and the Federalist control of the Lower House. The last remaining stronghold of the Federalists was the Council.

The Hartford Convention, the Bishop’s Fund affair, the Bill for Promotion of Religion and Literature, all played significant roles in republican electoral success in the Spring of 1817 culminating in never before held political success for Connecticut’s dissenting party, but Republican’s knew they needed to continue to strike while the political and religious wind was in their favor. It was with this animating spirit that republican’s (and Federalists) published article after article, defense after defense before the Spring elections of 1817, the summer following, and before the Fall elections, illustrating both

¹⁰⁶ Greene, 619, 622

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid*, 623

the importance of the subject to the public as a whole and the significance of the issue to Connecticut politics at the time.

Newly elected 'Toleration' Governor Oliver Wolcott's inaugural gubernatorial speech to Connecticut's House of Representatives and subsequent responses manifest this point. Amidst political platitudes and discussion of pertinent issues to his constituency i.e. taxation, election of judiciary, separation of powers, and freedom of suffrage, Wolcott addressed the issue of religion and religious liberty directly. He diplomatically articulated the position of Republicans and dissenters, yet clearly stating intent and meaning to disabuse Federalist atheistic fear-mongers. Promulgating the Christian nature of Republicans to defend themselves against Federalist accusations of infidelity and atheism, Wolcott stated it was "the right and duty of every man, publickly and privately to worship and adore the Supreme Creator and Preserver of the Universe in the manner most agreeable to the dictates of his own conscience." He added that no man had the right to control or dictate the worship or religious opinion of another.¹⁰⁸

Wolcott furthermore averred a familiar republican refrain, "the Gospel of Christ... does not require the support of human strength." While he maintained that religion beget morality, piety, and "good order," and laws should enforce the voluntary contracts of the people for supporting religion, Wolcott made clear the Republicans stance on religion; that it should stand on its own, unsupported by the state. And, according to the Republicans, it would flourish if equality reigned.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁸ "Governor's Speech," *Connecticut Journal*, May 13, 1817. *The Columbian Register*, *American Mercury*, and *Connecticut Courant* also published Wolcott's speech at later dates simply due to weekly publication dates.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

Despite the fact that Wolcott did not focus his speech on religion, articles in the newspapers nonetheless rashly and specifically responded to his comments on the subject. An editorial by the *Times* investigated Wolcott's speech to see if Republicans had any reason for complaint. Interestingly, the article's evaluation focused solely on Wolcott's comments concerning religion. The author averred that the laws of Connecticut concerning religion failed to keep up with the spirit of the times and hence were "inapplicable." Furthermore, the author insinuated the Federalists and Standing Order were "blinded by prejudice, and swayed by interest," likening dissenters in Connecticut to the "poor Catholicks in IRELAND."¹¹⁰

What is more, there were only two principles noted by the author by which the spiritual could be recognized by the temporal: either through protection or coercion. He praised Wolcott for his assertion that government ought to protect religion, but not legislate on it or "coerce" it, and affirmed the assertions made by republicans and, more specifically, by Wolcott's speech. The law should only enforce the duties that men owed to each other according to the republican author, not the duties to God; to republicans such laws were simply attempts to aid God which, in their eyes, assumed "the highest kind of impiety."¹¹¹

As had been done before, both parties used speeches from outside of Connecticut to articulate their various arguments and no doubt with the intent to add credibility. In the summer of 1817, following their recent electoral success, republicans published a speech

¹¹⁰ "Governor's Speech No. III," *Times*, June 3, 1817.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*

given by the renowned Baptist leader John Leland on the subject of religious freedom. Originally delivered in 1811 to the House of Representatives of Massachusetts, Leland's speech expounded on the union of church and state and all its concomitants. Leland averred to the Massachusetts legislature that while a majority of the citizenry of the state believed in forced pecuniary duties to support protestant Christianity, a "respectable minority" disagreed. Leland, however, clearly articulated that while both groups were firm in their belief of "the divinity of Christianity," the dissenting minority believed temporal interference with Christianity would be impertinent. He added that religion should be a matter between the individual and their God; any interference or attempt at control was like Popery.¹¹²

Leland conveyed the exact message republicans in Connecticut wanted political supporters and opponents to hear – especially those quick to denounce Republicans as infidels, atheists, and purveyors of irreligion – and presumably anyone politically neutral: Christianity was not under attack by republicans, but rather simply, they saw an alternative mode of support by which the sacrosanctity of Christianity might be encouraged and honored without violating the rights of conscience of any citizen.

The printed speech of Leland, however, touched on multifarious issues concerning religion and the state that republicans in Connecticut had clamored about for months, and even years. One such issue was virtue. Republicans had long argued that Christianity would be supported under their rule – in defense of federalist claims that religion would be abandoned and left prostrate – but would not be enforced. They claimed their

¹¹² "Rights of Conscience, Mr. Leland's Speech," *Times*, June 10, 1817.

constituency held the virtue to voluntarily support Christianity at the same level, if not more so, than compulsory support had done under federalist rule, and Leland conveyed just such a message. Leland asserted Congregationalists unscrupulously forced the support of their own denomination and worship with discriminating laws – a point Republicans and dissenters could relate well to in Connecticut – thereby subordinating other denominations and sects, forcing them “to support a worship in which they had no faith.” Dissenters, however, avowed Leland, would “freely contribute to support Protestant Christianity” but would simply not pay for religious services with legal taxes.¹¹³

Furthermore, in defiance of federalist claims that without state support religion would inevitably wane, Leland noted that many of the old colonies i.e. New York, Pennsylvania, Delaware, etc., as well as the new states, did not have, or never had any legal establishment and yet “flourished as well as Massachusetts.” All of the old colonies established liberty, noted Leland, with the exception of New England, as their foundation and yet they were not “sunk with earthquakes, or destroyed with fire and brimstone.” Further confirming republican claims to Christianity, Leland invoked the very beginnings of Christianity for his argument noting that Christianity not only survived without the encouragement of the law, but flourished in opposition to it.¹¹⁴

Leland also defended the idea of religious liberty in spiritual terms, arguing that the temporal tainted the spiritual; a defense republicans had made and would make fervently as the time for the harvest of religious liberty grew nearer. He affirmed to the rep-

¹¹³ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*

representatives, and consequently to Connecticut's citizens, that religious societies, parishes, or towns would not be "disrobed" of their corporate powers (that is, the power to tax their own people) but the legal tax disrobed "Christianity of her virgin beauty – turning the churches of Christ into creatures of State – and metamorphosing gospel ambassadors to state pensioners."¹¹⁵

As Leland stated, as would Connecticut republicans years later, Christianity was "the greatest blessing that ever was among men," and should "stand upon its own basis;" if incorporated into the law, "it becomes the mother of cruelties." Forced support was anathema to Leland, as it was to all republicans in Connecticut, but as Leland argued, the central impetus to disestablish derived itself from fear of the evil hand of civil government infecting and tainting the purity of Christianity with corruption.¹¹⁶

Leland posited yet another argument regarding the antinomic and pernicious nature of civil enforcement of ecclesiastic support; again, an argument Republicans used and would use in defense of federalist accusations of infidelity and atheism. The argument posited can be summed up in an 'if this, then that' scenario: if Christianity was false, then the government should not support it; if it is true, thus its principles and assertions that "none of the princes of this world know the genius of Christ's kingdom," then men are unable to comprehend Christianity thus "very unfit to legislate about it."¹¹⁷

The speech given to the Massachusetts legislature by Leland perfectly exemplified the meeting of two religious philosophies at a political junction. The same can be

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*

said for Connecticut's road to disestablishment. Both sides held inviolable, at least to them, religious principles and the political culture and political nature of federalist religion necessitated the debate to be conducted on the political stage. The only recourse to secure either religious philosophy was to obtain political power, thus politics became the battlefield for religious liberty and the union of church and state.

As noted above, Leland's speech embodied the overall philosophy of republicans concerning religion in Connecticut. His arguments and assertions had been and would be echoed by republicans and attacked by Federalists through the newspapers in the weeks and months to come.

In a very unique article published in the *Times*, both federalist and republican ardently defended their positions concerning church-state relations, touching on many of Leland's points and showing all of the hyperbolic rancor. Entitled "A dialogue between Church and State and a dissenter" the article didactically, through written dialogue between an advocate for establishment and a dissenter, addressed the respective viewpoints of the two positions. The dialogue started with the dissenter averring their desire for a constitution to secure religious liberty to all people, to which the church and state advocate responded "What! Do you mean to cut all loose at a single stroke; and give such unbounded liberty to infidels and every one else, as to destroy all religion?" He concluded that they had given to dissenters what was reasonable. Echoing Leland's point, the dissenter posited federalists had given what was not theirs to give, "like the language of sa-

tan, when he showed our Saviour the kingdoms of the world; and told him, all these will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me.”¹¹⁸

The church and state advocate exemplified federalist response to republican claims of oppression and tyranny. Religion ought to be supported claimed the federalist and forced support intended to sustain, not oppress dissenting denominations. The dissenter recanted, again echoing Leland and in classic Republican form, religious obligations emanated from God adding that scripture offered no example of “compulsion.” To this the federalist exclaimed that the destruction of such laws would be in defiance of Connecticut’s forefathers, whose laws made Connecticut “the most moral, religious and orderly state in the union;” federalists consistently claimed the laws established by Connecticut’s forefathers set apart Connecticut as uniquely religious thus moral, virtuous, and prosperous, and consequently should be left unchanged.¹¹⁹

The dissenter again noted that “God has placed beyond the jurisdiction of every human legislature;” a familiar refrain in Republican argument. But the church and state advocate made known federalist qualms regarding unsupported religion; that infidels and irreligious – read republicans – would not support religion and thus would “tumble to the ground.” Because Republicans equated forced support as oppressive and coercive, the dissenter responded succinctly “if the sword was necessary, Christ would not have told Peter to put it up into the sheath.”¹²⁰

¹¹⁸ “For the Times. A DIALOGUE Between Church and State and a Dissenter,” *Times*, August 11, 1818.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.* See also “For the Conn. Journal. To the Federalists of All Denominations,” *Connecticut Journal*, April 8, 1817; “Address, to the Freemen of Connecticut,” *Connecticut Courant*, March 4, 1817; *Connecticut Courant*, June 17, 1817; “For the Courant. To the Freemen of Connecticut,” *Connecticut Courant*, August 26, 1817.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*

The entire dialogue between the two interlocutors, as written by the newspaper, serves as a microcosm of the dialogue between federalists and republicans. It exemplifies the philosophies behind the religious war fought between advocates for and against a union of church and state and consequently between all federalists and republicans. The dialogue between the two, as represented in the article, represented two contrasting religious ethos' that were forced to confront each other through the only power structure available to change anything: politics.

Another prominent Baptist leader vocalized his sentiments concerning religion. In a series of newspaper articles entitled "The rational Christian, or, AN ENQUIRY WHETHER THE SEVERAL DENOMINATIONS OF CHRISTIANS IN THIS STATE ENJOY EQUAL CIVIL AND RELIGIOUS PRIVILEGES?" Roger Williams set out to prove what many Republicans in the state had been claiming for years and already vividly put forth by Leland: government imposition into religious territory, and consequently on men's rights of conscience, was not only unnecessary, but impious and harmful and the disreputable union of church and state produced only tyranny, oppression and corruption. Williams asserted the Republican belief that all men were inherently equal in the eyes of God and the duties they owed to Him "ought not to be interfered with, or subject to any abridgement or restraint." To Republicans, as Williams illustrated, the state was nothing more than "crafty politicians" (read Federalists) pretending to serve the interests of the people; their interference upon a man's rights of conscience embodied in compulsory support quite simply was interfering with "the Almighty." As Williams argued, laws concerning religion imposed on God's domain and preposterously attempted to authorize the mode by which God would be worshiped.¹²¹

¹²¹ Roger Williams, "The rational Christian," *Times*, August 12, 1817

From the spiritual argument to the temporal, Williams noted that “the sagacious framers of the Constitution of the United States” eliminated all possibility for an establishment of religion, as had almost all other states in order to stop “crafty and designing men.” The situation in Connecticut, however, according to Williams and republicans went the other direction as the laws provided for a legal establishment which only served to support tyranny, oppression and favoritism.¹²²

Williams’ arguments and assertions covered two important themes republicans wished to present to the public, not only in their own defense, but as fulminations against federalists. The first theme, the temporal, Republicans declared and attempted to show the existence of an establishment, which produced the familiarly republican perceived effects: tyranny, oppression, favoritism, and corruption. The second theme, the spiritual, which became a more prevalent issue, republicans maintained that civil government had no authority in the Christian kingdom, thus any law imposing upon religion, impertinently trespassed onto the very domain of God.

Continuing in his series of articles entitled “The rational Christian, or, AN ENQUIRY WHETHER THE SEVERAL DENOMINATIONS OF CHRISTIANS IN THIS STATE ENJOY EQUAL CIVIL AND RELIGIOUS PRIVILEGES?,” Roger Williams intended to prove the existence of an establishment in Connecticut and that it was an establishment of a particular church, the Presbyterian, supported by “corporate and coercive powers.”¹²³

Williams’ avowedly intended to show a “legal establishment” of religion in Connecticut, evidenced by the Presbyterian Church. He took pains to show the historical ori-

¹²² *Ibid.*

¹²³ Roger Williams, “The rational Christian No. III.,” *Times*, August 26, 1817.

gins of the laws supporting religion in his lengthy article. From the outset, Williams showed that Connecticut's laws suppressed those who differed in faith from the established system; they were considered heretics and were punished accordingly, mostly with fines. The statute of Toleration of 1708 passed by the civil government ceased the labeling and punishing of heretics as criminals, but Williams noted that the Saybrook platform and subsequent legislation officially recognized a "system of faith, worship, and discipline" as the "established religion of Connecticut." Henceforth, Williams claimed, the intolerant, abusive, and oppressive establishment punished dissenters.¹²⁴

Williams made extra effort to distinguish the suffering of his Baptist brethren. "They seem to have been peculiarly obnoxious to the intolerant and persecuting spirit of the established churches...the primitive Baptists were treated with the greatest severity, and every effort made to suppress them." Williams made special notice of Elisha Paine, a Baptist minister punished "for the *crime* of worshipping God according to his own conscience." Williams' special attention to Baptists demonstrated generally the *de facto* and *de jure* history of Connecticut's oppressive and intolerant church establishment.¹²⁵

In another lengthy article Williams endeavored to prove the contemporary laws of Connecticut supported "a visible church by corporate and coercive powers," and the legal establishment was a particular denomination.¹²⁶ Williams conceded to the public that the system of "faith, discipline, and church government" – the creed of the Presbyterian

¹²⁴ *Ibid.* Quakers were considered to be the most prevalent heretics in Connecticut.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.* Williams also linked Yale College, a perceived stronghold of federalism and the Standing Order, to the establishment.

¹²⁶ Roger Williams, "The rational Christian No. IV.," *Times*, September 2, 1817. Williams never names the Presbyterian Church, but undoubtedly would have been obvious to the public to whom he referred.

Church – established in the Saybrook Platform was omitted following the revolution but avowed nonetheless that the laws “indeed expressly recognize a prevailing church.”¹²⁷ After enumerating the laws concerning the erection of denominational meeting houses and the support of teachers and ministers of the gospel – mixed with his own personal and republican assertions – Williams brazenly averred “the pope is the head of the catholic church, the king of the church of England, and the general assembly of the established church of Connecticut.” These incendiary and public remarks of Williams directed at all federalists and the Standing Order further demonstrate the deeply seated rancor from which the war was born; to be put on level with the pope and the catholic church, as well as the English monarch and his church, *the* two most offensive and deplorable associations known in Connecticut, and perhaps in the United States, clearly evinces – the purposes of political propaganda notwithstanding – the republican disdain for federalist establishment.¹²⁸

Williams assiduously attempted to show the establishment “of a particular church.” He addressed tenets, laws and statutes of Connecticut, guided, of course, by Williams’ own rhetorical and republican questions and comments, finally averring that liberty in preaching the gospel “distinct and separate from the established worship” could not exist in Connecticut under the given laws. “Grace cannot be supported by power” asserted Williams, and those that interfered with the power of God “whether it be in the hands of a pope, a king, or a general assembly, is equally ecclesiastical tyranny, and tends

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*

to corrupt the gospel of Christ.”¹²⁹ Indeed, to many supporters of the republican cause, any legal foundation in religion inherently and absolutely vitiated the “gospel foundation.”¹³⁰

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*

¹³⁰ *Ibid.* Williams specifically mentioned Baptists and Methodists, but judging by republican argument throughout the war, the sentiments can be applied to many supporters of Republicans.

Chapter 4

Connecticut's First State Constitution

I

Elections of 1818 and the Call for a Constitutional Convention

The elections in the Spring of 1817 were a political turning point for Republicans in Connecticut. The dissenting party to the "Standing Order" now held the highest office in the land, something to which they could never before lay claim. Oliver Wolcott won the governor's seat, Jonathan Ingersoll retained his Lt. Governor seat, and the "Tolerationists" controlled the Lower House by a nearly two to one margin. Only the Federalist controlled Council was left to overtake to win the crusade viz., create, in their eyes, Connecticut's first Constitution. After placing in nomination their candidates for Councilors, "they agitated in town meetings and in every other way the discussion of their "Constitution and Reform Ticket," eventually carrying the day by re-electing the reflected governor and lieutenant-governor, preserving Republican majority in the House and electing 8 anti-Federal Senators. The last Federalist political bulwark was taken, the Republican's now free to call for a constitutional convention and effect permanently the changes they long desired.

In the minds of republicans the revisions made after the Revolutionary War to the Charter of 1662 granted by Charles II did not constitute an adequate document of constitutional rights. Thus, calls for a written constitution to inviolably solidify the principles of government and rights of the people, on par with the other state constitutions as well as

the Federal Constitution, came long before the actual convention. The most notable was William Judd's petition in 1804 in which he proposed to Connecticut's Legislature the principles and rights under which the constitution should be composed. Unfortunately, for Judd, who represented Republicans, Baptists, and religious dissenters alike, the petition fell on deaf ears in both government and citizenry. At the time of his plea federalism and the Standing Order had been firmly entrenched in Connecticut and the citizenry had no reason for such radical changes to their society as proposed by Judd.

As noted the War of 1812 and the infamous Hartford Convention changed many perceptions of Connecticut's long-standing Federalist government. When Republicans finally established themselves in Connecticut politics in 1816 with their electoral successes the seeds for a constitution consequently fell on more fertile political soil. Henceforth, starting in early 1817, the prevalence and stridency of discussion concerning a constitution increased dramatically.

Religion produced a substantial portion of the constitutional discussion; a general public discussion existed as well with simple cries for civil and religious liberty from republicans being the most prominent. Nonetheless, discussion of religion, whether on balance with the other issues or as the central issue in the constitutional dialectic, produced familiar arguments from both factions. Republicans avowed the existence of a legal establishment of the congregational church embodied in the Saybrook platform and followed by Yale College and railed against its intolerance and oppression. To republicans,

a constitution granting dissenters their rights would be the only emollient.¹³¹ Others who discussed the constitution didn't always want a constitution, but promulgated a desire for religious liberty – as defined by republicans – citing the very familiar argument that Christ's kingdom was not of this world thus should not be supported or ruled by temporal government.¹³²

As election seasons opened, calls for a constitution not only became wants, but needs to Republicans. They averred a written constitution would be the “basis of the many important objects of reform which are *required* by the present enlightened and renovated state of the public mind.” The need for a constitution however, actually meant the need for certain rights, the most prevalent being religious liberty. Although frequently discussed alongside multifarious issues debated by federalists and republicans, religion generally garnered the most attention and in-depth discussion in the forums concerning a constitution, especially once a convention was decided upon. Furthermore, following the election of delegates in early summer of 1818, discussions, indeed debates, became more vociferous and regular, especially as the convention drew nearer. Throughout though, the arguments of the two parties remained the same.

In a common and recurrent republican argument republicans called for Christianity to be placed constitutionally “upon its own foundation,” to guarantee the rights of conscience, to protect “all denominations of Christians, and other religious sects” in “their

¹³¹ “The Established Order,” *Columbian Register*, March 1, 1817. The civil topics included many topics important to both Republicans and Federalists i.e. universal suffrage, an independent judiciary, separation of executive and legislative powers, etc. Richard Purcell's *Connecticut in Transition* offers the best historical discussion on the civil topics pertinent to the constitutional convention.

¹³² “Stability of Republics, &c.,” *Columbian Register*, February 22, 1817.

respective creeds and modes of worship,” and rid religion of the tincture of state support forever.¹³³ The republican press familiarly cried corruption of the establishment, borne from its very roots, as well. They continued to assert that obligatory obedience to a certain religious system “provoked” the “power of the sword” from the establishment when a man refused to pay his tax; such an “offensive war” de-legitimated the “peaceable kingdom of Christ” to the republicans and had no place in the new constitution.¹³⁴

Federalists too chimed in about the upcoming constitution proffering their familiar and recurrent arguments. They maintained “very little room for improvement” existed in the old government and any changes to the existing constitution would be unnecessary.¹³⁵ Federalists not only defended their much maligned religious system but turned the republican argument of religious favoritism back at them, claiming that government should “promote the interests of the people at large” and not local or sectarian interests such as particular denominations of religious dissenters i.e. Baptists or Methodists. Federalists furthermore cogently argued that if all dissenting sects called for their modes of worship, religious principles, and support of ministers to be “exclusively considered constitutional,” chaos would reign.¹³⁶

As the convention neared federalists stayed consistent with their ideological arguments. They maintained that religion was necessary for “good order” in society, thus

¹³³ Servetus, “The Times. Tuesday April 7, 1818. A New Political Era,” *Times*, April 7, 1818.

¹³⁴ Conscience, “For the Times, Shall every man be made to contribute to the support of Religion?,” *Times*, August 11, 1818.

¹³⁵ Federalists commonly maintained that the charter granted to Connecticut in 1662, with the amendments made over the years, served as Connecticut’s written constitution.

¹³⁶ “New Haven, Aug. 25,” *Connecticut Journal*, August 25, 1818.

necessitated all to support some religion. In response to republican fulminations against a corrupt and oppressive establishment, federalists promulgated that “each denomination have the privilege of enjoying their own unbiased sentiments, and of worshipping according to the dictates of their consciences.” Indeed, to federalists all denominations were equal in that regard and only the superior numbers of Congregationalists distinguished them in regards to government, as it was expedient that the minority should have to “certify” from the majority out of simple convenience.¹³⁷

Federalist religious ideology hinged on the association and consequential effects of religion, morality, and “good order” in society. Given that ideological stance, a union of society and religion became the only logical approach. Hence, where republicans protested religious oppression and imposition, federalists saw a basic equality in the law where anyone could “choose his mode” and be protected in that choice.¹³⁸

As the convention approached, the Baptists actively printed their passionate thoughts on the matter. Newspapers printed resolutions adopted by Baptists in various meetings as well as “communications.” Congruent with federalists and their republican brethren Baptist publications dealt specifically with the articles on religion to the neglect of most other issues. In one particular communication the Baptists, averring the importance of a Constitution, mentioned only that religious liberty would be lost “for a long time to come” if the new constitution duplicated the provisions for the establishment of religion in the Massachusetts constitution.¹³⁹

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*

¹³⁹ “Communication,” *Times*, June 16, 1818. Note MA’s provision.

The resolutions adopted by various societies of Baptists, which also dealt only with religion were also well publicized. The content of those resolutions reiterated previous declarations made by Baptists and their political kin; the legal establishment of religion was oppressive, tyrannical, and “subversive of the general welfare,” and the laws authorizing the support of one sect by taxing other dissenting sects were “palpably unjust.”¹⁴⁰ But more than just exercises in repetitive political propaganda, Baptist meetings concluded with a firm resolution to not support the constitution proposed by the legislature “unless it contain[ed] a provision for securing the full and complete enjoyment of religious liberty.”¹⁴¹ Some of the publicized meetings declared explicitly that they would reject absolutely any constitution that restrained “the free exercise of religion, or compel[led] any man to contribute to the support of any religious worship.”¹⁴²

The town of Groton held a Baptist convention, drew up a petition and actually selected one of their members, David Bolles, to address the constitutional convention. In principle, the Baptists declared “that rulers have no right to legislate on the subject of religion” and demanded “that equal rights and privileges, may be secured to all religious denominations, by a special article in the Constitution.”¹⁴³ Bolles addressed both houses of the legislature with Baptist demands, but also addressed the “leading republican members” and demanded the passage of the principles offered in the Baptist petition. He re-

¹⁴⁰ “At a Meeting of the Baptist Society in Hartford,” *American Mercury*, August 11, 1818.

¹⁴¹ “At a Meeting of the Baptist Society in the Town of Willington,” *Times*, August 11, 1818. The resolutions drafted by the various town meetings of Baptists were undoubtedly coordinated considering the uniform preamble to each resolution.

¹⁴² *American Mercury*, August 11, 1818.

¹⁴³ “New-Haven, July 28. Singular,” *Connecticut Journal*, July 28, 1818.

minded the delegates that Baptist votes allowed the party to gain political power and threatened to withdraw support if demands went unmet. “Refuse to grant it [the above-mentioned principles] and you will lose our support.” As noted by one newspaper, the Republicans were obliged, if not obligated, to listen to Bolles and the Baptists for “to *them*, they owed their very seats in that body.”¹⁴⁴

No other issue engendered such a passionate and firm response from a political or religious sect, not to mention the civic activity it created among Connecticut’s citizens. Baptists evinced an unambiguous position to their political brethren and avenue to religious liberty. They let Republicans know that their principles regarding religion were non-negotiable and no compromise concerning their rights of conscience would be accepted. It was an unenviable position for Republicans; if they passed the Baptist principles unaltered, “the whole state would be in commotion” but reject them and the support so integral to their political success and to the success of the constitution would have been lost.¹⁴⁵ The eventual compromises inserted into the constitution may have been one reason why the vote for ratification was so close.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.* There ended up being a compromise regarding religious liberty in the constitution, but it is uncertain how that affected the ratification vote amongst Baptists.

II

The Constitutional Convention and Ratification

Resolved, That this Convention do deem it expedient to proceed at this time to form a Constitution of Civil Government for the People of this State...

PREAMBLE

The people of Connecticut, acknowledging with gratitude the good providence of God in having permitted them to enjoy a free government, do, in order more effectually to define, secure and perpetuate the liberties, rights and privileges which they have derived from their ancestors, hereby, after a careful consideration and revision, ordain and establish the following Constitution and form of civil government...

DECLARATION OF RIGHTS

Section 3. The exercise and enjoyment of religious profession and worship, without discrimination, shall forever be free to all persons in this State: provided that the right hereby declared and established shall not be so construed as to excuse acts of licentiousness or to justify practices inconsistent with the peace and safety of the State

Section 4. No preference shall be given by law to any Christian sect or mode or worship...

ARTICLE SEVENTH. OF RELIGION.

Sec. 1. It being the duty of all men to worship the Supreme Being, the great Creator and Preserver of the Universe, and their right to render that worship, in the mode most consistent with the dictates of their consciences; no person shall by law be compelled to join or support, nor be classed with, or associated to, any congregation, church or religious association. But every person now belonging to such congregation, church, or religious association, shall remain a member thereof, until he shall have separated himself therefrom, in the manner hereinafter provided. And each and every society or denomination of christians in this state, shall have and enjoy the same and equal powers, rights and privileges; and shall have power and authority to support and maintain the ministers or teachers of their respective denominations, and to build and repair houses for public worship, by a tax on the members of any such society only, to be laid by a major vote of the legal voters assembled at any society meeting, warned and held according to law, or in any other manner.

Sec. 2. If any person shall choose to separate himself from the society or denomination of christians to which he may belong, and shall leave a written no

tice thereof with the clerk of such society, he shall thereupon be no longer liable for any future expences which may be incurred by said society.

During the actual constitutional convention federalists and republicans offered the same old stories in the newspapers. Federalists boasted of the virtue, talents and character of their leaders and proclaimed the inferiority of their un-esteemed political opposition. They customarily boasted of the “unexampled prosperity” enjoyed by Connecticut; a perceived direct outcome of the political, literary and religious institutions – all Federalist – that produced “peace, order, and happiness.”¹⁴⁶ They also promulgated the benevolence of the government established by “their” sapient and prudent ancestors and furthermore that they were the descendants of such government entrusted to maintain the prosperity that Connecticut enjoyed for two centuries under their forefathers’ methods of government and, of course, the blessing of God. In their opinion, republicans were simply “crazy reformers” out for themselves.¹⁴⁷

Federalists viewed the measures in the constitution concerning religion proposed by the Republicans – the absolution of all obligations to support religion provided by a written notice left with the society’s clerk – as measures to absolve people from “obligations to support the gospel;” a truly galling idea to them. They averred the “toleration” boasted of by the Republicans could be defined as “a toleration to be without religion.” It was a familiar attack on the supposed irreligion of republicans and their “open warfare” on religion – embodied in the constitutional article – which, to federalists, jeopardized the

¹⁴⁶ “New Haven, Sept. 15,” *Connecticut Journal*, September 15, 1818.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

foundation of morality, peace, and order and consequently the foundation of Connecticut's future prosperity.¹⁴⁸

Republicans likewise presented familiar refrains during the convention. In classic republican discourse they continued to claim "a more perfect system of religious intolerance and oppression was never imposed upon mankind." The establishment's laws still violated the rights of conscience and the Standing Order still reigned in tyranny.

During the convention the newspapers of Connecticut printed the proposed articles of the constitution and both parties were quick to print their respective opinions. In one article republicans retorted to a federalist objection to the provision on religion printed in the *Journal* by accusations of wanting the law to compel men "to support doctrines which they do not believe."¹⁴⁹

Federalists quickly counterbalanced republican fulminations. When the convention convened, copies of the constitution were distributed to the newspapers for public perusal. Eager to publicize their sentiments in hopes of dissuading voters from accepting the constitution federalists exclaimed that anyone "who cherishes good order and good morals, or reverences the religion of the Holy Scriptures" should give "his most determined negative" to the constitution.¹⁵⁰

A "Freeman" wrote to the *Journal* and gave his reasons why he could not give approval to the Constitution as proposed, which un-coincidentally represented the federalist

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.* See also "Times; Constitution; Religion," *Connecticut Mirror*, October 19, 1818.

¹⁴⁹ A Republican, "For the Register," *Columbian Register*, September 26, 1818.

¹⁵⁰ Aristides, "Communication. 5th of Oct. in Farmington," *Columbian Register*, October 17, 1818. Also published in the *American Mercury* on October 20, 1818. The delegates designated the first Monday in October to be the date for the citizens' ratification vote.

position. His response illustrates plainly the importance of religion and the particular system defended by federalists so adamantly for nearly two years. In the article, the “freeman” listed seven separate grievances against the constitution as proposed. Two of those grievances, however, dealt directly with religion while the others dealt with separate issues i.e. universal suffrage, gubernatorial power, the bare-majority vote for ratification, et al. The first listed disagreement pertaining to religion the author asserted that literature, morals and religion were not to be promoted by law. To our advocate of establishment and indeed, all federalists, Legislation that ceased “to promote the improvement, the prosperity, or the happiness of the people,” would “check the enterprise and dampen the energies of the people.” Secondly, it appeared to the “freeman” that the constitution “designed to *unchristian* a large portion of the community.”¹⁵¹ He feared young men, if called to publicly declare their religion as the constitution stated rather than assuming religion with the option to certificate would abjure his duty thus would belong to no Christian denomination and “have no religion.” As the author noted, “why is the young man called upon to take an oath in a court of justice, when the law has no knowledge, and no right to presume that he believes in the existence of God, or an overruling providence, or a future state.” The effects of religion, to all true federalists, reached onto the very scales of justice.¹⁵²

Federalists realized time was fleeting as the vote for ratification drew closer and only a bare-majority was needed to pass. Thus, they made the most of both time and per-

¹⁵¹ A Freeman, “Messrs. Printers,” *Connecticut Courant*, September 22, 1818.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*

suasion by publishing and republishing their positions as often as possible. One week after the Journal published the “freeman’s” article, the Journal published another diatribe against the constitution, printed next to a re-print of the freeman’s article. As had been done in the previous article, the article printed on the 29th of September discussed various features of the proposed constitution, but focused on religion. The editor, however, simply referred to the article on religion as “pernicious” and printed two letters, one of which was the reprint by the “freeman” and the other by an Episcopalian (at least in name). Notably, the only article in the constitution addressed by the author was the article concerning religion. On that subject, the Episcopalian affirmed the traditional federalist stance concerning religion and its effects on society, that religion “undoubtedly” caused the “sobriety of manners, obedience to the laws, and an upright moral deportment” to blossom, which had distinguished the state “in the eyes of the world.” Religion, as noted by the Episcopalian, echoing the previous harangues of federalists, promoted public happiness better than anything and those that sought religious toleration really only sought “a toleration for infidels and blasphemers.”¹⁵³

As evinced by the article from the Episcopalian, federalists feared that if men did not class themselves with a religious society, all religious societies and churches would be destroyed, not just the Congregational, thus ending public happiness and prosperity. Without compulsion, they feared young men would leave their societies and potentially remain unassociated to any Christian denomination.¹⁵⁴ Those “who prefer their gold to

¹⁵³ An Episcopalian, “New-Haven, Sept. 29. The Election,” *Connecticut Journal*, September 29, 1818.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.* See also “Universal Suffrage,” *Connecticut Journal*, September 29, 1818.

their God” would cease giving to their church and religious societies, others would follow their example, and the church would be left without sufficient support and society would suffer the detrimental consequences. In the words of one federalist newspaper article, the article on religion would injure Episcopalians and Congregationalists, “retard the growth of the Baptists and Methodists, and be serviceable to none but *Nothingarians*.”¹⁵⁵

In the eyes of federalists “the depravity of mankind and the designs of ambition” pushed the article “to absolve men from all civil obligation to support the gospel.”¹⁵⁶ They assumed that “every man” believed their duty to be, in the language of the new constitution, “to worship the supreme Being, the great Creator and preserver of the universe.” Consequently every man should be able to associate himself with some denomination or form of worship agreeable to their conscience. Hence the freedom of conscience proclaimed by republicans to be the impetus behind the constitutional article did not signify freedom of conscience to our federalist and Episcopalian author, “but freedom to trample it in the earth and escape from the most sacred obligation to both God and man.”¹⁵⁷

Federalists did not let the publicized Baptist resolutions go without a rejoinder. Federalists expressed confusion with Baptist desires and contemporary laws. They believed – and should have been apparent to everyone – that the law enacted in May of 1817 granted the “full and complete enjoyment of religious liberty” as demanded by the Baptists. In fact, federalists loudly promulgated the fact that everyone enjoyed the rights

¹⁵⁵ “Universal Suffrage,” *Connecticut Journal*, September 29, 1818.

¹⁵⁶ An Episcopalian, “New-Haven, Sept. 29. The Election,” *Connecticut Journal*, September 29, 1818.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.* See also “Universal Suffrage,” *Connecticut Journal*, September 29, 1818.

of privileges of the dictates of their conscience; the law no longer required anyone “to aid in the support of public worship, contrary to the principles and practice of those with whom he may choose to associate.”¹⁵⁸ Furthermore, and in classic federalist form, they posited the benefits of such a system; that people from every society could choose their own teachers who “knows their wants circumstances and character” and would reside with them in order “to administer comfort, consolation, and advice...at all times and all occasions”; that they could choose the location of their house of worship; and that all of that would “produce good order, regularity and stability in society.” The system in place proved itself beneficent to Connecticut in the eyes of federalists, thus, the battle between the two camps became more than simply opposing ideological and theological stances concerning civic and ecclesiastical partnership, but rather that one system had proven itself in Connecticut – beneficent in the eyes of federalists, contemptible to republicans.

Because Connecticut had no officially written constitution, the delegates at the constitutional convention dealt with the gamut of political and legislative rights and regulations. With only a vaguely written charter introduced a century and a half earlier as their constitutional foundation, the delegates had to establish everything from scratch. Although they were able to draw upon the Federal Constitution and their fellow states’ constitutions as resources, every right of citizen, every facet of government, and the remaining political minutia needed to be dealt with, which under the circumstances of Connecticut politics, proved problematic. When all was said and done, the delegates at the convention debated and established a preamble, a Bill of Rights comprised of twenty-

¹⁵⁸ Sydney, “From the Courant,” *Connecticut Journal*, October 20, 1818.

three sections, and a complete Constitution with eleven amendments. The Bill of Rights dealt with religion in two of its sections – third and fourth – and the Constitution in one, the seventh article. While not the only issue of import, it is fair to say religion garnered the most meaningful dialogue, in quantity and quality, not to mention acrimony.

It did not take long for delegates to carry on the religious battle in convention as they came out firing on the first day of meaningful debate. Governor and presiding president of the convention Oliver Wolcott Jr. made opening remarks at the convention that alluded to the ongoing battle and even portended the eventual constitutional provisions concerning religion. “As to religion” Wolcott stated, “there should be nothing gross in principle inserted in the Constitution: there should nothing be inserted, which was calculated to create feuds.”¹⁵⁹ Wolcott apparently understood the tenuous ground on which the delegates tread and appeared keenly aware of the tumult created by religion. His carefully chosen words illustrated not only an awareness of the contentiousness of the issue, but the delicacy with which the Constitution needed to be approached. If not handled delicately, the outcome of the convention could have endangered the political “revolution” accomplished by Republicans and, as previously noted by a Republican sympathizer, the cause of religious liberty might have been lost forever.¹⁶⁰

The first discussion of the subject of religion at the convention brought forth familiar arguments and rancor. The third section of the Bill of Rights concerning religious toleration went virtually undisputed, and after a few concurring remarks by Federalist

¹⁵⁹ *Courier*, September 9, 1818. The first day of meaningful debate in the convention started on September 1, 1818.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

John Treadwell the delegates unanimously approved the section. The proposed fourth section, however, which stated “No preference shall be given by law, to any religious sect of mode of worship,” started the debate with excited passions. John Treadwell led the charge for federalists with an objection to the phraseology of the section. Treadwell *et al* rejected the use of the term ‘religious’ and demanded the term ‘Christian’ be inserted in its place.¹⁶¹ The arguments that ensued from that federalist proposition echo, in sentiment, style and zeal, the public battle that had been brewing since the election of 1816 and before. Both sides spoke their peace with passion and prejudice in the hopes that their espoused religion would reign victorious.¹⁶²

Federalists made it clear in the debates that Christianity should be favored over the “heathen” Gods. Treadwell remarked that Jesus Christ was not be put “on a par with false Gods” and therefore requested the word religious be exchanged for Christian.¹⁶³ While he acknowledged equal privileges for all religions, the section, as proposed, concerned Treadwell. He feared it could be construed to mean complete religious equality among all religions; he accepted equality of privileges, but vehemently objected to ranking Christianity the same as other religions.¹⁶⁴

Republicans countered with a reiteration of their spiritually *laissez faire* attitude. Andrew Wolcott averred religion “was not an affair of the state.” Even alteration of phraseology of the laws, noted Wolcott, signified an inherent power of the state over reli-

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.* There was actually a motion to erase the entire section and replace it.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

gion for which the Republicans would not stand. After some remarks from a couple of delegates, the delegates amended the section as proposed by Treadwell and carried it.¹⁶⁵

With its new phraseology and consequently altered meaning, the delegates debated the fourth section *de novo*. In the excitement over the change – which signified to republicans an assumed Christian superiority in law – republican passion for divesting religion from the state sidetracked their discussion. Alexander Wolcott averred that it was proper to say other religions were not equal to Christianity but paradoxically that it was improper to say that they weren't, finally concluding that nothing should be done on the subject and no man should be compelled to support "any religious sect." In his mildly irrelevant diatribe, Wolcott attacked traditional federalist argument, positing that Christianity was not responsible for morality but rather that pagans inculcated the virtues of society. He continued to assert traditional republican argument by noting the problematic nature of truth. He remarked that each sect maintained the truth of their religion, thus all laws compelling men to support whichever denomination actually compelled men to support truth in the eyes of one denomination, but falsehood in the eyes of all others. Essentially, Wolcott argued due to the subjectivity of truth, the laws inherently supported truth and falsehood thus invalidating all laws on the subject.¹⁶⁶

Due to the new phraseology the discussion turned to the question of equality among Christian sects; at this point delegates operated under an assumption of the overall superiority of Christianity regardless of sect or denomination. Because of the new mean-

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

ing federalists found themselves defending the equality amongst the different Christian denominations, a position historically defended by republicans, undoubtedly to protect the superiority of Christianity over other religions; federalists saw the writing on the wall for their system of religion considering the political success of the Republicans and made every attempt to retain any remnant of their soon to be superseded system. Nathan Smith remarked that the article “was consistent with the principles of Justice” as was the third article. He noted that every Christian mode of worship would be protected under the terms of the section thereby obviating any jealousies amongst denominations or sects.¹⁶⁷ Most importantly, Smith showed the shrewd and compromising nature of the federalists in his rejection of the idea that one denomination should be supported by the others and declaration that the legislature should retain the power of regulating the taxes issued by ecclesiastical societies. Establishment was pre-eminent to Smith and federalists, even if it was an establishment of all Christian denominations.

The long-standing republican objection to legislative interference quickly became the *leitmotif* of republican protest in the convention. Daniel Burrows opposed Smith’s comments regarding the rights of the legislature, “if they had power to legislate on the subject, they had power to legislate on matters of *conscience*,” a principle which he and his fellow Republicans ardently opposed.¹⁶⁸

The arguments propounded by republicans throughout the religious war frequently exuded a spiritual tone, most likely to quell rumors of impiety and irreligion. In the

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid* Although Burrows clearly articulated his opposition to any legislative right concerning religion, he noted his opposed to the section as amended if it indicated a religious test by which no man would hold office if he did not “embrace the *Christian* religion.”

concluding remarks of the debate, echoing traditional republican religious ideology, Joshua Stow denied the idea that the legislature had the right to interfere in religion and remarked that “Christ’s kingdom was not of this world, and all had a right to worship in their own way.” He compared Connecticut to other states and noted “look at our neighboring states, New York, New Jersey and others – their government is founded on religion as well as ours – there the Legislature did not interfere in religious concerns.” Noting the inevitable challenges ensuing from an establishment, Stow averred that the places that had established religion or the legislature actively interfered dealt with “constant petitioning.”¹⁶⁹

The debate concluded with a failed motion by Republicans to amend the fourth section and was subsequently approved and passed as originally amended with the term ‘Christian’ inserted in place of ‘religious,’ just as Federalists requested.¹⁷⁰ Both sides put forth their trademark arguments and set the tone for the debate on the seventh article of the constitution; Federalists clamored for lawful recognition of Christian superiority and legislative rights in ecclesiastical matters while Republicans decried legislative interference in Christ’s kingdom and desired equality for all religions with preference for none. The initial debates on religion in the Bill of Rights illustrate not just the continuation of the public religious war into legislation, but also a compromising party spirit as both sides knew an overly intractable position might doom their particular religion.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.* The failed amendment read “Nor shall any person be compelled to attend any place of public worship, or maintain any minister, without his consent and approbation.”

No doubt aware of the public's interest, newspapers printed all of the proceedings of the convention including the many proposed amendments or sections. Communication to the public lacked the instantaneousness of the twentieth century as editors produced only weekly publications at this time, hence there was an obvious delay in information from the convention. The information printed by the newspapers was at least a week behind the convention's schedule, sometimes more, sometimes less, but was nonetheless still new to the public.

Editors sometimes added personal comments to the published proceedings. The editor from the *Columbian Register* preferred to summarize the discussions of the delegates, but offered his thoughts – and consequently political and religious leanings – on the discourse as well. He noted that in the debate over substituting 'Christian' for 'religious' in the fourth section, "gentlemen [republicans] properly questioned the right of earthly powers to make laws in regard to religion, or to make discriminations between Jews and Gentiles, &c," opining that Joshua Stow's "observations" on the subject "appear to be agreeable to scripture and reason."¹⁷¹

The debate on the article in the Constitution dealing with religion proposed for the actual constitution created one of the most complete discussions during the entire convention. Despite the decorous language, the debate engendered the most vehement discussions. And, unlike the dialectic of the other articles, delegates heartily opposed each other. Mirroring the debates in the newspapers that led up to the convention, delegates ex-

¹⁷¹ *Columbian Register*, September 26, 1818.

aggerated and manipulated opposing arguments in an effort to undermine and vilify the message of the opposition.

The article dealing with religion was the last substantive discussion in the convention, and illustrated the complexion of the religious discourse among the delegates. Mirroring the newspaper debates pre-convention, the delegates defended their cause while their parties launched propaganda against their religious nemeses. Eager to justify their particular brand of religion, delegates' speeches painted a threatening mosaic of the deleterious potential their opponent's religion.

Federalists often played on the religious sentiments of the public by juxtaposing foreign religions and their Christianity. They warned that a weakening of church and state relations would erode the prosperity borne out of Christianity. John Treadwell echoed these sentiments in the commencing speech on the seventh article, objecting to the word 'duty' in the first section of the article remarking that "conscience may be perverted, and man may think it his duty to worship his Creator by images, or as the Romans and Grecians did." Treadwell made it clear all modes would be tolerated but balked at the Constitution's recognition of "the duty of a person to worship as the heathen do." His harangue, however, availed him nothing as 'Duty' was not erased.¹⁷²

Treadwell switched the discussion over to a federalist favorite – state supported church. He declared the section stating "No person shall be compelled to join or support, or by law be classed with, or associated to any congregation, church or religious association" would only serve to dissolve ecclesiastical societies thereby depriving them of

¹⁷² "Hartford Convention, No. 2.," *Connecticut Mirror*, September 21, 1818.

rights and privileges and leave them “in a state of nature.”¹⁷³ In an effort to pacify those opposed to the Congregationalist Standing Order, Treadwell remarked that all denominations “should be placed on an equal footing” but “when a particular denomination prevails, I would make it the standing denomination of the place, and others should enjoy the privilege of separating from it.” Typical federalist argument on the issue demanded that all denominations outside of the denomination that prevailed at the state level, not in each individual society, should certificate. Treadwell’s deviation was no doubt a conciliatory measure required by the exigencies of the situation. But it also seems to be a veiled attempt to galvanize all denominations of Christians, for all to see the war as one not amongst Christian denominations, but between Christians and heathens; between Christian society and non-Christian society. Moreover, Treadwell shrewdly leveled all denominations, arguing that no distinction would be made for any denomination other than those that prevailed in a particular society; acknowledging the predominance of Congregationalists Treadwell reiterated that “the principle associates no particular denomination by law...if the ypocritesna or ypocrit prevail, the other denominations should certificate... But the article dissolves all associations...this is to dissolve the whole union.” Treadwell concluded with a forthright opposition to the article but preceded it with another attempt to convince the delegates of the adverse effect of such an article. He feared associations of all Christian denominations, not just the Standing Order, would be dissolved. “I am unwilling that these associations should be thus dissolved; they have certain rights and privileges, as corporate bodies, and unless they have forfeited those rights, they cannot be

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*

justly taken from them.”¹⁷⁴ Yet another indication of federalist ties to their religious philosophy and not just their own political power and standing of their church.

As was the case in the debate on the sections dealing with religion in the Bill of Rights, Stow and Treadwell appeared to be the representatives of their parties as they bore most of the burden of debate. In fact, Treadwell and Stow seemed to have their own dialogue throughout the convention. Responding to Treadwell, Stow propounded the traditional republican argument that a legal establishment of the congregational church existed and that the article proposed would unshackle those “imprisoned unlawfully” by forced incorporation, adding that Treadwell “would make the ypocritesnalists the predominant order.”¹⁷⁵

Portraits of the establishment greatly differed between delegates, just as they had in the newspapers. Stow contended that the proposed law acted like a pardon to those incarcerated by the legal establishment and would “secure the rights of those who are incorporated and those who are not.”¹⁷⁶ Treadwell though, saw the proposed law as a means of dissolving ecclesiastical societies altogether, signifying not just the loss of rights and privileges for the array of denominations, but the disunion of the Christian religion. Connecticut’s contemporary laws, as seen by all federalists, served principally to support all denominations for the betterment of society. But the contradictory assertions of Stow and Treadwell simply illustrate the oppositional nature of the two religious

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.* Treadwell retorted, seemingly angrily, that Stow did not understand him for he “*expressly* declared, that all denominations should be placed on an equal footing.”

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

ethoses', which in turn reveals the reason for a constitutional convention. It was the denouement to an internecine struggle that had finally reached a boiling point.¹⁷⁷

Delegates from both camps stood before the committee to offer their opinions on the article, some offering more than others. Alexander Wolcott tersely stated he "would not have a man compelled to join, or pay, to any political society." Echoing Treadwell's harangue, Nathaniel Terry averred "the Article goes to withdraw all support from present corporations...to dissolve all obligation." Obligated to the exigencies of the situation, Terry let his fellow delegates know he was "not opposed to the free enjoyment of the rights of conscience," something federalists had not previously avowed, but quickly reverted to the old federalist aphorism that religion benefited society. In one of the most cogent arguments offered by federalists, Terry noted that the nature of taxes were not amenable to everyone, but necessary for the benefit of society. The federalist idea was simple. Anything beneficial to society, whether it be schools or society, was for "the public good" thus subject to taxation.¹⁷⁸

Terry faithfully adhered to traditional federalist argument. He denied the existence of an establishment as avowed by Stow, and noted the simplicity of the certificate law, which, to federalists, only required a man to declare his desire in writing to the town clerk. Defending the righteousness of his system he added that "it is impossible that a law should be more equitable, or more just." In an unprecedented act in the convention, Terry displayed the animus intrinsic to this religious battle, borne only from deeply root-

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

ed beliefs, by promulgating that he could not vote for the Constitution simply because of the article on religion, which struck “at the root of good order in society.”

Stow, again, spoke for republicans using traditional republican argument. He remarked that the ability to compel a man to support public worship indicated the ability not only to define public worship, but where and in what manner it should be supported, which seemed to Stow “impolitic” and “the cause of all martyrdoms.” No doubt aware of federalist accusations of irreligion and apostasy, Stow noted the Christian impetus of republican argument remarking that it be “the duty of all to worship in sincerity and truth... if my neighbor don’t think as I do, he is accountable to God for it.” He concluded his speech by attempting to illustrate the malignant and anti-Christian potential of the federalist system, noting that by their law if man “think it his duty to worship the devil” the federalist law “would compel him to worship the devil.”¹⁷⁹

The third section of the article garnered more attention from other delegates, all of whom defended the conventional arguments of their camps. Treadwell continued to press for all men to be compelled to a society of a Christian denomination because “the support of Public worship, is necessary to the good of the State.”¹⁸⁰ Zacheus Waldo cast a biblical light on the situation comparing Connecticut’s laws to Pharaoh’s refusal to “let the people go,” and how no force was used when “the disciples deserted our Saviour.”¹⁸¹ In the course of the debate Republicans did not hesitate to define themselves as the uphold-

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.* The delegates amended the first section as requested by Tomlinson, which read “It being duty of all men to worship the Supreme Being, the Great Creator and Preserver of the Universe, and their right to render that worship, in the mode, &c.” The first section was approved as amended with 103 yeas to 86 nays.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*

ers of true Christianity as federalists so frequently did. Waldo remarked to the convention simply that those who do not “Love the Lord thy God, &c...must take the consequences” from their god. Samuel Hart attacked the argument of Treadwell and Terry, “there is but one true religion...I have no idea of supporting error” and noted that “according to the reasoning of the gentleman [Terry] the more money you spend, the more religion you have...let us refute each others errors, and support truth.”¹⁸²

When the debate concluded the delegates amended slightly the article on religion at the request of Terry and subsequently approved it. Doubtlessly angered over what was wrought, Timothy Pitkin actually moved to erase the entire article, which was not done. After much ado about the proportion of voters for ratification of the constitution, the delegates decided on a bare majority.¹⁸³

A curious – and pertinent – situation occurred in the convention reported by the *Connecticut Courant*. During the last debate over the article dealing with religion, the day in which the vote was to be taken, Treadwell stood to discuss the subject and upon beginning to address the delegates an interruption of “coughing, hawking and shuffling” occurred to the point where he desisted and sat down. Most curiously, the exact same situation occurred the following day. The minutes of the convention make no such mention of the situation, and while the issue may well have been exaggerated and the distur-

¹⁸² *Ibid.*

¹⁸³ *Ibid.* Two amendments to the first section of the article on Religion proposed by Nathaniel Terry, which did not change the meaning of the section, were passed. Further demonstrating the nature of the debate over religion, Timothy Pitkin actually moved to erase the entire article on religion, which did not pass. The question of the whole constitution carried at the convention - 134 yeas to 61 nays. Interestingly, the question of proportion of voters to ratify the constitution was met with “considerable struggle.” A four-sevenths vote (approx. 57 percent) failed, as did five-ninths (approx 55 percent) which lost by only one vote – 86 to 87. Had either proposal passed, the constitution would not have been ratified by Connecticut’s citizens as only about 53 percent voted in its favor.

bances overstated and coincidental, the mere fact that Treadwell, perhaps the most intransigent Federalist, was about to discuss the most polarizing subject, begs a second thought. The Connecticut Journal called the “attack” on Treadwell an “outrage” that was “a bold attack upon liberty itself.”¹⁸⁴

Treadwell headlined republican newspapers during the convention as well, but as the personification of heretical federalists. Republicans charged Treadwell with leading a group of religious pretenders and himself a “religionist.”¹⁸⁵ Furthermore, republicans labeled him as a “political and militant leader” of conceited, self-righteous, and intolerant “Calvinists, Presbyterians, Enthusiasts, superstitious bigots and ypocrites.”¹⁸⁶

In the weeks between the end of the convention and the vote for ratification federalists tried to capitalize on the power of the press to publicly denounce the proposed constitution and sway the upcoming citizen’s vote. Once again, religion lay at the core. They labeled the article on religion “pernicious” and, specifically citing the provisions on religion, called the constitution “fundamentally wrong.”¹⁸⁷ One publication of the *Courant* enumerated the reasons for repudiation, two of which dealt with the article on religion. The first reason being that the legislature no longer promoted “the interests of literature, morals, or religion” and secondly because it was seen as a design “to unchrist-

¹⁸⁴ “For the Journal. On the Constitution – No. 3.,” *Connecticut Journal*, November 17, 1818. Only federalist newspapers reported the situation.

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*; “Communication. 5th of October. in Farmington.,” *Columbian Register*, October 17, 1818. Also printed in the *American Mercury* on October 20, 1818.

¹⁸⁷ “Governor Treadwell,” *Connecticut Journal*, September 22, 1818; “New-Haven, Sept.29. The Election.,” *Connecticut Journal*, September 29, 1818.

ian a large portion of the community.”¹⁸⁸ Echoing Treadwell and Terry’s sentiments from the convention, federalists tried to scare Connecticut’s citizens with talk of an abandonment of religion. Without legal motivation, they promulgated that young men would choose no religion.¹⁸⁹

The discussion of the constitution in the days and weeks before the ratification vote concentrated on the article of religion. In characteristic federalist argument, federalists avowed their religious societies to be the reason “that the citizens of this State have become distinguished.” They also declared government recognition of religion proved itself to be “the most successful means of promoting public happiness, and pointed its subjects on the road to heaven.” Federalists also customarily railed against republicans in typical fashion calling them “infidels and blasphemers.”¹⁹⁰

Spurred by the urgency of the situation, federalists threw every argument in their repertoire at the republicans to convince the public of the destructive potential of the constitution and the “pernicious” article on religion. They contended that “wealthy, influential and fashionable men would absolve themselves of all obligations to support the gospel and thus the gospel would “be given up as insupportable, for want of necessary means.” Federalist mentality carried a nexus between religion and societal prosperity, happiness, and decency; and the breaking of that bond seemed inconceivable. Hence, to federalists, the proposed article in the constitution was simply an “escape from the most

¹⁸⁸ “Messrs. Printers.,” *Connecticut Courant*, September 22, 1818.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁰ “New-Haven, Sept.29. The Election.,” *Connecticut Journal*, September 29, 1818.

sacred obligation to both God and man” and “freedom to trample it [freedom of conscience] in the earth.”¹⁹¹

Republicans did not let the calumnies proffered by the federalists go without response. In response to the denunciations of the constitution and its provisions for religion, republicans noted to the public that federalists wanted “men to be compelled by law to support doctrines which they do not believe.” In response to a particular federalist article written by a “republican,” a democrat, who styled himself ‘republican,’ – no doubt hinting at his true republicanism – sardonically commented that federalists objected because the Constitution allowed men to be “free agents,” allowing men “to act on the subject of religion according to the dictates of their consciences.”¹⁹² Indeed, federalist opposition to the “equal power, rights and privileges” granted to all Christians secured by the article on religion, and the consequent rejection of the entire constitution, perplexed them.

Federalists actively and almost physically tried to prevent the adoption of the constitution. The town of Farmington, one of the bulwarks of federalism, held a meeting prior to the fifth of October (the day of the ratification vote) to determine the town’s constitutional persuasion. But in an effort to dissuade any federalists who approved of the constitution and who might cast their vote in its favor, they decided not to cast the vote by ballot, which would have allowed any dissenters to vote secretly in favor of ratification, but rather by delineating the room into two sides; one side for those who voted in

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁹² “For the Register,” *Columbian Register*, September 26, 1818.

favor, and the other for those who objected; voters would then go stand on the appropriate side to cast their vote. John Treadwell and Timothy Pitkin, Farmington's two delegates at the constitutional convention, both of whom voted against the constitution, led the meeting. Both delegates spoke, railing against the Constitution, particularly against its dealing with religion, and attempted to convince the citizens of Farmington to vote it down. After some discussion, Treadwell then directed the voters to vote; those who approved of the constitution went to his left, those who disapproved on his right. Much like the stand-up law, known federalists, most likely lacking the proper personal fortitude, would have been loath to so publicly cast a vote in favor of ratification. Federalists knew, however, that only a bare majority decided the outcome and every vote counted; fear of public shame and political repercussions undoubtedly worked in the past and federalists capitalized on them once again. Every vote counted to the federalists and they took nothing for granted. But Pitkin and Treadwell's demonstrated aversion to the article relating to religion – Pitkin went so far as to say he would not vote for the whole constitution because of the article – and consequently to the constitution itself, reveals that, at least in part, their political maneuvering centered on religion. The voters of Farmington decidedly rejected the constitution; we will never know if some men who favored the constitution voted against it, but it is safe to assume that those who valued their public esteem in Farmington thought twice about their very public vote.¹⁹³

After ratification of the constitution, federalists and republicans continued to debate in the newspapers, offering familiar arguments. Federalists continued to extol the

¹⁹³ "Communication. 5th of Oct. in Farmington," *Columbian Register*, October 17, 1818. The final vote was 280 to 75.

virtues of the congregational church and clergy in rejoinder to the “unqualified abuse” heaped on by republican publications, but did not hesitate to cast a few of their own aspersions. Responding to republican ridicule in newspapers, federalists maintained their congregational clergy were never “more learned, pious, or useful... [and] had a more extensive and salutary influence upon the peace and happiness of society.” Federalists furthermore continued to accuse republicans of political religion; they thought the “vulgar abuse” propounded by republican press contradicted their avowed beliefs and wreaked “a political cause to be advanced at the expense of all moral good.”¹⁹⁴

Rejoicing in their recent victory, republican newspapers declared “the hierarchy is overthrown;” ratification of the constitution to republicans brought “deliverance from religious persecution.” In fact, most discussion of the constitution post-ratification, just as had been the case before and during the convention, boiled down to the article on religion. The ratification of the Constitution, caused by “a kind Providence” meant “deliverance from religious persecution” and denominational equality to republicans.¹⁹⁵ In response to the “death groans of Connecticut Federalism,” in which a federalist publication averred that “the fatal die is cast – The freedom of Connecticut...is prostrated in the dust,” Republicans responded almost exclusively with thoughts on religion. Victory in hand, republicans nonetheless denounced federalists with the same animus and argument as had been done in the spring election of 1816 with religion still the focus. The “just right, dearest privilege, and best interest” claimed lost by the federalists, to republicans,

¹⁹⁴ A Professor of Religion, “For the Journal. To Christians, and all Friends to the Christian Religion,” *Connecticut Journal*, December 22, 1818.

¹⁹⁵ The People, “For the Register. Persecution.,” *Columbian Register*, December 26, 1818.

was the right “to thrust your hand into the pocket of every person not under the shield of a legal protection, and without consent, to rob him of his money” and the privilege of “power to compel nonconformists to give it to you.”¹⁹⁶ Republicans still propounded allusions to the oppressive establishment even after the ratification of the constitution. They remarked that “religious tyranny is at an end,” that all were freed from the “galling yoke” of the federalist establishment.¹⁹⁷

In January, 1819, three months after ratification, republicans exalted the “work of reform.” In large part reform signified to republicans that “the rights of conscience are secured and established, the adulterous union of church and state dissolved, legal religion abolished, and the religion of the heart encouraged, a powerful motive to hypocrisy removed, grace left free to all, ‘without money and without price’ and the primitive rights of Christianity restored.”¹⁹⁸

Not to be outdone, federalists fulminated against republican religion well into the New Year as well. Still defending their system federalists avowed “that more liberty of conscience would not be enjoyed under any government, than has heretofore been enjoyed in Connecticut.” More, republicans were familiarly reviled as “demagogues” and “enemies of religion” that sought only popularity and “public distinction.”¹⁹⁹ Indeed, in the minds of federalists, “true religion” remained their bailiwick and the war carried on

¹⁹⁶ Freedom, “For the Times. Death-Groans of Connecticut Federalism.,” *Times*, November 10, 1818.

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁸ *Times*, January 5, 1819.

¹⁹⁹ “Connecticut Mirror. Hartford, February 8.,” *Connecticut Mirror*, February 8, 1819.

by republicans evinced a design “not simply for power and office, but...a war against Religion also.”²⁰⁰

²⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

Conclusion

To Lyman Beecher and many federalists the days and months following the ratification of the constitution “was a time of great depression and suffering.” The political revolution executed by Republicans, which had culminated in the ratification of Connecticut’s first state constitution, sundered irrevocably the long-standing establishment so dearly cherished, so vociferously fought for, and so ardently believed in by federalists. In response to the revolution Beecher exclaimed,

“It was as dark a day as ever I saw. The odium thrown upon the ministry was inconceivable. The injury done to the cause of Christ...was irreparable. For several days I suffered what no tongue can tell *for the best thing that ever happened to the State of Connecticut.*”²⁰¹

Beecher’s responses, the first noted by his daughter Catharine after the 1817 elections, illustrate the religious nature of Connecticut’s road to disestablishment. To Beecher, as to other federalists, the newly ratified constitution and its articles pertaining to religion were nothing less than attacks on Christianity itself. It was not simply political defeat. Indeed, the significance of religion is unmistakable and not to be overlooked. From political issue to political issue, the religious nature continued to present itself to a degree which deserves more historical attention.

The political slide of the Federalists and the “Standing Order” began in earnest with the Hartford Convention and the party’s perceived treachery towards the national government. But the inroads made by Republicans stemming from that political backlash

²⁰¹ Beecher, 252. Beecher’s passion for the political excitement in Connecticut was unmistakable. A staunch Federalist and defender of the Standing Order, Beecher wrote in his autobiography a dream he had which he called ‘The Toleration Dream.’ His dream and its introductory Toleration poem vividly illustrate the disdain for Toleration and its contemptible concomitants held by Beecher and many federalists.

were made continuously through religious sentiments. To be sure, other issues weighed on Connecticut's citizenry in the early Republic i.e. independent judiciary, taxes, voting rights, but the public discourse waged through the newspapers reveals, from issue to issue, election season to election season, that religion was at the forefront.

In the first major political issue following the Hartford Convention, we see the religious animosity that led to disestablishment. Episcopalian frustration with the Standing Order's handling of the Phoenix Bank Bonus and the Bishop's Fund and resultant political defection from Federalist ranks instigated Federalist criticism of the Republican party. Denounced as Jacobins and Pagans, Federalists attempted to keep Episcopal vote by reminding them the Bible was both Federalist and Episcopal foundation - a veiled denunciation of Republican "atheism." It was a 'good versus evil' interpretation that would last until the ratification of the Constitution.

Republican press retaliated in kind with every political opportunity, they too criticizing Federalists as corrupt and casting themselves as the defenders of true religion. In the 1816 elections, fresh off the Episcopalian frustration with the Bishop's Fund affair and with the Hartford Convention still lingering with voters, Republican salvos made clear to the public that Federalist establishment of religion was nothing less than "horrid persecution" and prejudice, and that the "Gospel denounces them." Federalists responded decrying Republican atheists, continuing to cast the war as one of patriots - those defending religion and God - and infidels - those who seek to destroy religion in Connecticut.

Following a political defeat in the Spring of 1816 with the election of a Republican Lieutenant Governor, the likes of which Federalists had not experienced in their political history in the Land of Steady Habits, Federalists countered with the Bill for the Promotion of Religion and Literature. Here, too, we see the nature of the issue. Federalists extolled religion and its power by attempting to prove to Connecticut's citizenry that the only way to acquire the virtue, character and intelligence is through religion and the support of it, something Federalists were the true defenders. Only atheists would argue against such support. Republican's printed anything and everything to prove to the voting public of Connecticut that establishment equaled corruption and any forced support of religion was not virtuous, but interference, and that the Gospel could not flourish with such conditions.

As the political revolution progressed with the election of the Toleration Party governor Oliver Wolcott in 1817, a political first in the state of Connecticut, republicans maintained their stance as the true defender of the Kingdom of God. Using revered political and religious figures as credibility, Republicans continued to assert in the press the protection of Christianity under their authority, that the "divinity of Christ" would not be corrupted by interference, that Federalist trespassing on God's domain was the true enemy to religion and the Gospel.

When after Republican successes in the Spring elections of 1818 allowed them to call for a Constitutional Convention, the public discussion continued in familiar refrain. From election season to the Constitutional convention in the Fall of 1818, Republicans and Federalists continued their religious battle. It would be Connecticut's first state con-

stitution in its history and the public political discussion centered on religion, on who would be the true defender of Christianity and its flourishing. Other major political issues were at stake, but the conversation's boiling point was religion.

This, too, was the case during the Constitutional Convention. The most intensity of debate was found over the sections concerning religion in the Bill of Rights and the Article dealing with religion in the Constitution itself. Federalists employed similar arguments to convince the delegates of the rightness of their cause and the danger of relenting to irreligion. Such was their determination that they argued for the equality of all Christian sects, so long as Christianity remained supported by the government. Republican's railing against the corruption of Christianity by Federalists and the "Standing Order" continued while maintaining their position as the rightful defender of "rights of conscience" and by that fact, the Gospel.

Even the constitution was seen through a religious prism. Both camps perceived the constitution mainly as a final battle over establishment and in the eyes of federalists and republicans, over what type of religion would prevail in Connecticut. The discussion over a constitution was really over establishment. The constitutional convention became the judge and jury for Connecticut's religion and in the eyes of many citizens, its society; to republicans it was a decision between religious liberty and religious oppression; to federalists, it came down to a decision between Christianity, morality and virtue and irreligion.

The history of Connecticut's political battle for religious liberty is at once well documented by a few key historians and mischaracterized, perhaps even misinterpreted,

by many others. And yet, even for those that have documented the political, social, even economic history of this fight, the nature of the battle lay untouched in historical scholarship. As the facts reveal, however, a deeper look into the discourse within and surrounding these truths reveals a religious nature of this political battle, one that transcended politics and one that I believe deserves a greater investigation to learn its true depth.

Was religion, or, a belief in the relationship between the state and the church that would most benefit Christianity, even the Gospel itself, the reason for the existence of this political battle in Connecticut? Were the religious divisions more important than the political ones? Or to put it more philosophically, were religious convictions a greater influence than political convictions? Challenging questions, to be sure, but continued investigation and research into this vital topic in American History will shed more light and hopefully, reveal more truth.

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