BAPTISTS AND BRITONS: PARTICULAR BAPTIST MINISTERS
IN ENGLAND AND BRITISH IDENTITY IN THE 1790S

John Robert Parnell, B.A., M.A.

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APPROVED:

Marilyn Morris, Major Professor
Laura I. Stern, Committee Member
Roy J. deCarvalho, Committee Member
Denis Paz, Committee Member
Randolph B. Campbell, Committee Member
Deborah Needleman Armintor, Committee Member
Harold Tanner, Chair of the Department of History
Sandra L. Terrell, Dean of the Robert B. Toulouse
School of Graduate Studies
This study examines the interaction between religious and national affiliations within a Dissenting denomination. Linda Colley and Jonathan Clark argue that religion provided the unifying foundation of national identity. Colley portrays a Protestant British identity defined in opposition to Catholic France. Clark favors an English identity, based upon an Anglican intellectual hegemony, against which only the heterodox could effectively offer criticism.

Studying the Baptists helps test those two approaches. Although Methodists and Baptists shared evangelical concerns, the Methodists remained within the Church of England. Though Baptists often held political views similar to the Unitarians, they retained their orthodoxy. Thus, the Baptists present an opportunity to explore the position of orthodox Dissenters within the nation.

The Baptists separated their religious and national identities. An individual could be both a Christian and a Briton, but one attachment did not imply the other. If the two conflicted, religion took precedent.

An examination of individual ministers, specifically William Winterbotham, Robert Hall, Mark Wilks, Joseph Kinghorn, and David Kinghorn, reveals a range of Baptist views from harsh criticism of to support for the government. It also shows Baptist disagreement on whether faith should encourage political involvement and on the value of the French Revolution. Baptists did not rely on religion as the source of their political opinions. They tended to embrace a concept of natural rights, and their national identity stemmed largely from the English constitutional heritage. Within that context, Baptists desired full citizenship in the nation. They called for the repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts and the reform of Parliament. Because of their criticism
of church and state, Baptists demonstrate the diversity within British Protestantism. For the most part, religion did not contribute to their national identity. In fact, it helped distinguish them from other Britons. Baptist evangelicalism reinforced that separate identity, as the nation did not outweigh spiritual concerns. The church and state establishment perceived the Baptists as a threat to social order, but Baptists advocated reform, not revolution. They remained both faithful Baptists and loyal Britons.
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The Calvinist Particular Baptist ministers in England from 1789 to 1799 maintained a distinct denominational identity that, at times, clashed with their identity as Britons. They were loyal to an ideal of the nation, but their denominational and evangelical concerns meant they could not fully embrace British identity. To Baptists, being a Christian was separate from being a Briton. An individual could be both, but one identity did not necessarily imply the other. Evidence from Baptists does suggest that there was a clear sense of the nation by the end of the eighteenth century. It is ambiguous whether that identity was genuinely British or just an enlarged English identity, but it was rooted in English experience and institutions. Baptists were patriotic, but they qualified their patriotism; they wanted a more moral, more Christian, more tolerant nation. Though, at times, they were portrayed as irresponsible, Baptists did not advocate the overthrow of the government; they simply desired reform. They were certainly loyal to the nation, at least to what they perceived as the nation’s potential. They valued their nation above all others; they simply did not see the nation as the highest authority. In fact, national identity does not appear to have been their strongest association, and their Baptist identity seems to have been more important than their British identity. Therefore, religion was crucial to the identity of Baptists, but instead of generating or reinforcing a national identity, religion contributed to their distinctiveness within the nation.

Baptists are worth studying because of their status as Dissenters, outside of the established Church of England. For any definition of a nation, it is necessary to acknowledge the

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1 Because of their smaller numbers and their drift towards Unitarianism, General Baptists are not covered here. For more information on the distinction between General and Particular Baptists, see Chapter IV.
importance “of those excluded from national mythologies.” An examination of Particular Baptists contributes to an understanding of the diversity of identities competing within or alongside a national identity. The Particular Baptists were orthodox Protestants who had largely embraced evangelicalism, much like the Methodists. Baptists differed from the Methodists, though, because Methodism developed within the established church and Methodists tended to support the existing political and social structure more than the Baptists did. Though Baptist political views were often similar to those of the Unitarians, the orthodox Christianity of the Baptists set them apart from Unitarian beliefs. Therefore, the Baptists represent an opportunity to study the place of an orthodox Dissenting group in the nation. Although historians have mentioned the Baptists in examining identity, or elaborated on Baptist theology and church growth in the late eighteenth century, there is no specialized study of Baptist ministers concerning their national identity and their position in the structure of church and state.

The years from 1789 to 1799, the decade of the French Revolution, are crucial as a period that highlighted competing political and religious identities within Britain. On the one hand, some celebrated the French Revolution as an example of liberty, natural rights, and republicanism in action. Supporters advocated limits on the king’s authority in Britain along with greater representation in Parliament. On the other hand, the establishment, consisting of the government and the Church of England, perceived the French Revolution as a threat to stability, social order, and the constitution. Those who held that view wanted to protect Britain against the overthrow of the monarchy, the aristocracy, and the established church. Because of the support in Britain for the French Revolution, there was a growing fear of a similar revolution in Britain. Britain’s wars with revolutionary France, which began when France declared war on 1 February

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1793, exacerbated that fear. The war put pressure on the nation to respond, not only with mobilization to the threat of invasion, but also to the question of reform. While Britain fought as part of a coalition to counteract French power and expansion, the British government fought against the ideas of the French Revolution as well. The establishment feared for the survival of monarchies and of Christianity. Because of their growth in membership, their use of itinerant preaching, and their position outside the Church, evangelical Dissenters were susceptible to accusations of disloyalty and disorderliness. The fear of upheaval led the government to restrict certain civil rights in the 1790s. For example, the government suspended habeas corpus beginning in 1794. Passed in 1795 the Treasonable Practices Act outlawed any writing or speech that incited contempt of the sovereign, government, or constitution. The same year saw the passage of the Seditious Meetings Act, which required a license from a magistrate for any meetings of fifty or more people. In large part, those measures effectively silenced groups such as the Baptists, but did not alter Baptist views of the nation. In fact, they served to reinforce Baptist arguments that reform was necessary.

Despite their disagreements with the established church and the national government, Baptists were not isolated from a British identity. In many ways, English Particular Baptist ministers in the 1790s fit into the notion of a developing British identity. They were Protestant and anti-Catholic. They were interested in trade and British prosperity. Baptists believed in the efficacy of the nation’s institutions of government. They were grateful for the political and social stability of Britain. They were glad to be British and extolled the virtues of the constitution and the liberty it protected. Baptists interpreted Britain as God’s chosen land.

Despite those factors, the position of Baptists as Dissenters led them to criticize their nation. They loved their nation, but argued that it could and should be better. Britain was not
living up to its status as a chosen nation. Baptists saw Britain as a nation of sinners. They questioned the motives of the aggressive accumulation of national power as evidenced by the growth of the British empire. Baptist ministers doubted the godliness and wisdom of their government. They were skeptical of the faith of government officials who called for fast days to build and sustain support for the war with France. Baptists did not appreciate the government’s use of religion as a tool for national unity. They believed such efforts to be hypocritical, as religion should not be part of government institutions. Baptists not only opposed the established Church; they also expressed disdain for any established church. They resented the legal discrimination against Dissenters that accompanied an established church. The Corporation Act of 1661 required all those seeking municipal office to qualify for that office by taking communion in the Church of England. The Test Act of 1673 required all those holding public office under the crown, including Members of Parliament, to receive Anglican communion at least once a year, and to take an oath of allegiance to the crown. Baptists and others did get some relief from nearly annual indemnities that modified the Test and Corporation Acts. An officeholder could no longer be punished for illegally entering office, that is, without taking Anglican communion. Yet if a candidate was clearly not conforming to the established church, then that individual could no longer run for office. Baptists hoped for the removal of those religious restrictions and the end of Anglican ecclesiastical authority. Despite their criticisms, Baptists did not advocate revolution. They argued that the government had corrupted both the nation’s constitution and the ideals liberty stemming from 1688. They wanted to return to those principles, or at least their perceptions of those principles. The Baptists were patriotic Britons, but at the same time, they criticized what they saw as defects in their society.

Their critical view of the nation extended to the war with France. Many Baptists supported the French Revolution at first, and even after the war started, Baptists questioned the Christian’s role in war. They realized the importance of the war with France, and they wanted their nation to win the war, as long as the British effort was defensive. Most Baptist ministers tried to avoid politics and direct involvement in the war effort; they saw such activity as a distraction from their spiritual calling. They could conceive of the war, however, as an opportunity for the nation to return to God and godliness. Even so, Baptist ministers preferred peace and often considered the war with France as an outgrowth of British imperial aspirations. In addition, if the establishment in Britain were victorious in the war with France, then there would seemingly be no freedom for Dissenters. Therefore, Baptists, could not completely support the war, and thus introduced a further element of doubt concerning their loyalty. The establishment saw them as a potential threat.

Tony Claydon and Ian McBride offer an interpretive approach that accounts for Baptist distinctiveness and opposition to the establishment. They suggest focusing on statements of religious unity as aspirations, not as fact: “One might uphold the idea that the elect, godly nation was central to eighteenth-century thought, but one could suggest that this ideal was an objective for the community, rather than any agreed depiction of it.” There was a genuine desire for Britain to become the ideal Protestant nation. Claydon and McBride interpret that desire as the motivating force of the eighteenth century: “the dynamism of the era was often the product of the drive to create a truly protestant nation; and the divisions of the time were often rooted in disagreements about the correct strategy to reach this goal.”

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Baptist goals for their nation and for Christianity differed from the established church, and even though Baptists were a small minority in the nation, they offered a genuine alternative in competition with the Church of England. Baptists sought the transformation of society, largely through evangelicalism. Yet they also desired the expansion of liberty, which they envisioned first as greater religious toleration, the removal of religious restrictions, and the absence of an established church. In addition, they advocated greater representation in Parliament, the possibility of holding government office without penalty, and the right to speak on political issues without fear of prosecution. To Baptists, Britain had an evangelical mission; the nation should be a force for good in spreading Christianity. Therefore, the Baptists led international missions activity. In their view, freedom and evangelism went together. The basis of their aspirations was the idea that God was more important than Britain. Therefore, the goals of evangelicalism and religious liberty superseded the existing structure of society.

Baptist aspirations for the nation in the 1790s can be examined through an assessment of individual Particular Baptist ministers in England. This is not a study of local Baptist congregations, but an examination of what ministers said, through sermons, pamphlets, and letters, about their nation, their place in it, and how their religion affected that view. The ministers included here have been selected because they exemplify the variety of Baptist opinion. Some heavily criticized the government, while others avoided any public political statements. William Winterbotham served a prison sentence for having shared his critical views. Robert Hall was also a critic, but he moderated his views somewhat because of the war with France. Mark Wilks, though a sharp critic, never faced prosecution, and there is no evidence that he changed his political opinions. For those three faith contributed to notions of liberty, or at least faith did not conflict with their pursuit of greater civil rights. Joseph and David Kinghorn,
though, provide a contrast. For them, faith meant limited political involvement. While they rejected expressions of political views outside of private correspondence, they still criticized their government. Winterbotham and Wilks did not feature prominently overall in Baptist circles, beyond their criticisms of the establishment. Hall and Joseph Kinghorn, though, remained prominent in British Baptist life for the next few decades. Though Andrew Fuller contributed significantly to Baptist theology, he produced his only major political publication in the nineteenth century. William Carey, though influential in Baptist life in the 1790s, is not included in this study, as he spent most of the decade as a missionary in India. Other Baptists either wrote little to nothing on political issues, and the five ministers in this study represent the range of views among those who did openly express political opinions.

William Winterbotham is a striking example of a distinct Baptist identity. He was the only minister tried and convicted in the 1790s for malicious intent to disturb the peace and for stirring people to sedition. He preached the offending sermons in late 1792, so Winterbotham was prosecuted as a lesson to Dissenters just before Britain went to war with France, a time in which the British government feared rebellion. Winterbotham’s sermons, trial record, and commentary serve as a case study to examine the hierarchy’s fear as well as Baptist aspirations. Winterbotham argued in favor of reforming Parliament and ending legal religious discrimination. He questioned the war with France, and he complained about the debt and taxes to pay for it. He defended his right to speak on government from the pulpit, and accused the government of corrupting both the constitution and the ideals of 1688.

In his publications, Robert Hall, Jr., also expressed Baptist aspirations in opposition to the establishment. He argued that Christianity and a desire for liberty, far from contradicting each other, go together. Hall was adamant in the defense of rights, including the freedom of
Britons to speak, to publish, and to form associations. He desired the repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts and the reform of Parliament. After a decade of war with France, though, Hall modified his views. He began to express a preference for peace and social order rather than immediate political reform.

In Norwich Mark Wilks was an outspoken critic of government in some of his sermons. Wilks consistently supported the French Revolution and its ideals. He criticized his own country for alarmism and complained that the establishment labeled its critics as revolutionaries, as destroyers of society, when Wilks saw them merely as defenders of liberty. Wilks even used his idea of liberty to connect Jesus to the idea of revolution in general.

Norwich’s most prominent Baptist minister, Joseph Kinghorn, and his father, David Kinghorn, a Baptist minister in Bishop Burton, illustrate the reluctance of some Baptists to engage in political discussions. Their avoidance of political sermons contrasts them with Winterbotham, Hall, and Wilks. Even so, in their personal correspondence during the 1790s, they demonstrated a propensity to criticize their nation. David Kinghorn supported the government but still criticized it. Joseph Kinghorn was more of a critic, but only in private. Both Kinghorns doubted the sincerity of faith among government officials. They questioned the validity and goals of the war. They hoped that Britain would be great primarily as a Christian nation, not as a military or imperial force.

These Baptist ministers illustrate the distinct identity and aspirations of their denomination. They could advocate obedience to the government, while pointing out its defects. They expressed gratitude for the blessings of the nation, such as freedom and security, while condemning the nation’s immorality. They interpreted the war with France as God’s discipline for national crimes. In addition, their nation’s liberty was incomplete. Thus, Baptists advocated
the repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts. Winterbotham, Hall, Wilks, and the Kinghorns exemplify the diversity of identities within the Baptist denomination, while the Particular Baptists as whole point to the diversity of identities in Britain. The Baptists show that orthodox Dissenters consistently criticized their society and their government. In addition, they demonstrate that Britain did not have a unifying Protestantism.
NATIONAL IDENTITY AND RELIGION

The two dominant interpretations of British identity and religion in the eighteenth century have been those of Linda Colley and Jonathan Clark. Both authors agree that religion was fundamental to the expression of nationhood, but they disagree on the shape of that religion and its precise effects. Colley interprets British identity as fundamentally Protestant, and she argues that a struggle with an external enemy shaped that identity. Clark sees an English identity based on Anglican hegemony. Both see identity as largely inclusive, that there was a consensus, but they discount Dissenting, and specifically evangelical, identities. While both have sparked criticism, they serve well to understand the parameters of the historiography and to place this examination of Baptist ministers within that historiography.

Colley clearly positions the growth of British identity in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, largely because of the British defining themselves against a group or an ideology that threatened their existence, way of life, and position in the world. Colley uses the notion of the Other to describe that threat and she portrays the Other as an external hostile power, in this case Catholic France.\(^1\) Colley contends that national allegiance and invented Britishness were possible because of Britain’s wars with France, which endangered British commercial and colonial power.\(^2\) Specifically, the British “came to define themselves as a single people not because of any political or cultural consensus at home, but rather in reaction to the Other beyond their shores.”\(^3\) Increasingly, the British defined the special nature of their country as Protestant, in conflict with Catholic France. Yet Britons also contrasted themselves with the conquered

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2 Colley, *Britons*, 1, 3-4.
people of empire. That allowed the British to view themselves as being special: “Possession of such a vast and obviously alien empire encouraged the British to see themselves as a distinct, special, and—often—superior people. They could contrast their law, their standard of living, their treatment of women, their political stability, and, above all, their collective power against societies that they only imperfectly understood but usually perceived as far less developed.”

Although British unity grew in the context of the conflict with France, Colley argues that religion was the way to achieve national identity: “It was their common investment in Protestantism that first allowed the English, the Welsh and the Scots to become fused together, and to remain so, despite their many cultural divergences.” Britain’s position in the world rose because of its Protestant identity, and the British saw themselves as a chosen nation, possessing freedom, true religion, and God’s watch care. That belief extended to Britain’s role in the world: “God had entrusted Britons with empire, they believed, so as to further the worldwide spread of the Gospel and as a testimony to their status as the Protestant Israel.” The British even believed they were more prosperous because they were Protestant. Commercial success added to national pride, but there was a perceived connection between economic prosperity and Protestant patriotism.

Protestantism, when combined with conflict with France, successfully generated a British identity, and Colley argues that the effective mobilization of the population, primarily to resist the French threat, reflected a sense of Britishness. She contends that “the British government had been compelled to call for the support of all Britons—not just Englishmen, or Anglicans, or

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4 Colley, Britons, 5.
6 Colley, Britons, 367-68.
7 Colley, Britons, 20, 29-30, 53-54, 368.
8 Colley, Britons, 368-69.
9 Colley, Britons, 33, 37, 43.
10 Colley, Britons, 4.
the propertied, or men of conservative views, but Britons in general. In terms of rallying nationwide support against an invasion from without, this call had proved unexpectedly successful."\(^{11}\) Therefore, the series of wars with Catholic France outweighed any other factor in national identity.\(^{12}\) She does qualify that by allowing that other loyalties persisted, especially to Scottish, Welsh, and English identities.\(^{13}\) Thus, the “sense of a common identity here did not come into being, then, because of an integration and homogenisation of disparate cultures. Instead, Britishness was superimposed over an array of internal differences in response to contact with the Other, and above all in response to conflict with the Other.”\(^{14}\) Colley implies that there was an overall sense of unity, that is, the majority supported and willingly participated in that identity. Though she acknowledges that some people rejected aspects of that identity, Colley argues that scholars should not let those who disagreed take historical precedence over those who supported it.\(^{15}\) Even divisions within Protestantism “should not obscure what remained the towering feature in the religious landscape, the gulf between Protestant and Catholic.” Furthermore, Colley stresses that “this mythic interpretation . . . was emphatically British, not just English in scope.\(^{16}\)

Where Colley argues for a newly constructed British identity from external pressure and a broad-based Protestantism, Clark stresses the continuity of English social and political order centered on Anglican hegemony. Protestantism itself was not enough of a foundation for identity; only the union of church and state allowed for the development of a national identity.\(^{17}\) Clark dismisses the importance of anti-Catholic sentiment: “Denominational conflict among

\(^{11}\) Colley, *Britons*, 317.
\(^{13}\) Colley, *Britons*, 372-73.
\(^{15}\) Colley, *Britons*, 4.
\(^{16}\) Colley, “Britishness and Otherness,” 317.
Protestants was often a more salient theme than Protestant unity against Roman Catholicism.” Furthermore, Clark maintains that in the eighteenth century “‘British’ meant ‘English’, and ‘Protestant’ meant ‘Anglican’. ” He thereby discounts the notion of a superimposed Britishness while he emphasizes Anglican intellectual domination.\textsuperscript{18} That intellectual system defined the interdependence of the monarchy, the social elite, and the Church, three things apparently threatened by the French Revolution.\textsuperscript{19} England was a confessional state not because of uniform religious beliefs, but because of “the dominance of certain ideas of what society’s problems were and how they should be addressed.”\textsuperscript{20} Because of that common ground, any sense of Englishness was not characterized by opposition, but by integration and social order: “England achieved a successful state form in the long eighteenth century not least because it combined monarchy and liberty, religion and science, trade and landed wealth with a minimum of friction, and did so in order to keep the lid on the primitive, atavistic and destructive forces of religious war and popular resistance.”\textsuperscript{21} Clark sees religious toleration in that England possessed “a hegemonic established church combined with freedom of worship for other denominations.”\textsuperscript{22} Despite the existence and growth of other denominations, Clark interprets the English as largely sharing a set of beliefs. The ruling order depended on broad support and agreement, which rested largely on religion.\textsuperscript{23} Clark sees no change by the end of the eighteenth century:

As in the early part of the century, so in the 1790s, the strongest element in the official rationale was not the constitutional one—the attempt to argue that the principles which justified 1688 would \textit{not} justify a future revolution—but the religious element, the assertion of the centrality of the Church, its validation of

\textsuperscript{18} J. C. D. Clark, \textit{English Society, 1688-1832: Religion, ideology and politics during the ancien regime}, 2\textsuperscript{nd} ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 40.
\textsuperscript{19} Clark, \textit{English Society}, 20.
\textsuperscript{20} Clark, \textit{English Society}, 34.
\textsuperscript{22} Clark, \textit{English Society}, 23.
\textsuperscript{23} Clark, \textit{English Society}, 17, 24.
the Hanoverian dynasty, and its political message of subordination, loyalty and obedience.\textsuperscript{24}

Those principles dominated to the extent that “the only possible effective criticism of this united front was from outside this Anglican, royalist and libertarian middle ground.”\textsuperscript{25} Clark rejects orthodox Dissenters as being capable of such criticism.\textsuperscript{26} Because of their inability to work collectively, their lack of effective leadership, and their Trinitarian views, evangelicals did not contribute to reformist doctrine.\textsuperscript{27} Though they criticized the religious and social establishments, they were not effective enough to bring about fundamental change.\textsuperscript{28} Clark describes a “heterodox Nonconformist intelligentsia” that did successfully generate a critique.\textsuperscript{29} It was the heterodox nonconformists who offered a vision of society outside the traditional English middle ground: “Doctrinally, the disaffected within a Christian-monarchical polity largely coincided with those who rejected its theological orthodoxy, the intellectual underpinning of Church, King and Parliament.”\textsuperscript{30} Therefore, the heterodox targeted Church doctrine for their criticism, rejecting Trinitarian Christianity and the establishment of any church. Clark recognizes that most Dissenters were Trinitarian, but he attributes the necessary intellectual framework for reforming English society to a minority heterodox elite.\textsuperscript{31} Even when orthodox Dissenters were active in reform efforts, “what mattered most in reforming campaigns was less the actions of Dissenting denominations as such than the leadership supplied by a (normally heterodox) Dissenting intelligentsia.”\textsuperscript{32}

\textsuperscript{24} Clark, \textit{English Society}, 308.
\textsuperscript{25} Clark, \textit{English Society}, 317.
\textsuperscript{26} Clark, \textit{English Society}, 36-37.
\textsuperscript{27} Clark, \textit{English Society}, 322-23.
\textsuperscript{28} Clark, \textit{English Society}, 486.
\textsuperscript{29} Clark, \textit{English Society}, 32-33.
\textsuperscript{30} Clark, \textit{English Society}, 320.
\textsuperscript{31} Clark, \textit{English Society}, 321.
\textsuperscript{32} Clark, \textit{English Society}, 406.
Along with their disagreement over the ingredients of a national identity, and the role of religion in creating unity, Colley and Clark illustrate the controversy concerning the timing of a genuine national identity. Colley places the growth of a newly created British identity in the period from 1707 to 1837. Clark sees a much longer historical process at work before the eighteenth century: “Britain was not invented, it developed.” Furthermore, any sense of Britishness rested on Englishness.\textsuperscript{33}

Some scholars have argued in favor of a national identity in a much earlier period. Geoffrey Elton points out that England was a dynastic state from the early tenth century, with the implication that represented the beginning of a particular sense of Englishness.\textsuperscript{34} Adrian Hastings argues that the medieval experience defined the English nation.\textsuperscript{35} He contends that a widely used vernacular literature, a shared cultural identity, and control of a specific territory established connections for the English.\textsuperscript{36} Walter Johnson agrees that nationalism existed in England in the Middle Ages, but its terms had changed. The monarch had once defined the nation, but that power passed to the rest of the social elite after 1688. Johnson contends that nationalism changed again in the eighteenth century, as the establishment used it to counteract criticism.\textsuperscript{37} There were two objectives at that point: to affirm the elite’s authority and to rally support in defending the nation from its enemies, both internal and external.\textsuperscript{38}

Other historians place nationalism in the seventeenth century. Liah Greenfeld argues that there was a clearly established national identity by 1600. The English Reformation had spurred a separate identity, in which the definition of nation had changed to signify a unique, sovereign

\textsuperscript{33} Clark, “Protestantism,” 275.
\textsuperscript{36} Hastings, Construction of Nationhood, 2-3.
people. In addition, the English emphasized their superior accomplishments in literature and science. The most important innovation was that nationality elevated the status of everyone in the community to a position of dignity and pride. Thus, the English created the idea of a nation, which consisted of an elite people. Claydon and McBride agree that there was a sense of nationality, at least for the English, in the seventeenth century, but they place that development in the middle of the century. John Breuilly, who defines nationalism as inherently political, places English nationalism slightly later in the seventeenth century. Nationalism is about how to acquire and use power, so it is not the result of a cultural identity. Only with the growth of the state can people see the central government as a way to get things done, and therefore seek power in that government. Because of the balance between royal and parliamentary power established in 1688 and 1689, England did have a centralized state and thus the basis for something close to nationalism.

Some scholars contend that nationalism occurred only in the eighteenth century. Benedict Anderson argues that the idea of a nation comes from emotional and ideological attachments to cultural artifacts, an eighteenth-century phenomenon. He defines the nation as an imagined political community in the sense that most citizens never know each other, though they have a similar image of the community. People are willing to sacrifice themselves for that community. Gerald Newman agrees with the eighteenth-century growth of nationalism, but he

40 Greenfeld, Nationalism, 78-79.
41 Greenfeld, Nationalism, 487.
43 John Breuilly, Nationalism and the State (New York: St. Martin’s, 1982), 1-2, 6, 10, 48-50, 353.
44 Breuilly, Nationalism and the State, 56-57.
46 Anderson, Imagined Communities, 5-7.
argues that it grew from a desire to preserve England’s cultural identity and dignity. \(^{47}\) Newman believes that what created a strong English identity was the intellectual critique that the British elite were too much like the French. The crucial factor in developing nationalism was the artist-intellectual, who wanted to defend English culture. \(^{48}\) As part of that effort, cultural critics began to conceive of national solidarity as an essential characteristic of freedom. There was an effort to break down traditional barriers and increase opportunities, all for a better nation. \(^{49}\) Critics often included clergymen and intellectuals, whose ambitions had been frustrated by the existing social order. Together they attacked national moral decline. \(^{50}\) The resulting nationalism reoriented both politics and religion. \(^{51}\)

Still others have suggested that nationalism was not present by the end of the eighteenth century. Ernest Gellner rejects the possibility of any true sense of nationality and nationalism by that point, because only industrial societies, which did not yet exist, could generate nationalism. \(^{52}\) Gellner describes what he terms a high culture, consisting of standardized literacy and communication of a shared culture through education and technology. In such a society, a homogeneous culture enters the population at large, and society becomes impersonal and anonymous. \(^{53}\) Because that can only happen after industrialization, nationalism is possible only in the modern world. \(^{54}\) Clark agrees with the assessment that nationalism is a modern

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phenomenon and argues that it only began in the nineteenth century, as an ideology of race and culture. Looking for an earlier origin of nationalism amounts to dehistoricizing.55

Scholars cannot agree, even if they concur that a genuine national identity existed in the eighteenth century, whether that identity was primarily British or English. Colley favors the British and Clark the English identity. Hastings rejects Colley’s notion of Britishness and argues that Britain was not a newly invented nation; it was simply a new name for an existing nation. He agrees with Clark on the continuity of English attachments, because many people still rallied around the concept of England. He faults Colley for paying too little attention to the importance of England in her effort to focus on a new British identity.56 In his view, English and British were two names for the same identity.57 Paul Langford acknowledges the ambiguity of terming the national character English or British. Foreigners used both mostly as synonyms and often used England to refer to Britain as a whole.58 Even when examining how people viewed themselves, Langford cannot separate English from British. Any characteristic assigned to the British had its basis in an attribute of the English.59

Part of the debate on what kind of identity existed concerns the importance of external factors. Colley argues that Britons’ anti-Catholic and anti-French sentiments were crucial to a developing national identity. Kathleen Wilson also emphasizes the late eighteenth-century importance of external factors on national identity, but she focuses on English concepts of race in forming a group identity.60 The English borrowed the idea of systematic classification to rank

55 Clark, “Protestantism,” 250-251.
57 Hastings, Construction of Nationhood, 64.
59 Langford, Englishness Identified, 14.
humans and societies.\textsuperscript{61} English stories of voyages to tropical islands and interaction with the natives there supported the idea that human development occurred in stages from primitive to advanced.\textsuperscript{62} In that context, natives lagged behind European social habits and intellectual development.\textsuperscript{63} Progress required both a capacity and a willingness to improve through reason, and only Europeans, especially the English, had freed their reason from their instincts. Therefore, only they could guarantee future progress. The English thus defined themselves against other, less advanced peoples.\textsuperscript{64}

Agreeing with Colley, Colin Haydon stresses the importance of anti-Catholic sentiment in forming identity. According to Haydon, opposition to Catholicism led to portrayals of the continent of Europe as inherently incompatible with Britain.\textsuperscript{65} The English viewed Catholic clergy as despotic and selfish.\textsuperscript{66} In addition, the English believed that poverty necessarily accompanied Catholicism. In contrast, even England’s lower classes were happy and free.\textsuperscript{67} Because of those contrasting views, “anti-catholicism, then, was an ideology which promoted national cohesion, countering, though not submerging, the kingdom’s political divisions and social tensions. It showed what it was—despite these—to be English by emphasising what it was to be ‘unEnglish’.\textsuperscript{68} Overall, the English believed that they needed to defeat Catholics and tyrants so that the nation could accomplish its destiny.\textsuperscript{69}

\textsuperscript{61} Wilson, “Island race,” 268.
\textsuperscript{62} Wilson, “Island race,” 280-81.
\textsuperscript{63} Wilson, “Island race,” 282.
\textsuperscript{64} Wilson, “Island race,” 283.
\textsuperscript{66} Haydon, “King and Country,” 34.
\textsuperscript{67} Haydon, “King and Country,” 35.
\textsuperscript{68} Haydon, “King and Country,” 49.
\textsuperscript{69} Haydon, “King and Country,” 52.
Though Wilson and Haydon support Colley, some scholars deny the importance she attributes to the fear of an external threat. Robin Eagles rejects Colley’s definition of the Other as Catholic France. Despite conflicts with France, there were heavy Francophile influences among the aristocracy in the second half of the eighteenth century. Many of the nobility traveled to France and even had property in France. Furthermore, every level of society showed an interest in France. Because of respect for the French, Eagles insists that historians should reappraise the portrayal of Britain and France as consistently antagonistic. She argues that France’s threat did not successfully focus loyalty firmly on Britain. Claydon and McBride agree with that interpretation. They argue that historians have become preoccupied defining the nation against something, that a rejection of outsiders united the people. Concentrating on that, though it is a factor, detracts from studying the community’s own values. Going even further, Newman defines the Other, not as an external threat, but primarily as the nation’s own elite.

As part of the disagreement over the ingredients of a genuine national identity, there has been intense debate over religion’s specific role in creating and maintaining that identity. Colley and Clark both say it was central to identity. Margot Finn claims it is impossible to ignore the religious influences on nationalism. At the very least, religion prepared the way for nationalism. Hastings, with his early placement of nationalism, argues that the Bible and religion provided the primary ways to imagine the nation. Wilson concludes that the English,

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77 Hastings, Construction of Nationhood, 12-13, 22.
and later the British, believed in their nation’s destiny because of Protestantism.\footnote{Wilson, “Island race,” 290.} Richard Connors and J. R. D. Falconer contend that people identified themselves as part of a specific religious community.\footnote{Richard Connors and J. R. D. Falconer, “Cornering the Cheshire Cat: Reflections on the ‘New British History’ and Studies in Early Modern British Identities,” Canadian Journal of History 36 (2001): 98.} Ian Christie agrees that an individual’s religious group identity provided structure in life.\footnote{Ian Christie, Stress and stability in late eighteenth-century Britain: reflections on the British avoidance of revolution (Oxford: Clarendon, 1984), 186.} Yet Breuilly rejects the capacity of religion to unite the nation because of the explicitly political character of nationalism. Nationalism grew from ideas of rights rather than shared religious beliefs.\footnote{Breuilly, Nationalism and the State, 49.} Anderson also de-emphasizes religion. Nationalism arose in eighteenth-century western Europe because of the need for a transition to secular meaning, as religious ways of thinking lost importance.\footnote{Anderson, Imagined Communities, 11.} Gellner’s idea of an industrial high culture does not have a connection to a faith or a church. Though Protestantism had characteristics that contributed to nationalism, such as literacy and individualism, Gellner contends that nationalist cultures did not grow out of traditional religion.\footnote{Gellner, Nations and Nationalism, 141-42.} Langford agrees that identity did not emanate from religion.\footnote{Langford, Englishness Identified, 20, 316.} Newman, too, argues that nationalism was not a religious movement.\footnote{Newman, Rise of English Nationalism, 238.} Social ethics, not theology, united political reformers. Nationalism, instead of developing from Christianity, relied on the English people’s view of themselves as serious, honest, and moral.\footnote{Newman, Rise of English Nationalism, 239.}

Some scholars do not reject religion as part of an identity, but they express doubt that any one characteristic determines national identity. Jeremy Black points out the danger of claiming any one discourse led to a sense of the nation. Such approaches fail to address the complexity of society, and thus are too limited. For example, Colley and Clark discount the significance of

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\item[78] Wilson, “Island race,” 290.
\item[80] Ian R. Christie, Stress and stability in late eighteenth-century Britain: reflections on the British avoidance of revolution (Oxford: Clarendon, 1984), 186.
\item[81] Breuilly, Nationalism and the State, 49.
\item[82] Anderson, Imagined Communities, 11.
\item[83] Gellner, Nations and Nationalism, 141-42.
\item[84] Langford, Englishness Identified, 20, 316.
\item[85] Newman, Rise of English Nationalism, 238.
\item[86] Newman, Rise of English Nationalism, 239.
\end{thebibliography}
orthodox Dissenters in challenging the establishment. Black argues that any notion of an easily dominant national identity is misleading. Relying on one description of identity distorts an understanding of the past. Johnson agrees that no one dimension of English society determined its national identity. Greenfeld echoes that position by rejecting the confinement of national identity to only a religious or even a class identity.

Claydon and McBride extend that view and offer a critique of the tendency to elevate Protestantism beyond its status as one part of national identity to a defining role in that identity. Identity grew out of wider context, which included race, language, the English constitution, and interaction with Europe. More importantly, for this study at least, Claydon and McBride emphasize the diversity among Protestants, as well as Dissenters’ doubts about the established church being the true church. Because of those divisions, Protestantism could not provide the foundation for a sense of nationality. Even so, Claydon and McBride acknowledge that Protestantism played a key role in the early modern national identity. It was just that that identity was “less one of a dominant consensus, than of a frequently contested terrain.” Faith was at the center of identity but faith was only an aspiration, so there were limits on how far national clarity and unity stemmed from it.

Black concurs that Dissenters and Anglicans contested Protestant identity, so much so that Protestantism could never effectively generate an overall sense of Britishness. In fact, there

88 Black, “Confessional state?” 56.
89 Johnson, “Historiographical Sketch,” 2.
90 Greenfeld, Nationalism, 12.
94 Claydon and McBride, “Trials,” 25.
was “no easy protestant consensus in England. The split between anglican and dissenter was a basic political and ideological one, which ensured that protestant identity was a contested area.”

Black advises historians to build on the insights of Clark and Colley without expecting any simple, orderly standard of identity to emerge. Indeed, Black contends that historians should emphasize the variety of possibilities when studying how faith relates to national identity. Interpreting religion and national identity from only one perspective ignores the religious options from which the British people could choose.

The variety of options extended beyond religion. Many scholars have questioned the effectiveness of an overall national identity, and have opened the possibility of groups having separate, distinct identities, within a sense of the nation. Therefore, an English or British national identity did not exclude other identities. Laurence Brockliss and David Eastwood argue that Britain contained several conflicting identities, and the British state’s toleration allowed for the expression of different identities. Brockliss and Eastwood would limit Colley’s idea of an identity successfully superimposed, but they also reject Clark’s notion of hegemony. They do agree with Colley that a sense of Britishness was developing in the eighteenth century, but claim that sense was only weakly developed by the end of the century. Only a few people, such as army and navy officers, operated in an all-British context. Even most professionals organized mostly on national lines within Britain. Bruce Lenman agrees that Britishness did not

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96 Black, “Confessional state?” 61.
97 Black, “Confessional state?” 72.
99 Brockliss and Eastwood, “Multiple identities,” 3.
represent a full ideological integration for identity.\(^{101}\) Langford argues that separate identities continued within a national sense, but that Britishness represented another layer of identity that was compatible with existing loyalties.\(^{102}\) Connors and Falconer claim that there existed a “bewildering and multifarious conglomeration of identities,” that could include ethnic, political, social, cultural, geographical, religious, and personal affiliations.\(^{103}\) Raphael Samuel sums up this position by arguing that nationality is only one of many competing identities.\(^{104}\)

The most obvious of those competing attachments were regional. Clark argues that an interpretive framework of national identity should allow for the continued existence of regional identities along with a sense of the nation.\(^{105}\) Connors and Falconer reinforce that position by pointing out the considerable difficulty in reconciling the idea of national attributes with the ongoing presence of powerful regional loyalties and regional characteristics.\(^{106}\) Scotland and Wales, for example, were distinct nations within Britain, with their own ethnicities and articulated identities.\(^{107}\) Prys Morgan, in studying Welsh identity and nationalism, concludes that unity did not successfully grow out of anti-French sentiment or Protestantism. In fact, in the eighteenth century, there was growing interest in Welsh cultural distinctiveness. What eventually created more connections, and greater unity, with England, was industry.\(^{108}\) Colin Kidd contends that, although the Scots largely welcomed Anglicization and admired England’s

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\(^{103}\) Connors and Falconer, “Cheshire Cat,” 105.


\(^{105}\) Clark, “Protestantism,” 263.

\(^{106}\) Connors and Falconer, “Cheshire Cat,” 94.

\(^{107}\) Connors and Falconer, “Cheshire Cat,” 95.

achievements in the eighteenth century, in the 1790s, Scots defended their distinctiveness.\textsuperscript{109} Despite that, in the end Scots saw the benefits of prosperity in the Union, and by the middle of the nineteenth century, “Scotland rested securely within Britain’s union of multiple identities.” Scots could express pride in Scottish culture, but operate within a British party system.\textsuperscript{110}

It should be clear by now that no consensus exists on the issue of British national identity. Colley and Clark have sparked a massive debate concerning the timing and ingredients of a genuine national identity. They both suggest a relatively unified religious outlook, though they differ concerning religion’s role in developing a sense of the nation. For Colley Britishness grew out of a Protestantism adamantly opposed to Catholicism. On the other hand, Clark interprets identity as largely the result of Anglican hegemony. The criticisms of Colley and Clark that other scholars have offered demonstrate the variety of competing identities within Britain at the end of the eighteenth century. Though they do not agree on the role of religion in adding to or detracting from an attachment to the nation, those historians have opened the possibility for a distinct religious identity alongside a national identity. This study shows that the Baptists certainly had a clear sense of national identity in the eighteenth century. That identity was broadly Christian and Protestant, but religion itself did not furnish national attachments. Instead, England’s history and British institutions provided the strongest bonds with the nation. Even so, national identity held second place to Baptists’ identity as a denomination of evangelical Dissenters.


\textsuperscript{110} Kidd, “Sentiment,” 111, 123.
CHAPTER 3

DISSENTERS, EVANGELICALS, AND THE NATION

Dissenters, or nonconformists, represented the diversity within British Protestantism, as they maintained a separate religious identity within the nation. Dissenters included both orthodox and heterodox, and both sectors of Dissent called for political reform. Evangelicalism contributed to an individualist outlook among orthodox Dissenters, who focused their reform efforts largely on individual rights. Dissenters limited their patriotism because of their religion and legal restrictions against them for that religion. Thus, Dissenters did not completely submit to the government. They disagreed with the established church and its interpretation of the war with France. Though there is some debate whether evangelicals affirmed the existing social order or not, it is clear that they offered an alternative in religion at a time when the Church of England grew increasingly weaker. Because of Dissenting influence, the establishment portrayed Dissenters, especially evangelicals and itinerant preachers, as disruptive. Such groups threatened society because they broke or bypassed traditional social bonds.

Dissenters faced discrimination throughout the eighteenth century. In 1714, the Anglicans gained a virtual monopoly on education. 1 Throughout the eighteenth century, some magistrates were reluctant to register places of worship and to license Dissenting preachers. 2 After 1757, everyone was required to marry in the parish church. Dissenters could live, pay taxes, preach, worship, and print, but they could only achieve low positions in the army and navy. 3 Dissenters were not eligible for ordinary schools, or for the universities. 4

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2 Deryck W. Lovegrove, “Particular Baptist Itinerant Preachers During the Late 18th and Early 19th Centuries,” *Baptist Quarterly* 28 (1979): 138.
4 Whitley, *British Baptists*, 274.
though, the requirement for Dissenting clergy to sign the Thirty-Nine Articles was abolished.⁵ That success was limited, as efforts from 1787 to 1790 to repeal the Test and Corporation Acts failed. The House of Commons had rejected repeal by a 188-89 vote in 1739, but repeal efforts revived in 1787. In 1789, repeal was defeated 122-102, but in 1790 the vote against repeal stood at 294-105.⁶ Dissenters showed their support for repeal through provincial associations and public meetings.⁷

Because of the circumstances of Dissenters, a distinct identity was not only possible in a regional or national sense, but the British composite identity also stretched to matters of faith. Laurence Brockliss and David Eastwood contend that Britain’s religious culture, despite its diversity, was becoming even more heterogeneous.⁸ Colin Haydon agrees that there was not a strong bond among Protestants in general, because Dissenters criticized Anglican practices.⁹ Richard Connors and J. R. D. Falconer also highlight the heterogeneous nature of Protestantism in Britain.¹⁰ Ian Christie emphasizes that people had their choice of religious affiliation. The Church of England did not exercise a monopoly.¹¹ William Stafford argues that most religious groups often limited their nationalism. They had concerns and loyalties that, owing to their faith,

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⁵ Whitley, *British Baptists*, 197.
⁷ Watts, *Dissenters*, vol. II, 482, 486.
stretched beyond the nation. It is precisely because Dissenters had other loyalties that they were able to maintain a separate identity alongside a national identity.

There is some consensus that Dissenters tended to limit their expressions of nationalism through criticism of the establishment, but there is a question concerning how great a threat Dissent was to the social order, that is, how radical Dissent was. J. Ann Hone has described radicalism as the effort to make the world better. Radicals wanted to improve the human condition through political change, and so desired a more representative House of Commons. In that context, most Dissenters wanted greater representation, and enough political change to end religious discrimination. Yet Dissenters did not see political change as the primary path to improvement; they tended to focus on religion as the vehicle for social change.

While it is clear that Dissenters desired change, there is debate over what branch of Dissent contributed to reformist politics. Jonathan Clark says that only heterodox Dissenters contributed to fundamental change in English government and religion. Michael Durey and Albert Goodwin tend to agree. Durey supports Clark’s assertion that radicalism stemmed primarily from rational, not orthodox Dissent. Of thirty-seven English radicals with known religious affiliations who fled to the United States, thirty-one were Unitarians or deists, and only five orthodox Dissenters. Durey asserts for the 1790s, that little evidence exists to sustain a contention that orthodox Dissenting ministers became involved in movements of political radicalism. Although some ministers supported the French Revolution until 1792, only a few

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14 Hone, Cause of Truth, 2, 4.
radical clergymen have been discovered.\textsuperscript{16} Albert Goodwin contends that Dissent had a lasting
effect on radicalism, but he seems to agree with Clark that only heterodox Dissenters exerted that
effect. They were the ones who argued for religious liberty of conscience and civic equality.\textsuperscript{17} Those Dissenters could no longer tolerate their unequal political status and therefore refused to
acquiesce in it.\textsuperscript{18} Despite the mild enforcement of penalties, Dissenters wanted full eligibility to
offices and directorships of businesses, such as the Bank of England and the East India
Company. Furthermore, those Dissenters claimed political equality.\textsuperscript{19} By so doing, they
represented a threat to the establishment, and Goodwin sees a connection between rational
Dissenters and political radicals.\textsuperscript{20} He contends that Dissenters both supported parliamentary
reform and helped organize radical political activity.\textsuperscript{21}

Yet there was definitely potential for radicalism among orthodox Dissenters, and the
limited patriotism of Dissenters was not just a feature of the 1790s, but of the preceding decades
as well. During the eighteenth century, Old Dissenters, that is, Independents, Baptists, and
Presbyterians, supported the monarchy and the establishment’s definition of the constitution less
and less, while they increasingly favored parliamentary reform and the repeal of the Test and
Corporation Acts.\textsuperscript{22} Even in the 1780s, before the French Revolution could motivate reform
efforts, Dissenters challenged the establishment by opposing the Test and Corporation Acts.\textsuperscript{23}

\textsuperscript{16} Durey, “Trumpet of Sedition,” 143.
\textsuperscript{17} Albert Goodwin, \textit{The Friends of Liberty: The English Democratic Movement in the Age of the French Revolution}
(Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1979), 68.
\textsuperscript{18} Goodwin, \textit{Friends of Liberty}, 71.
\textsuperscript{19} Goodwin, \textit{Friends of Liberty}, 77-78.
\textsuperscript{20} Goodwin, \textit{Friends of Liberty}, 79, 81.
\textsuperscript{21} Goodwin, \textit{Friends of Liberty}, 98.
\textsuperscript{22} Stafford, “Religion and nationalism,” 381.
\textsuperscript{23} Stuart Andrews, \textit{Unitarian Radicalism: Political Rhetoric, 1770-1814} (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire:
Stafford concludes that those legal restrictions meant that Dissents could only express a qualified patriotism.  

Dissenters demonstrated the limits of their patriotism by disagreeing with their government. Ursula Henriques contends that many Dissenters, particularly ministers, advocated constitutional reform, because their political exclusion was legislated and enforced by a government that was not representative. Emma Vincent Macleod reinforces that view by arguing that at its core, Dissent was anti-establishment, and thus some ministers openly espoused liberal political views. Robert Hole asserts that while every Christian denomination acknowledged a responsibility to submit to the government, they also rejected total submission. Thus, no one could expect Dissenters’ total obedience to the government. While Dissenting groups made genuine professions of loyalty, their loyalty was conditional, because submission to God was always a higher priority. Hole sees the tension between Dissenters and Anglicans as a reflection of a disagreement concerning Christianity and the state. While the establishment viewed religion as necessary to support the state, Dissenters viewed religion and politics as separate. Therefore, an individual could be outside the established church but still participate in government. According to James Bradley, even though Dissenters disagreed with their government, they expressed optimism that the House of Commons, because of its representative

24 Stafford, “Religion and nationalism,” 381.
28 Brown, English Baptists, 4.
29 Hole, Pulpits, 146-48.
nature, could rectify the problems in government. Their trust in Parliament was not absolute; Dissenters emphasized Christ as Lord, and thereby minimized human authority.

Dissenters’ opposition to the establishment extended to the Church of England. Bradley argues that Dissenters offered a competing concept of society. In so doing, Dissenters demonstrated clearly distinct aspirations and they challenged the existing structure of church and state in the late eighteenth century. As part of their critique, Dissenters portrayed the Church as a “bloated and arrogant instrument of state control,” which had to use religious tests to maintain its power. They even dismissed the established church as unnecessary. They made it clear that they had no desire to have any established church, including their own. An established church interfered in politics, especially by denying civil and political equality to anyone who disagreed with it. Most Dissenters viewed religion as necessary for morality, but a state-established church was not necessary for morality or for religion. Though Dissenters desired the disestablishment of the Church of England, Bradley rejects Clark’s notion that their opposition to the existing hierarchy derived primarily from heterodoxy. The numerical growth among theologically orthodox Dissent shows that their alternative to the Anglican vision was more important than the liberal politics of rational Dissent.

The orthodox Dissenting alternative to the establishment included an emphasis on rights. Few reformers claimed the right to vote and an equal share of prosperity as God-given rights, but individual liberty of worship and conscience were granted by God and as such were essential

31 Bradley, English Radicalism, 419.
32 Bradley, English Radicalism, 417-18.
33 Henriques, Religious Toleration, 85.
34 Henriques, Religious Toleration, 86.
35 Henriques, Religious Toleration, 87.
36 Bradley, English Radicalism, 418, 423-24, 430.
parts of the constitution. Religion should not deprive men of civil privileges, or of the privileges of their class and wealth. Neither should the government exclude men from the ranks of the clergy because of differences in belief. For Dissenters exclusion meant that they were not fully citizens. In other words, they were being punished for their religion. Dissenters made a clear distinction between religious beliefs and political rights. That belief stemmed from an individualist outlook: “Religion was a matter between man and God, in which the civil governor had no right to interfere.” Religion provided the basis for individualism in the notion that the individual received grace directly from God. The individual came before the nation. The nation provided experiences in which to grow, but there was no need for any particular nation.

The Dissenters’ concern for their rights contributed to their view of themselves as a separate entity within the nation. J. E. Cookson argues that, because of the failures to secure repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts in 1787 and again in 1790, Dissenters became aware of themselves as a group representing a particular set of interests. The establishment opposed those interests, though, and the Anglican reaction to repeal efforts was so strong that in the 1790s Dissenters began to believe that they had to struggle to avoid any further restrictions because of their religion. In fact, they thought it possible that the establishment wanted to stamp out the Dissenting denominations altogether. Because of their alternative to the establishment,

37 Hole, *Pulpits*, 120.
Dissenters could not take their freedom for granted. They needed to remain vigilant to maintain what religious liberty they possessed.45

While Dissenters demonstrated a separate identity within the nation, evangelicals had a distinct identity within Dissent. That identity stemmed from four basic features of evangelicalism: conversionism, the idea that people needed to repent and turn to Christ; activism, the belief that the gospel should be spread; biblicism, regarding the Bible as the foundation of spiritual truth; and crucicentrism, an emphasis on Christ’s sacrifice as the center of theology.46 David Bebbington argues that these attributes led to changes in evangelicals’ aspirations for themselves and for their nation. Evangelicals expressed optimism that humans had the potential to improve, and, theologically speaking, salvation was not restricted to a limited few. Therefore, they saw a need to share the gospel.47 Beyond making converts, evangelicals desired reforms in morality and manners.48

Because the evangelical movement included most Particular Baptists, it is important to understand the debate surrounding the effects of evangelicalism on identity and the potential for radicalism, just as it was with Dissent in general. Some scholars have taken the position that evangelicals supported the existing order, despite the radical nature of their approach to religion. According to Mark Noll, evangelicals exerted a considerable effect beginning in the mid-1790s. Noll portrays evangelicals reacting against liberty as expressed in France, and thus clearly implies that evangelicals were conservative. In essence, evangelicalism substituted for political radicalism.49 Victor Kiernan also argues that evangelicals contributed to social stability by

45 Brown, English Baptists, 132.
46 David W. Bebbington, Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1989) 3, 5, 10-14, 40-41.
47 Bebbington, Evangelicalism, 53, 60.
48 Bebbington, Evangelicalism, 69-70.
49 Mark A. Noll, “Revolution and the Rise of Evangelical Social Influence in North Atlantic Societies,” in Evangelicalism: Comparative Studies of Popular Protestantism in North America, the British Isles, and Beyond,
At the same time, evangelicals were convinced of their nation’s depravity and they worked to reform manners, particularly among the upper classes. Along with their criticism, though, evangelicals discouraged rebellion and eased fears of social unrest by showing that they could lead the working class. Gerald Newman agrees that evangelicals combined an emphasis on order with criticism of their society. Evangelicals discouraged radicalism while disparaging the morals of the aristocracy. In the guise of national security, they advocated throwing out upper class values. Otherwise, the lower classes would rebel. Kathleen Wilson continues the idea that evangelicals were conservative. She contends that evangelicals were egalitarian in their religion, but not in their approach to society or politics. In their view, spiritual equality coexisted with national and social hierarchies.

Other scholars have suggested that evangelicals remained quiet on political matters, thereby exerting little direct influence on the existing structure. According to Bebbington, while encouraging reform in society, evangelicals discouraged political activity. Dissenters doubted the appropriateness of pushing for civil and religious liberty through the years of the French Revolution and thus minimized their activity in the political sphere. Overall, Bebbington contends that what “vital Christianity entailed, according to many Evangelicals, was a blend of quietism and loyalism.” In fact, evangelicals broadly demonstrated a strong attachment to the

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51 Kiernan, “Evangelicalism,” 50.
52 Kiernan, “Evangelicalism,” 54.
political status quo.\textsuperscript{58} Macleod agrees that evangelicals often shied away from direct criticism of their government and preferred to direct their energies toward goals outside of politics, largely evangelism.\textsuperscript{59} They saw that as a more appropriate way to achieve their aspirations. \textsuperscript{60}

Evangelicals consistently professed more pressing priorities than national politics. According to Nancy Uhlar Murray, evangelicals’ optimism in spreading the gospel, both internationally and at home, was so great that it overshadowed their political hopes. Political reform appeared trivial when compared with saving souls.\textsuperscript{61} Stafford agrees that true Christian faith mattered more than the nation to evangelicals.\textsuperscript{62} Deryck Lovegrove affirms that evangelicals generally remained silent on political issues. Lovegrove offers three possible reasons for that silence. First, the failure to repeal the Test and Corporation Acts reinforced political detachment. Second, Dissenters wanted to prove their reliability so that they could avoid any further restriction of their freedoms. Third, they saw evangelical pursuits as more appropriate for Christians than political ones. While trying to affirm that they were no threat to the nation or the social order, they saw evangelism as more important than political reform.\textsuperscript{63}

Despite that assertion of quietism, Lovegrove argues that evangelicals had a greater effect than Clark and others conclude. By the end of the eighteenth century, evangelicals were more socially relevant than the Church of England, and therefore were in a position to exercise greater influence.\textsuperscript{64} It is important to point out that although evangelical Dissenters were not the

\textsuperscript{58} Bebbington, \textit{Evangelicalism}, 73.
\textsuperscript{59} Macleod, \textit{War of Ideas}, 152.
\textsuperscript{60} Macleod, \textit{War of Ideas}, 153.
\textsuperscript{62} Stafford, “Religion and nationalism,” 388.
established church, neither were they heterodox. Lovegrove again disagrees with Clark: “The problem the established church had with Dissent in the 1790s was not with rational Dissent, but orthodox evangelical Dissent, though accusers did not always bother to make that distinction.” By the end of the century, the establishment feared evangelical Dissenters because they represented a significant potential force for social change.

David Hempton extends that argument by claiming that the religious enthusiasm and denominational changes of the 1790s eventually brought an end to the old order of church and state. Far from exercising a conservative influence, evangelicals actually forced change in the established church by drastically increasing the number of people attending services outside of the Church of England. For many Dissenters, evangelicalism represented a way to protest the established church and state. For many others, though, the establishment was simply irrelevant. Therefore, they bypassed the established church and continued with their evangelical efforts. Treating the Church of England as irrelevant, however, contributed to the establishment’s view that evangelicals wanted to overturn the national social order.

Views of the Methodists, who were orthodox evangelical Dissenters much like the Baptists, reflect the diversity of opinion concerning the identity of evangelicals. E. P. Thompson argues that Methodists strictly, and even harshly, supported the existing social order. He offers a view of Methodism as an ideology that focused on submission and hard work. Their emphasis

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65 Lovegrove, Sectarian People, 6-7.
66 Lovegrove, “Evangelical Dissent,” 263.
on discipline made Methodists valuable to manufacturers and managers.\textsuperscript{72} To keep members away from bad habits, Methodists tried to “reproduce the emotional convulsions of conversion,” and encouraged members to religious discipline and service to the church.\textsuperscript{73} For Thompson this represents “psychic exploitation.”\textsuperscript{74} He interprets Methodist and Baptist revivals as hysterical and emotionally violent.\textsuperscript{75} Bernard Semmel agrees with Thompson that the Methodists aided order, but he disagrees with Thompson’s view of Methodist oppression. Semmel claims that Methodists espoused revolutionary doctrine in terms of political liberty, but that their conservative leaders stressed obedience.\textsuperscript{76} To prevent the transition of their religious doctrine into politics, Methodists became leaders against any possible revolution and they defended the monarchy. Semmel believes that Methodists successfully created a sense of community, and thereby helped the transformation to an individualistic, industrial society in an orderly fashion.\textsuperscript{77} In contrast to both Semmel and Thompson, David Hempton says that Methodism was “new, disruptive and socially divisive.” Even while tolerated as part of the Church of England, Methodism was a religious revolution. He disagrees with Clark as well, arguing that Methodism, as orthodox Dissent, exerted considerable effect in achieving a religiously pluralistic society.\textsuperscript{78} The Methodists contributed to religious pluralism by asserting individual rights of conscience and worship against the establishment.\textsuperscript{79} Hempton rejects the notion that Methodism served as an antidote to revolution or represented a moderate synthesis of radicalism and religion.\textsuperscript{80} Methodism, and evangelicalism as a whole, instead of substituting for radicalism, expressed

\textsuperscript{72} Thompson, \textit{English Working Class}, 355.
\textsuperscript{73} Thompson, \textit{English Working Class}, 362-65.
\textsuperscript{74} Thompson, \textit{English Working Class}, 375.
\textsuperscript{75} Thompson, \textit{English Working Class}, 380.
\textsuperscript{77} Semmel, \textit{Methodist Revolution}, 171-72.
\textsuperscript{78} David Hempton, \textit{The Religion of the People: Methodists and popular religion c. 1750-1900} (London: Routledge, 1996), 141.
\textsuperscript{79} Hempton, \textit{Religion of the People}, 173.
radicalism through religion.\textsuperscript{81} Ian Christie agrees; rather than enforcing repression, Methodists offered an attractive religious option.\textsuperscript{82}

Because of the appeal of groups such as the Methodists and the Baptists, there was not an Anglican hegemony to the extent that Clark suggests. The Church of England was supposed to be a unifying religious institution, but there is some consensus concerning Anglican weakness at the end of the eighteenth century. Richard Soloway points out that because of their families, connections, and education many of the Church’s leaders were aristocratic, and thus isolated from the populace, in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.\textsuperscript{83} Eighteenth-century bishops rarely were active in their dioceses.\textsuperscript{84} Lovegrove agrees that in the eighteenth century the established church experienced declining influence because of its integration with politics and the ruling class. In addition, the economic difficulties of many clergy had led to pluralism and absenteeism, while the economic success of a few clergymen led to their isolation from the bulk of the population. Therefore, the church was losing its parish supervision as the population was growing. Under such conditions, the Dissenting denominations became more popular as they were more relevant.\textsuperscript{85} Michael Watts supports that position by arguing that Dissent flourished in areas in which Anglican clergy had failed to meet parishioners’ spiritual needs.\textsuperscript{86} W. R. Ward and Nancy Uhlar Murray agree with the notion of Anglican weakness but attribute part of that to the government’s failure to halt competition with the Church. For example, a failed effort in

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item[80] Hempton, \textit{Religion of the People}, 165, 175.
\item[81] Hempton, \textit{Religion of the People}, 178.
\item[82] Christie, \textit{Stress and stability}, 209.
\item[84] Soloway, \textit{Prelates and People}, 2, 3, 9.
\item[85] Lovegrove, \textit{Sectarian People}, 9-13.
\end{itemize}
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1800 to bring bills into Parliament to restrict itinerancy represented the government’s failure to assist its ally, the Church, allowing Dissenters’ influence to increase.\textsuperscript{87}

Still, the Church of England was the most powerful Protestant denomination, and because it feared the effects of Dissenting competition, the Church reacted by maligning Dissenters. Anglicans portrayed Dissenters as disruptive, unsophisticated, and destructive to the social order. The established church disparaged Dissenters accused them as unworthy citizens. According to James Sack, loyalist conservatives based their attitude toward Dissenters on a view of history in which Dissenters had conspired to overthrow both church and crown. There was continuity between the anti-Puritan sentiment of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and the anti-Dissenter sentiment of the eighteenth century. That view had spread to more people in Britain during the American Revolution, when loyalists accused Dissenters of trying to destroy the constitution. Nonconformity was clearly linked to treason.\textsuperscript{88} The conservative press portrayed Dissenters as levellers and traitors.\textsuperscript{89} In the 1790s, Dissenters faced further accusations that they were unpatriotic and disloyal, in part, because of what the establishment perceived as their tendency to encourage lower-class fanaticism.\textsuperscript{90} Dissenters, especially the new generation of leaders who were evangelicals, reinforced that negative view by approving the early stages of the French Revolution. Even when they backtracked, they could not escape the establishment of church and state associating them with subversion and violence.\textsuperscript{91}

\textsuperscript{89} Andrews, \textit{Unitarian Radicalism}, 10.
\textsuperscript{90} Lovegrove, “Evangelical Dissent,” 263.
\textsuperscript{91} Lovegrove, “Evangelical Dissent,” 264.
Soloway argues that that perception stemmed from the view of social equality as unnatural, a denial of divine hierarchy.\textsuperscript{92} Because society had been divinely created, subordination of the lower classes was completely natural.\textsuperscript{93} To encourage acquiescence and subjection, Anglicans described any threat to the existing social and political structure, such as the Dissenters, as a sin against God.\textsuperscript{94} The overriding goal of the Church of England was to preserve the social order.\textsuperscript{95} In that context, the issue of repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts was a matter of practicality and not of principle. Repeal could lead directly to revolution; religious liberty would destroy the sacred alliance of church and state.\textsuperscript{96}

Defenders of that alliance argued that religion was necessary for society and that the state church secured religion’s place in society.\textsuperscript{97} Supporters portrayed the Church of England as a bulwark against anarchy and atheism.\textsuperscript{98} In the 1790s, rather than using religion to justify the government, the establishment used religious arguments to support the social order.\textsuperscript{99} That order depended on morality and the established church stressed its importance in developing and maintaining morality. Morality did not proceed from the individual to society but the reverse. People learned duties from social relationships.\textsuperscript{100} Both church and state were essential institutions and significant change to either would ruin the benefits of civilization, primarily peace and stability. The connection between church and state was necessary to create a situation

\textsuperscript{92} Soloway, \textit{Prelates and People}, 20.
\textsuperscript{93} Soloway, \textit{Prelates and People}, 22, 25.
\textsuperscript{95} Soloway, \textit{Prelates and People}, 45-46.
\textsuperscript{98} Hole, \textit{Pulpits}, 127-28, 132.
\textsuperscript{99} Hole, \textit{Pulpits}, 98.
\textsuperscript{100} Stafford, “Religion and nationalism,” 389.
in which “the individual is perfected, not by his own efforts, nor as part of mankind, but by his nation.”

Murray agrees that the Anglican rivalry with nonconformists centered on the idea that order was at stake, and much of Anglican criticism centered on evangelical itinerancy, the practice of using traveling preachers, often laymen. The established clergy interpreted the activities of lay preachers as a conspiracy for revolution and schism. Allowing lower class and poorly educated people licenses to preach violated the spirit of the Toleration Act and the Seditious Meetings Act. The establishment accused itinerants of being enthusiasts, of possessing zeal without knowledge, and of deluding themselves into thinking that they had privileged contact with the Holy Spirit. Because evangelicals looked beyond the Church for active salvation efforts, the Church saw them as subversive for denying its authority. In addition, Anglicans complained about the loss of corporate identity. Whereas the parish had been the basis of a hierarchical order and social harmony, new converts failed to show deference and submission to the Church. The theology of evangelicals threatened morality, so Anglicans portrayed them as seducers of the uneducated. Itinerant preaching contributed to the establishment’s negative views of evangelicals. Lovegrove asserts that for itinerant preachers and their supporters much of the prevailing religious observance connected with the Established Church was little better than superstition, while, equally, many Churchmen regarded their irregular and uninvited activity as an unseemly and dangerous form of religious enthusiasm which in the light of contemporary events in France threatened the Establishment and the whole existing structure of authority.

The established church and the government viewed itinerancy as a genuine potential threat to the social order. Losing control of the presentation of religion could have wider implications.

That tension between Anglicans and Dissenters also was apparent in their views of the war. Macleod interprets Britain’s wars with revolutionary France as conflicts over principles and values within Britain itself. In that conflict of ideas, organized religion was still crucial for focusing national feeling.\(^\text{110}\) At the time, sermons powerfully communicated ideas. National fast and thanksgiving days brought high attendance, and published sermons were widely circulated.\(^\text{111}\) The government willingly used religion to advance its interests. By declaring national fast days and thanksgiving days, the government hoped that preachers would express support for the war on religious principles, thereby encouraging public approval of the war.\(^\text{112}\)

Yet Dissenters often disagreed with the established church concerning what ideas were at the root of the conflict. Instead of seeing the war with revolutionary France as the defense of order, or even of Britain as God’s favored nation, Dissenters interpreted the conflict as God’s punishment of unfaithfulness and immorality in Britain and Europe.\(^\text{113}\) Macleod concludes that a much greater proportion of Dissenting ministers opposed the war than their counterparts in the Church of England. Dissenters argued that the war violated the principles of Christianity as well as the interests of civilization.\(^\text{114}\)

Most Dissenters expressed horror at the war, without taking a firm political stance.\(^\text{115}\)

After all, evangelical efforts meant that the war with France was only a peripheral

\(^{110}\) Macleod, War of Ideas, 156.
\(^{111}\) Macleod, War of Ideas, 157.
\(^{112}\) Macleod, War of Ideas, 137.
\(^{113}\) Macleod, War of Ideas, 152.
\(^{114}\) Macleod, War of Ideas, 154.
\(^{115}\) Macleod, War of Ideas, 155.
That did not mean that evangelicals did not pay any attention to the war, but their most frequent remarks were neutral. Even so, there was significant evangelical support for peace.

Dissenting ministers who actively opposed the war took advantage of fast days to express their disagreements with the government. Dissenters complained about the government’s use of religion, through fast days, to stimulate political loyalty. They believed that the government’s requisitioning of prayers for political ends violated the principles of Christianity. Because they often opposed the war and doubted the sincerity of faith among government officials, Dissenting ministers on occasion failed to observe the fast days. They did not want to appear to be at the command of the government. Compliance with the fast day was voluntary, so each minister was free to assert his freedom by not using the prescribed prayer. Yet Dissenters did not see a need to exclude politics from a religious occasion, and fast days represented a way to react to loyalists on equal terms. Cookson concludes that fast days, despite the government’s intentions, became an outlet for political opposition. The government did not have the authority to enforce the observance of fast days or the sermons preached on those occasions.

Whatever their position on the war with France, Dissenters paid attention to the broader implications of that war. They connected the war with God’s sovereignty, and depicted the war as punishment for the nation’s wickedness. In their sermons, Dissenters stressed the need for the nation to repent of its unfaithfulness to God. They highlighted the government’s sins, which

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118 Macleod, War of Ideas, 153, 156; Cookson, Friends of Peace, 8-9.
119 Cookson, Friends of Peace, 134.
120 Macleod, War of Ideas, 155.
121 Cookson, Friends of Peace, 135-36.
included both an unjust war and unequal representation. The nation was special, but it needed reform, specifically in its moral state. Sexual immorality, the slave trade, and general irreligion were among the complaints, but Dissenters had not condemned their nation. In fact, despite the interpretation of the war as punishment, it was having a positive effect through a revival of religion and godliness.

Orthodox evangelical Dissenters expressed clearly expressed aspirations that differed with the establishment’s view. They believed following God to be more important than submitting to the national government. They saw no conflict in that because, unlike the church and state establishment, they viewed religious and national identities as separate. Therefore, they emphasized spreading the gospel. From their evangelical emphasis, they interpreted the war with France as punishment for British immorality. They desired peace, but more than, that Dissenters wanted godly government. Though they faced discrimination, they consistently offered a competing vision within Protestantism that challenged the establishment.

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CHAPTER 4

THE BAPTIST EXAMPLE

Particular Baptists in England demonstrated a clear sense of national identity at the end of the eighteenth century, but as orthodox, evangelical Dissenters, they embraced a distinct identity within Britain. They differed from the Methodists, who, though, evangelical, remained within the established church. Baptists also distanced themselves from Unitarians. Though the two groups often held similar political outlooks, Baptists regarded Unitarian theology as not genuinely Christian. Baptists showed that an orthodox Dissenting denomination could criticize the government and express a desire for political reform. Owing to their evangelical emphasis on spiritual equality, Baptists hoped for greater religious toleration, and they advocated the abolition of the slave trade. Baptists wanted a godly nation and looked to God as higher authority than the nation. Because of their growth in numbers, their lack of education, and their focus on evangelical goals, Baptists were perceived as a threat to society. They offered a clear alternative to the existing order in competition with the Church of England’s concept of a Protestant nation. They focused on rights, including the right to criticize the government. Baptists, though, offered no unified response to the French Revolution and Britain’s war with France. Even so, they developed a strong denominational identity that was more important than an attachment to the nation.

Baptists in eighteenth-century England practiced the baptism by immersion of adults who could understand the significance of conversion, that is, of following Christ. Thus, baptism signaled a new life in Christ. Within that context, there existed a distinction between General Baptists and Particular Baptists concerning salvation. To
General Baptists, God’s salvation was available to all people. Yet for Particular Baptists, salvation was only for the elect, and was impossible for anyone else. Particular Baptists held to a Calvinist concept that only God’s will effected salvation, not human free will.

For most of the eighteenth century, the Particular Baptists had rejected an evangelical approach. Only those predestined to salvation could believe, and thus an invitation to faith violated the doctrine of election. Yet late in the century, there was a Particular Baptist trend away from such strict Calvinism, with a growing belief in the “gospel worthy of all acceptation,” that the gospel should be available to everyone. Therefore, many Particular Baptists adopted an evangelical approach. A younger generation of Particular Baptists moderated their Calvinism and reconciled it with evangelism. Thus, they separated themselves from the hyper-Calvinists, who traditionally saw no need to spread the gospel, as salvation depended entirely on God’s will. In contrast, the moderate Calvinists accepted lay preaching and conversion experiences. Calvinist pastors influenced by evangelicalism were replacing pastors with more traditional views. The Particular Baptists borrowed practices from the Methodists, and the growth of the denomination paralleled that of the Methodists. Whereas more traditional Calvinists feared evangelical Methodist practices, newer pastors did not express much concern for order and respectability. They emphasized preaching the

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gospel. Many of the new pastors had converted in recent revivals. In fact, most of the newly ordained evangelical leaders were first generation Baptists who left Anglican, Congregational, or secular backgrounds, because of the scriptural basis for believer’s baptism. Their emphasis on evangelicalism as a priority meant they focused less on the defense of church doctrine. Indeed, a minister’s evangelical experience mattered as much as doctrinal expertise. Baptist evangelism led to crowds, distinct from the normal congregations, that attended Sunday evening lectures.

Baptist evangelicalism included itinerant preaching. Robert Robinson, who was minister of the Baptist church of Cambridge beginning in 1759, began to preach in nearby villages instead of only at his church. In 1775, the Baptist Western Association began a fund to support itinerant preachers, those willing to travel and preach in outlying areas. The Northamptonshire Association, in its circular letter of 1779, expressed support for village preaching. In trying to reach those beyond the settled churches, leadership came from ordained ministers who were combining pastoral and evangelical roles, but lay itinerant preaching became increasingly common in the 1790s. After 1795, itinerants were often salaried, with a specific region of responsibility, in areas of special need or opportunity. In 1797 evangelical Baptists founded the Baptist Society in London, for the Encouragement and Support of Itinerant and Village Preaching.

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7 Roberts, Continuity and Change, 121.
8 Roberts, Continuity and Change, 122.
9 Roberts, Continuity and Change, 250.
10 Brown, English Baptists, 85.
12 Deryck W. Lovegrove, “Particular Baptist Itinerant Preachers During the Late 18th and Early 19th Centuries,” Baptist Quarterly 28 (July 1979): 127.
of the Baptist itinerant preaching occurred near existing churches. Using an existing congregation as the center, Baptist itinerant ministers, often laymen, went to surrounding towns and villages. There they preached, sometimes in open air, sometimes in a home. Subsequently they tried to rent a room, barn, or shop for regular services. After a congregation had grown, they would build a chapel. A Particular Baptist church in Grundisburgh, Suffolk, serves as an example of the prevailing pattern. After its founding in 1798, it became the center of an effort that created eight other churches.

Class issues contributed to the establishment’s negative view of denominations such as the Baptists. Baptists had traditionally used lay preachers of humble social origins. By the late 1790s, most of the lay preachers were artisans and schoolteachers. Even among settled pastorates, most Dissenting ministers had to earn a secular living and Baptists were no exception. Shopkeeping was the preferred occupation. Yet other Baptist pastors earned a living through farming, teaching, or through their skills as artisans. In a study of eighteenth-century Lincolnshire, R. W. Ambler has discovered that farmers and graziers made up the largest occupational groups among Baptist church trustees. This does not mean that Baptists could not be wealthy. Some ministers and laymen, mostly in London, had high levels of education, wealth, and

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22 Watts, Dissenters, vol. II, 243-44.
social position. They embraced both their faith and their nation’s culture.\textsuperscript{24} Even so, well-paid ministers were the exception rather than the rule.\textsuperscript{25}

Meanwhile evangelism as a whole broadened the social basis of Dissent in England. Evangelical Nonconformists reached the poor, the artisans, and the laborers.\textsuperscript{26} In fact, the growth of New Dissent depended on recruitment from the lower orders. Although evangelical congregations could include skilled laborers, they depended on the artisan classes, particularly craftsmen and factory workers.\textsuperscript{27} Michael Watts has concluded that “Evangelical Nonconformity found its main support among the poor, the ignorant, and the unsophisticated.”\textsuperscript{28} Those people were looking for greater social equality. Alan Gilbert argues that “Dissent, as the Baptist leader, Robert Hall put it in 1791, provided an ‘asylum’ for those willing to affirm their social emancipation from the hegemony of squire and parson.”\textsuperscript{29} Yet Gilbert argues that Baptists were not political radicals; they caused alarm simply because they crossed the lines of the social hierarchy.\textsuperscript{30} Overall, in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, evangelicals had their greatest appeal among the least educated.\textsuperscript{31}

During the eighteenth century, Baptist ministers had reputations for low levels of culture and education, but by the end of the century, they increasingly emphasized education.\textsuperscript{32} Particular Baptists had begun day schools and academies early in the


\textsuperscript{26} Gilbert, \textit{Religion and Society}, 60.

\textsuperscript{27} Gilbert, \textit{Religion and Society}, 61.

\textsuperscript{28} Watts, \textit{Dissenters}, vol. II, 3.

\textsuperscript{29} Gilbert, \textit{Religion and Society}, 84.

\textsuperscript{30} Gilbert, \textit{Religion and Society}, 83.

\textsuperscript{31} Watts, \textit{Dissenters}, vol. II, 100.

\textsuperscript{32} Whitley, \textit{British Baptists}, 240, 258.
century.\textsuperscript{33} Those institutions offered viable alternatives to Anglican schools and prejudices.\textsuperscript{34} Yet Baptists began to see education, at least of the pastors, as a Christian duty.\textsuperscript{35} An educated ministry was crucial, especially for revival converts who moved into pulpits.\textsuperscript{36} Particular Baptists also expressed concern about theological education and the college at Bristol, founded in 1726 with the minister at Broadmead church in charge, became the most important Baptist academy.\textsuperscript{37} The Baptist church of Broadmead appreciated an educated ministry and some wealthy members endowed the college. The college’s initial success can be attributed to its being the project of one church, independent of other churches and associations. The school met with success in the broader denomination as well, which supported seventeen students in 1798 alone.\textsuperscript{38}

The need for an educated ministry reflected a growing denomination. Dissenters had experienced a numerical decline in the first half of the eighteenth century, but that situation had changed dramatically by the end of the century.\textsuperscript{39} The Baptists participated in the rapid rise in the overall numbers of Dissenting chapels in the 1790s, and the Particular Baptists had increasing numbers of converts in the late 1790s. In fact, Baptists experienced their most rapid growth ever from 1790 to 1810.\textsuperscript{40} In contrast, membership in the Church of England fell behind population growth during the eighteenth century.\textsuperscript{41}

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{33} Brown, \textit{English Baptists}, 51.
\item \textsuperscript{34} Brown, \textit{English Baptists}, 52.
\item \textsuperscript{35} Whitley, \textit{British Baptists}, 262.
\item \textsuperscript{36} Roberts, \textit{Continuity and Change}, 162.
\item \textsuperscript{37} Brown, \textit{English Baptists}, 83-84; Foreman, “Ministerial Education,” 361.
\item \textsuperscript{38} Foreman, “Ministerial Education,” 362, 364.
\item \textsuperscript{39} Watts, \textit{The Dissenters: Volume II}, 348.
\end{itemize}
Though they continued to represent only a small percentage of the nation’s population, Baptists grew in terms of the number of members. In 1750, approximately 10,000 Particular Baptists resided in England.\textsuperscript{42} Members of Particular Baptist churches numbered 17,000 in 1790, but the number of members had risen to 24,000 by 1800.\textsuperscript{43} For comparison, England’s population in 1791 was 7.74 million and by 1801 it was 8.6 million.\textsuperscript{44} By Gilbert’s assessment, Baptists made up only 0.5 percent of the population in England aged fifteen and over in 1800.\textsuperscript{45} In another calculation, Watts concludes that the Baptist portion of the population, including both Particular and General Baptists, rose from 1.09 percent in England from 1715 to 1718 to 2.95 percent by 1851.\textsuperscript{46} Such growth was especially evident in the 1790s. From 1791 to 1800, the number of registered places for Baptist worship increased, with the registrations of temporary locations rising from eighty-nine to 170 and those of permanent locations from thirty to seventy-four.\textsuperscript{47} Although the numbers of Baptist congregations had declined from 1716 to 1773, they rose from the 1770s.\textsuperscript{48} According to John Rippon’s accounts in the \textit{Baptist Annual Register}, a total of 379 Particular Baptist churches existed from 1790 to 1801.\textsuperscript{49} By 1800 Baptists lagged behind only Methodists and Independents for nonconformist congregations in England.\textsuperscript{50} Rippon reported that during the 1790s every English county except Westmorland had a at least one Baptist church.\textsuperscript{51} People began to see Baptist

\textsuperscript{42} Currie, Gilbert, and Horsley, \textit{Churches and Churchgoers}, 151.
\textsuperscript{43} Gilbert, \textit{Religion and Society}, 37.
\textsuperscript{44} William B. Willcox and Walter L. Arnstein, \textit{The Age of Aristocracy, 1688-1830} 8\textsuperscript{th} ed. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2001), 327.
\textsuperscript{45} Gilbert, \textit{Religion and Society}, 39.
\textsuperscript{46} Watts, \textit{Dissenters}, vol. II, 28-29.
\textsuperscript{47} Gilbert, \textit{Religion and Society}, 34.
\textsuperscript{48} Gilbert, \textit{Religion and Society}, 35.
\textsuperscript{50} Watts, \textit{Dissenters}, vol. II, 23.
\textsuperscript{51} Nuttall, “Baptist Churches in the 1790s,” 384.
churches as an attractive alternative to the Church of England. A church only grows if its members recognize its usefulness or relevance in achieving goals.\textsuperscript{52}

The growth of the denomination occurred in different parts of the country and among different sectors of the population. The Baptist church in Oxford serves as an example of the rapid growth. The church had twenty-five members and 130 hearers in 1788. Yet the congregation had grown enough to build in 1798 an enlarged meeting house that sat 530.\textsuperscript{53} Northamptonshire also illustrates the growing Baptist strength in numbers. In 1793 Northamptonshire had 136 parishes and thirteen market towns, with six or seven Anglican parish churches. At the same time, there were forty dissenting congregations in the county, twenty-one of which were Baptist.\textsuperscript{54} Clive Field has shown that women contributed much to the increase in numbers of Baptists. Women were growing as a percentage of members in Baptist churches, from 56.1 percent from 1751 to 1800 to 64.6 percent from 1801 to 1850.\textsuperscript{55} That level of participation was above the proportion of women in the general population.\textsuperscript{56} Field argues that Baptist churches appealed to women because of social opportunities and egalitarian ideals, that is, Baptists provided an appealing alternative to the established church.\textsuperscript{57}

The evangelical impulse to spread the gospel meant seeing all people as equal before God, at least spiritually, and Baptists translated that view into a worldwide missions effort. They saw a great opportunity to do so in the 1790s because Catholic

\textsuperscript{52} Currie, Gilbert, and Horsley, \textit{Churches and Churchgoers}, 7.
\textsuperscript{56} Field, “Adam and Eve,” 69.
\textsuperscript{57} Field, “Adam and Eve,” 78.
power had declined and France had lost much of its overseas empire.⁵⁸ William Carey took the lead in extending the Baptists’ moderate Calvinism and their evangelicalism into worldwide mission efforts.⁵⁹ A 1791 meeting of Baptist ministers in Northamptonshire charged Carey with thinking about foreign missions and proposing a program for the denomination.⁶⁰ In 1792 the Particular Baptist Society for propagating the Gospel amongst the Heathen was established as Britain’s first foreign missionary society.⁶¹ The Society made its priority the preaching of the gospel to the Hindus of India.⁶² In 1793 the first Baptist mission, which included Carey, departed for India. In their global effort to share Christianity, Baptists faced discrimination from the British establishment. They had to travel on a Danish vessel, as they could not go on an East India Company ship.⁶³ In addition, the British government did not protect the missionaries in India.⁶⁴

Baptist interest in international missions stemmed in part from the evangelical emphasis on spiritual equality, and Baptists saw a common bond with other peoples: “there are at this moment above FOUR HUNDRED MILLIONS of our fellow-men in a state of pagan darkness.” As all people were formed in the image of God, Christians should not desert unbelievers. God’s love applied to all human beings: “Ah! if the soul of a Hottentot, a Hindoo, or a Negro . . . . be like mine! And who can dispute it?—Capable of becoming like God in his moral image—Capable of enjoying his favour and love—Capable of communing with him.” In addition to the spiritual benefits, Baptists

⁶² “Propagating the Gospel,” 485.
⁶³ Himbury, *British Baptists*, 80.
hoped that spreading the gospel would bring great change to native societies: “Were these ignorant immortals but thoroughly instructed in the doctrines and precepts of christianity, their civilization would naturally follow.”

Their evangelical approach, with its idea of equality, also led Baptists to join other Dissenters in condemning the slave trade. In 1791 the Yorkshire and Lancashire Associations called for the end of the slave trade and collected money to promote that goal. The slave trade brought shame on them both as Christians and as British:

we cannot but lament that any who call themselves Christians, should so far forget the principle of their religion, as to stand forth the defenders and patrons of the most horrid and diabolical practice that ever disgraced the conduct of mankind. We need not tell you that we mean the SLAVE TRADE. Good God! must a practice so abhorrent to all the principles of humanity and justice, still be supported by the laws of A Christian country? Is it possible, in this enlightened age, to find a large minority in a British House of Commons, who can disgrace themselves and their country by voting against the abolition of this inhuman traffic, and pleading for its continuance? . . . Let us hope, however, that the period is not far distant, when the SLAVE TRADE shall no longer dishonour the British name.

The slave trade was so morally reprehensible that Baptists could not remain silent.

Baptism, itinerancy, and international evangelism contributed to the Baptists developing a clear denominational identity by the late eighteenth century. Yet that identity was not only distinct from the established church, but also from other Dissenters, because Baptists had a greater consciousness of themselves as a separate religious group. Increasingly in the eighteenth century, Baptists created their own agencies.

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64 Himbury, British Baptists, 88.
65 “Propagating the Gospel,” 371-72.
67 Himbury, British Baptists, 124-25.
69 Roberts, Continuity and Change, 225.
70 Roberts, Continuity and Change, 225.
Baptists also created a series of associations that provided recreational and communal opportunities, as well as material aid for the poorest members.\(^\text{71}\) Often in large Anglican parishes, people were distant from the parish church, and they vastly outnumbered the clergy. Thus, Baptists provided alternatives for religious association.\(^\text{72}\) Baptists also formed societies for specific purposes, such as efforts to free pastors on Sunday evenings and weekdays for village, or itinerant, preaching.\(^\text{73}\)

The new Baptist regional associations represented the most important innovation. Most Baptist congregations were rural and insulated, with only a few wealthy members who traveled. Therefore, association life helped connect church members beyond their local perspective.\(^\text{74}\) Local association meetings were held in May or June. Delegates elected a moderator and a scribe for each meeting. Visitors from other associations were welcomed, thus providing the opportunity to strengthen connections with other Baptists.\(^\text{75}\) Associations published their own periodicals, hymn collections, and circular letters.\(^\text{76}\) As Baptists allowed for more and more congregational participation, association meetings included non-pastors.\(^\text{77}\)

While evangelicalism and association life contributed to a growing sense of Baptist denominational identity, John Rippon was a crucial individual in fostering that identity. Rippon, pastor of a church at Carter Lane, Southwark, was a leader among London Baptists.\(^\text{78}\) Rippon published previous histories of Baptists and promoted the

\(^{71}\) Gilbert, *Religion and Society*, 90-91.
\(^{75}\) Nuttall, “Baptist Churches in the 1790s,” 386.
\(^{76}\) Whitley, *British Baptists*, 272-74.
\(^{77}\) Roberts, *Continuity and Change*, 225.
preservation of Baptist history. He also compiled the Baptist Annual Register from 1790 to 1802. He wanted to encourage Baptists, especially in their evangelism, by publishing the records of achievements from across the denomination. Rippon’s Baptist Annual Register made Particular Baptists aware of each other’s work by reporting on churches, pastors, meetings, publications, circular letters, and overseas missions. The Register, along with missionary societies, and associations and their circular letters, did much to unite Particular Baptists with a well-defined religious identity.

Despite that increasingly distinct identity, evangelicalism led Baptists to cooperate more closely with other Dissenting denominations. Evangelical Dissenters shared the features of support for itinerant preaching and the importance of laymen’s activities. Nondenominational Sunday schools exhibited cooperation among denominations to maximize efforts. Having Sunday schools open to all was more important than restricting attendance based on a covenant of baptized believers. William Carey thought that international missions would benefit from cooperation among denominations. In the realm of political action, however, Baptists had long before begun working with other groups. The Protestant Dissenting Deputies, which consisted of lay Presbyterian, Baptist, and Independent members, first met in 1732. Every Dissenting church in London sent two deputies to that committee for political action.

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79 Manley, “John Rippon,” 110, 118.
81 Brown, English Baptists, 118.
82 Brown, English Baptists, 131.
83 Roberts, Continuity and Change, 251.
84 Gilbert, Religion and Society, 53.
85 Gilbert, Religion and Society, 59.
88 Brown, English Baptists, 53-54.
89 Whitley, British Baptists, 197.
Their original meeting grew out of a desire to apply to Parliament for the repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts.  

Baptists demonstrated a common bond with other Dissenters by criticizing the legal restrictions against them because of their religion. Baptists resented limits on their opportunities:

Every Dissenter in England is excluded from all ecclesiastical employment of honour and profit in the kingdom. No Dissenter can be admitted to command in the army or navy, were even his country invaded, nor to collect any part of the public revenue, nor to act as a magistrate, nor to graduate in either of the universities, not even to take a degree of Doctor of Music or Physic, which employments do not seem to have any reference to the state. . . . This civil incapacity makes Dissenters be looked upon by the vulgar, most unjustly, as rebels and enemies to government, and to a family which they placed on the throne; and in all seasons of alarm and tumult, they have experienced, and do experience, great evils in this day.

Baptists clearly implied that the ascension of William and Mary would have been impossible without the consent and support of Dissenters. Therefore, Dissenters deserved rights that other citizens possessed. Baptists also complained about their obligations to the established church, despite their rejection of that church: “Dissenters pay all taxes and tythes, and are obliged to serve offices in the church, which are attended only with labour and expence, as churchwarden, &c. subject to heavy penalties if they do not serve, or find, at their own expence, a proper substitute!!!” The Particular Baptists, though tolerated, were certainly not treated as equals. Thus, they desired reform.

Several historians offer insight into Baptist aspirations for reform by attributing to the Baptists a long-term tradition of pushing for religious toleration. 

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90 Watts, *Dissenters*, vol. II, 485-86.
92 “Civil State of Dissenters,” 524.
argues that they used an individualist approach as the basis for that effort. Baptists believed that anyone could understand basic Christian truths by studying the Bible with the help of the Holy Spirit.  Therefore, a hierarchy such as the Church of England was unnecessary, and separating church and state represented the only way to achieve religious toleration. Henriques argues that, because of their individualist approach, Baptists were leaders for toleration whom other supporters of toleration followed. Barrie White and Tony Peck echo Henriques in portraying a tradition of Baptist efforts to dismantle the state’s establishment of a church. They place the initial opposition as early as 1612 in the person of Thomas Helwys, who went to prison for his views. Baptists believed that the Anglicans should not have a religious monopoly and, in fact, that there should be no state imposition of religion. The goal of Christians should be preaching for conversions rather than punishing for deviance from the established church. Furthermore, the state had no right to command obedience in conscience or religion. Even if someone was not a Christian, religion was between the individual and God. Therefore, faith should be voluntary, not coerced. Though they favored religious toleration, Baptists pledged their loyalty to the state during the French Revolution, arguing that civil responsibility can accompany religious freedom. Though late eighteenth-century rational Dissenters, who rejected the Trinity, as well as the divinity of Christ, became the leaders for religious toleration, most Baptists, who were orthodox Trinitarians, still desired toleration. As an example of the continued Baptist belief in

94 Henriques, Religious Toleration, 22.  
96 Henriques, Religious Toleration, 31, 70.]
toleration, in 1791 the Yorkshire and Lancashire Particular Baptist Association declared there was “nothing ‘more injurious to the Christian interest than Religious Bigotry.’”97

The goal of religious toleration reflected a desire for liberty, which also influenced the Baptist view that government should protect the rights of its citizens. William Carey argued that evangelical opportunity only came with civil and religious liberty.98 Most Baptists tended to think of freedom and evangelism as inseparable. They feared that the loss of one would lead to the loss of the other.99 Robert Hole places eighteenth-century Baptists within a basic Christian belief that God ordained governments. Specific forms of government, however, were human creations, so change in those forms was possible.100 Two Baptist ministers represented that position in the years immediately prior to the 1790s, thereby establishing a precedent for the views expressed in that decade. Caleb Evans, who had responded to John Wesley concerning the American Revolution, emphasized popular rights, specifically that the people were the origin of all power under God. If government acted for the good of the people, God had clearly ordained it. This did open the possibility of resistance to an unjust government; the people could retake power, according to Evans’s interpretation of Paul’s letters in the New Testament.101 In addition, Robert Robinson, a Baptist minister in Cambridge during the American Revolution, argued that Paul meant that government was divinely appointed, not the governors. Furthermore, reason rather than faith determined the best government. There was no need for revelation to have government; government was a secular matter. Robinson echoed Evans in claiming that government could

97 Ward, Religion and Society, 19.
98 Brown, English Baptists, 135.
100 Hole, Pulpits, 21, 28.
exercise authority only while protecting individual rights. Otherwise, the people could resist their government.\textsuperscript{102} Robinson seemed to confirm suspicions that Dissenters were politically radical and his name was invoked in parliamentary debates in 1787 and 1790 as a symbol of danger.\textsuperscript{103}

According to the confession of faith to which Particular Baptists adhered, God alone was the lord of conscience, not men’s ideas or demands. Baptists would accept nothing contrary to God’s word, arguing that anything requiring “absolute and blind obedience, is to destroy liberty of conscience, and reason also.”\textsuperscript{104} Therefore, the Baptists offered a religious test for government officials:

God the supreme Lord and King of all the world, hath ordained civil magistrates to be under him, (Rom. 13:1-4) over the people, for his own glory, and the public good; and to this end hath armed them with the power of the sword, for defence and encouragement of them that do good, and for the punishment of evil doers.\textsuperscript{105}

Thus, the Baptists clearly stated that government existed for both the glory of God and the public good. In that context, Christians could participate in government, even during a time of war:

It is lawful for Christians to accept and execute the office of a magistrate, when called thereunto; in the management whereof, as they ought especially to maintain (2 Sam. 23:3) justice and peace, according to the wholesome laws of each kingdom and commonwealth: So for that end they may lawfully now under the New Testament (Lk 3:14) wage war upon just and necessary occasions.\textsuperscript{106}

\textsuperscript{101} Hole, \textit{Pulpits}, 28.
\textsuperscript{102} Hole, \textit{Pulpits}, 28-29.
\textsuperscript{103} Brown, \textit{English Baptists}, 133.
\textsuperscript{105} “Confession of Faith,” 33.
\textsuperscript{106} “Confession of Faith,” 33.
In the ideal situation when magistrates lived up to their calling by God, Christian citizens owed loyalty and respect:

Civil magistrates being set up by God, for the ends aforesaid; subjection in all lawful things commanded by them, ought to be yielded by us in the Lord, not only for wrath, (Rom 13:5-7) but for conscience sake; and ought to make supplications and prayers for kings, and all that are in authority, (1 Tim. 2:12) that under them we may live a quiet and peaceable life, in all godliness and honesty.\textsuperscript{107}

Baptists sought such a quiet life, but they continued to fear restrictions on their freedom of worship. In a sense, government had failed to protect Dissenters adequately.

The circular letter of the Northampton Association in June 1791 offered some possible guidelines for Baptist action in society. In general, there was an emphasis on Baptists working for peace: \textit{“strive for the things that make for peace among your fellow-men, and fellow-christians.”}\textsuperscript{108} That implies that pressing for religious liberty could be detrimental. At the very least, it should be restricted to rare occasions: “Avoid interfering in the temporal concerns of others.Unless persons act immorally, so as to bring disgrace upon religion, we have no concern with their affairs.” To several Baptist ministers, though, the establishment had disgraced Christianity. According to the Northampton letter, there were appropriate times for such anger: “There are cases, to be sure, in which we have a right to be offended, yea, in which it is our duty.” That opening counteracted to some extent the injunctions for peace and unity. The call to peace had its limits: \textit{“sacrifice almost any thing for the peace and welfare of society, except truth, and a good conscience.”}\textsuperscript{109} So if Baptists saw the state as acting immorally or against truth,

\textsuperscript{107} “Confession of Faith,” 33.
\textsuperscript{109} Rippon, \textit{Baptist Annual Register}, vol. 1, 197.
or behaving in way that violated Christian principles, Baptists could, with good conscience, speak out against the government.

Even so, Baptists disagreed on the propriety of criticizing the government. Many were reluctant to do so; they believed that political action distracted them from saving souls.\textsuperscript{110} Religion would be desecrated if tied too closely to the world. The violence of the Terror in France, and the meetings restrictions in Britain contributed to many Baptists adopting an “apolitical and conservative stance.”\textsuperscript{111} Carey believed that, according to biblical principle, he should be a peaceful subject under any government.\textsuperscript{112} Andrew Fuller argued that Christians should be obedient, and that they departed from God whenever they entered political disputes.\textsuperscript{113} Faced with the threat of persecution, David Kinghorn participated in no peace petitions or political discussions.\textsuperscript{114} Rather than adopting a quiescent stance, some Baptists even actively supported the government. Josiah Thompson gave £100 to assist Britain’s war effort against France.\textsuperscript{115} Thomas Tayler celebrated the naval victories of 1798 as a sign of God’s approval of that war.\textsuperscript{116}

In contrast, some ministers rejected both of those approaches and preferred to voice their criticisms. William Winterbotham argued that the British should be like the French and make a stand for liberty if the king did not observe and uphold the laws.\textsuperscript{117} Mark Wilks maintained his support of the French Revolution even during its radical

\textsuperscript{110} Watts, Dissenters, vol. II, 352.
\textsuperscript{111} Watts, Dissenters, vol. II, 353.
\textsuperscript{112} Watts, Dissenters, vol. II, 356.
\textsuperscript{113} Watts, Dissenters, vol. II, 357.
\textsuperscript{115} Watts, Dissenters, vol. II, 357.
\textsuperscript{116} Watts, Dissenters, vol. II, 356.
\textsuperscript{117} Watts, Dissenters, vol. II, 354.
Previously, many Baptist ministers had sympathized with the American colonists in revolution. Yet support for the American Revolution did not involve an effort for social change at home. With the French Revolution, however, Baptists sought change in Britain. Their views on war, government, and rights, as well as their willingness, unlike the Methodists, to express political opinions, meant that Baptists offered an alternative to the establishment. They hoped for religious liberty for all:

The astonishing Revolution in FRANCE, and the increasing thirst among the nations after civil and religious liberty, should greatly encourage us to pray, that they may also enjoy spiritual evangelical liberty, called in scripture the glorious liberty of the children of God! The POPE’s own subjects in Avignon, where those Antichristian Pontiffs once resided for 70 years, viz. from 1307 to 1377, affords some additional encouragement to hope for the approaching downfall of mystical Babylon. May the ravenous beast, Despotism, which has so long supported the harlot, False Religion, be shortly slain by the well-tempered, great, and strong sword of Jehovah.

Such statements fueled the establishment’s fear of Dissenters’ warmth for the French Revolution, and Baptists did sympathize with the French, though eventually the bloodshed and anarchy reduced Baptist support for the revolution. Yet even when the French executed their king in January 1793 and declared war on Britain the following month, Baptists only disapproved of the revolution’s violence. They continued to identify with the aim of liberty. Joseph Kinghorn, pastor of the largest Baptist church in Norwich, could not wish ill for the French people who had just become free, and he celebrated the destruction of the Bastille. Mark Wilks saw “the hand of God” when

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118 Watts, Dissenters, vol. II, 357.
119 Himbury, British Baptists, 123.
120 Himbury, British Baptists, 123.
122 Rippon, Baptist Annual Register, vol. 1, 167.
123 Brown, English Baptists, 133.
124 Brown, English Baptists, 134; Watts, Dissenters, vol. II, 482.
Louis XVI was captured, and Robert Hall exulted in that blow against despotism.\textsuperscript{125}

James Bicheno described the French Revolution as a struggle for liberty, both civil and religious.\textsuperscript{126}

Despite that position, Baptists tended to support the British war effort against France, within certain parameters. Michael Haykin offers some justification for Baptist support for the war with France. Baptists believed that the injunction of Matthew 5:39, in which believers are instructed to turn their cheeks and not to resist evil, was never a universal absolute.\textsuperscript{127} Therefore, fighting for the nation was acceptable, and during the war with France, Baptist ministers emphasized duty. They were certainly willing to defend the nation in case of invasion.\textsuperscript{128} Other biblical passages supported that position. In Romans 13, Paul encouraged believers to be subject to the authorities as instituted by God. In John 18, Christ did not turn his cheek when struck by a guard for his answer to the Jewish high priest. He did so, not out of a desire to retaliate, but for justice. Thus, Baptists could support a war for justice. In this case, they were not out to ruin France, just to defend Britain. In addition, the Calvinistic Baptist Second London Confession affirmed the military defense of the nation.\textsuperscript{129} Yet from their beginnings Baptists had advocated peace, and they continued to desire peace.\textsuperscript{130} John Sutcliff, pastor at Olney, fasted daily and prayed for peace.\textsuperscript{131} Robert Hall and John Rippon could support a

\textsuperscript{125} Watts,\textit{ Dissenters}, vol. II, 482.
\textsuperscript{126} Macleod,\textit{ War of Ideas}, 153-54.
\textsuperscript{128} Haykin, “Resisting Evil,” 220-22.
\textsuperscript{129} Haykin, “Resisting Evil,” 223.
defensive, just war, accompanied by prayer and repentance.\textsuperscript{132} Other Baptists remained relatively silent on the issue of war. For example, the Baptist Western Association in 1794 lamented the war’s costs in finances and in lives. The association also expressed opposition to military training on the Sabbath, but otherwise, there was no mention of the war in the association’s reports.\textsuperscript{133}

Frank Mauldin has outlined a Baptist definition of truth that suggests why Particular Baptists held a distinct denominational identity within the nation. Baptists rejected the established church, and thereby rejected the national definition of Christianity, because the source of truth was beyond the nation. God was truth, and Christ was truth as the revelation of God.\textsuperscript{134} In that sense, an individual could only experience truth in intimate acquaintance with Jesus Christ, not through a particular church.\textsuperscript{135} People could find knowledge of God in the Bible, but the Bible did not contain all knowledge. For example, it held no scientific learning. It did provide information on God and humans, the concepts of sin and salvation, and rules for living.\textsuperscript{136} Yet because the Bible did not incorporate all truth, Baptists could turn to other sources for their political ideas, as their religious and political identities were largely separate.

Baptists’ distinctiveness was evident in their desire for greater liberty and in their criticism of the establishment. With that in mind, there is a middle ground of interpretation between Linda Colley and Jonathan Clark, who both assume a larger degree of national consensus than existed. Baptists show that a superimposed national identity was not entirely successful. Because Baptists desired religious and even political

\textsuperscript{132} Lovegrove, “Evangelical Dissent,” 273.
\textsuperscript{133} Lovegrove, “Evangelical Dissent,” 267; Lovegrove, \textit{Sectarian People}, 131.
reform, they cannot be considered genuinely conservative. Most Baptist ministers
desired significant change in the structure of British society. Therefore, in a situation of
declining Anglican influence, the Baptists offered relevant criticism of the establishment
and, therefore, an alternate identity. Baptists were anti-Catholic, but the threat of France
did not subsume their identity as an orthodox evangelical Dissenting denomination in
favor of a developing British identity.

Baptists were viewed as enemies because the establishment feared the loss of
social control from both itinerant preaching and the possible removal of religious
restrictions. Yet Baptists simply wanted what they saw as their rights. They did not want
to contribute to a church not of their own choosing. They sought the repeal of the Test
and Corporation Acts. They desired equal opportunities to serve as sailors, soldiers,
magistrates, and tax collectors. They did so as an orthodox denomination. What Baptists
desired most was a genuinely Christian nation and for the British people to be true
followers of Christ. They believed their nation was the best, but they thought it was
growing unfaithful to God. Therefore, they presented distinct aspirations. Even Jonathan
Clark concedes that, despite their relatively low numbers, Baptists were strong where the
Church was strongest, thereby “offering an alternative, a challenge deliberately hostile to
the Establishment.”  

Baptists were not part of an Anglican hegemony, but neither were they part of a broad Protestant consensus.

Baptists were loyal British citizens despite their desire for change. According to
Himbury, “throughout their history Baptists have married a desire for reform with their

loyalty to the existing order.” The Baptists were reformers, not radicals or revolutionaries. They did not advocate the overthrow of the government; they did wish that the government, as leaders of a Christian nation, would have greater integrity. The slave trade and evangelism, including itinerancy, were issues on which Baptists morally disagreed with the government. Because they separated religious and national identities, their politics did not necessarily stem from religion. Yet their religious views contributed to their desire for Britain to have no established church. In addition, Baptist evangelical interests at home and abroad meant that Baptists had priorities beyond government issues. They were loyal Britons, but because they disagreed on the nature of true Protestant Christianity, Baptists had a distinct identity alongside their attachment to their nation.

138 Himbury, British Baptists, 124.
CHAPTER 5

WILLIAM WINTERBOTHAM: BAPTIST AND BRITON

William Winterbotham exemplifies a religious identity distinct from a national one, with firm attachments to both. He had a sense of national identity and he was loyal to that identity, but it differed from the prevailing establishment view. Though he accepted that a magistrate’s authority came from God, he did not accept that the magistrate’s exercise of that authority was necessarily godly. Winterbotham saw the promotion and protection of liberty as government’s highest priority. He interpreted 1688 as the nation’s deliverance from both tyranny and Catholicism. He believed that the nation had drifted off course, largely because the government had failed to live up to its responsibility. Winterbotham placed his hope for redress in the nation’s institutions, such as the constitution and the House of Commons, but only if they returned to their earlier principles. By reforming the duration of Parliament, the size of the electorate, and the scale of aristocratic influence, the people could reassert their political power. In addition to his call for political reform, Winterbotham advocated religious toleration, despite an anti-Catholic attitude. He opposed discrimination against Dissenters. Winterbotham defended his right and his responsibility to speak on political issues as a citizen and as a minister. While reform was the duty of Britons, obedience was the obligation of Christians. Yet Christians owed only limited obedience to the government. Winterbotham’s outspokenness led the government to make an example of him to discourage sedition. The government saw him as symbolic of a threat to order and stability. His congregation, consisting largely of the laboring orders, only intensified the establishment’s fears. His emphasis on religious and political liberty meant he offered an
alternative to the establishment. He served four years in prison for two political sermons he preached in November 1792.

In his confidence in his nation and its institutions, Winterbotham shows his participation in a national identity, but he also illustrates the diversity within that identity. At first glance, Winterbotham’s anti-Catholic rhetoric might seem to support Colley’s assertion of unity growing from competition with an external enemy. Yet Winterbotham became an advocate for religious toleration. At the same time, Winterbotham did not shy away from criticizing his nation. He offered much more criticism within Protestantism than Colley would allow. His sermons, and his imprisonment for them, represent clear evidence that he embraced the reformist impulse, and was perceived as dangerous because of that, well beyond anything Clark acknowledges for orthodox Dissenters.

Winterbotham was born in 1763 in London, the sixth of fifteen children. He grew up in a family that was strictly Anglican, particularly his father. Winterbotham left school in the middle of the 1770s, because he disagreed with the schoolmaster, and he became apprenticed to a silversmith. His master was involved in politics and he influenced Winterbotham toward anti-papist and pro-American views. Winterbotham did not receive the offer of a partnership, so in 1784 he opened his own business as a buckle-maker. Because of illness, though, he had to return to his parents’ home.¹

The religious journey that resulted in his imprisonment began when his brother went to a Calvinist Methodist chapel and converted. In the summer of 1786, Winterbotham visited services to familiarize himself with Dissenters’ beliefs, so that he

could more effectively argue against his brother’s conversion. Instead, though, he
himself converted, and at first joined the Methodists. Winterbotham wanted to preach
soon after his conversion and he delivered his first sermon in the summer of 1787.
Despite his lack of formal training, he embarked on an itinerant ministry, without holding
a regular job. He continued to live at home, in spite of strained relations with his parents.
Eventually Winterbotham rejected infant baptism and was himself baptized in 1789 by a
deacon of a Baptist chapel. In December of that year he received and accepted an offer to
become the assistant to Philip Gibbs, Plymouth’s Baptist minister, earning fifty pounds a
year. Winterbotham moved to Plymouth in January 1790, and Michael Durey suggests
that Gibbs became a substitute for Winterbotham’s intolerant father. In addition,
Winterbotham’s post allowed him to be part of a community in which he faced no
disparagement for his religious beliefs, unlike the situation at home with his parents. At
the same time, Plymouth provided the background for Winterbotham to continue
developing his political views. Plymouth had approximately 40,000 residents, many of
whom worked in the navy dockyard, placing them at the lower end of the social
hierarchy. In addition, approximately only 200 freemen elected Plymouth’s two
members of Parliament.²

While in Plymouth, Winterbotham, in November 1792, preached the two sermons
for which he was convicted and sentenced to a combined four years in prison and a £200
fine. He preached the first sermon on 5 November, a day the government had set aside to
commemorate two events of national importance. The first such event was the foiled
Gunpowder Plot of 1605, in which young Catholics had conspired to blow up Parliament

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2 Dictionary of National Biography, ed. H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison (Oxford: Oxford University
when King, Lords, and Commons would all be present and thereby eliminated. The plot was discovered and the conspirators were tried and executed. That date became a regular celebration as well as expression of anti-Catholicism, and thus part of English identity. The second incident was William of Orange’s landing at Torbay in 1688. That was part of a chain of events that eventually led James II, who had demonstrated Catholic and absolutist tendencies, to flee the country. Subsequently, William and his wife Mary became joint monarchs of England. To many people, that assured the Protestant succession to the throne and protected Parliament’s role in the national government. Instead of using the day to express wholehearted support for the government, Winterbotham aired his own views on the principles of government and his aspirations for the nation’s liberty.

In 1794, while in prison, Winterbotham published the two sermons and the trial record, along with his commentary.3 Although printed after he had preached them and been imprisoned for them, they serve as the best gauge of Winterbotham’s aspirations. Winterbotham acknowledged the unpopularity of his views, but justified his sermons as efforts to pursue truth.4 He was “conscious of having done what was his duty as a man and a Briton.” He clearly associated himself with a national identity and believed he was exemplifying that identity, despite his prosecution. Winterbotham stated that he had “nothing to regret on account of having embraced a cause which corruption, bigotry, and fear, have rendered unpopular.”5 Because he believed his critics had misrepresented his views, he decided to bring his case to the public. He claimed that the published sermons

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3 Mills, “Winterbotham.”
were the same as those he preached, although he did add bits of commentary in footnote form.  

Winterbotham accepted that it may have been a mistake to bring politics to his pulpit, but he defended himself by pointing out that Parliament itself had “enjoined the commemoration of the events which render the introduction of politics necessary.” Although the government, in Winterbotham’s view, was suppressing works in favor of republicanism, he argued that “our own government as by law established, was founded on the very principles of freedom which the friends of republican government contended for.” He claimed common cause with those who advocated parliamentary reform.

Winterbotham began his sermon by addressing the meaning of the events of 1688. His text was Exodus 13:8, in which God commanded the Israelites to commemorate their deliverance from slavery in Egypt. Relating that to the events of 1688, Winterbotham stated that the English people had experienced a “deliverance, which rescued them from CIVIL and ECCLESIASTICAL OPPRESSION.” Therefore, they had the liberty to worship God according to their consciences, as long as they maintained consistency with God’s commands. Winterbotham interpreted two directives for the nation: an annual festival to commemorate the deliverance and the task of teaching the younger generation to remember what God had done. Such was the purpose of fast days, and although Winterbotham questioned the wisdom of proclaiming so many fast days, he acknowledged that commemoration of events such as those of 1688 was honorable. Yet

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5 Winterbotham, *Commemoration*, ii.
6 Winterbotham, *Commemoration*, ii-iv.
7 Winterbotham, *Commemoration*, vi.
8 Winterbotham, *Commemoration*, vii-viii.
he contended that the purpose would be thwarted “if we are not properly instructed into the NATURE and PRINCIPLES of the events we commemorate.” To preserve the purpose of the annual commemoration, he offered his remarks on those events. After all, Christians could better praise God if they understood the importance of those past events. Yet Winterbotham refused to confine his remarks to the previous century. He also remarked “on what ought to be our duty as BRITONS and CHRISTIANS” in contemporary circumstances. To clarify that duty, though, he pointed to the people of 1688: “THEIR VIRTUE, COURAGE, and PATRIOTISM, ought to be kept in view as EXAMPLES, which under like circumstances ought to be imitated.” In a footnote that was not in the original sermon, Winterbotham stated his belief that if a monarch imitated James II by subverting the constitution, then “the people have the right to follow the example of their forefathers and hurl the despot from the throne.”

Despite that hint of criticism of his government, Winterbotham tried to strike a chord of unity. For this commemoration, he declared that “all PARTY SPIRIT ought to be abolished” to avoid sectarian strife. He pointed out the negative example of the Birmingham riots of 14 July 1791, during which a mob had reacted to supporters of the French Revolution by destroying the home of Joseph Priestley and burning several Dissenting meeting-houses. That showed “one part of the nation railing at and abusing the other.” In contrast, the events of 1688 were “not the triumphs of a party but of a nation in which every individual, whether churchman or dissenter, ought to take his share

10 Winterbotham, *Commemoration*, 3.
12 Winterbotham, *Commemoration*, 5.
and no distinguishing names be known but those of a Briton and a Christian.\textsuperscript{14} Though it appears Winterbotham emphasized the British identity over the English identity, he clearly separated that national identity from a spiritual identity.

Winterbotham introduced some doubt into his call for unity by stating that the national bond stemmed from the nation’s “deliverance from the yoke of Papal Tyranny and oppression” and freedom from the “persecuting spirit of the Church of Rome.”\textsuperscript{15} In a footnote, Winterbotham asserted that overthrowing Catholic influence was so vital that despite the victims of the French Revolution, “I cannot bring myself to be the enemy of what I consider as the praise worthy attempt of a great nation, to that Liberty which is their inherent right, and which despotism had deprived them of.”\textsuperscript{16} To illustrate the importance of that liberty, Winterbotham used England, particularly in the period from 1553 to 1558, as an example of Catholic oppression. Winterbotham described scenes of a “venerable Prelate, fastened to the stake, yielding up his spirit ‘midst devouring flames’” and a “Husband torn from the arms of a beloved Partner and tender offspring, dragged to the dreary dungeon, racked with excruciating torments, and consigned to death.”\textsuperscript{17} In Winterbotham’s view, Catholics had attempted to return England to the papal yoke with the Spanish Armada of 1588 and James II’s efforts to ruin the constitution.\textsuperscript{18}

Winterbotham seemed to waver on the issues of unity and toleration, because despite his remonstrances against Catholics, he professed to favor religious toleration. In a footnote he stated that as he was “determined to enjoy liberty of conscience myself, I

\textsuperscript{14} Winterbotham, \textit{Commemoration}, 7.
\textsuperscript{15} Winterbotham, \textit{Commemoration}, 7.
\textsuperscript{16} Winterbotham, \textit{Commemoration}, 10.
\textsuperscript{17} Winterbotham, \textit{Commemoration}, 11.
\textsuperscript{18} Winterbotham, \textit{Commemoration}, 12.
shall ever be the advocate for extending it to others.” He further clarified his concept of toleration:

The conduct, and not the Creed, will to me ever be the criterion of Christianity—as a dissenter suffering under, but struggling for, the abolition of the remains of feudal Oppression, I am free to say, I shall ever deem that Government tyrannic that does not afford equal advantages to the Catholic and Protestant—the Churchman and Dissenter, the professor of Judaism and the follower of Mahomet.19

Though Winterbotham wrote as an imprisoned Dissenter, such a statement reinforces the notion of Baptists continuing to support religious toleration. Durey explains that the change in Winterbotham’s tone between the anti-Catholicism of the sermon and the toleration of the later commentary stemmed from Winterbotham’s becoming more radical while he was in prison. When Winterbotham edited his sermons in June 1794, “his views had lurched further to the left.” His cellmates at Newgate included twelve men of various religious persuasions awaiting trial for treason as well as several accused of sedition and seditious libel.20 Owing to his interaction with those individuals, he could recant his anti-papal rhetoric and add Jews and Muslims to his definition of religious toleration: “Undoubtedly, his religious liberalism was awakened in part by the generous manner in which members of other denominations treated him in the early stages of his imprisonment. Unitarians in particular were prepared to express their solidarity.”21

In the sermon, once he had demonstrated the significance of the deliverance from Catholicism, Winterbotham elaborated on the importance of 1688 beyond religion. He stressed the power of the nation’s people and its fullest expression, the Parliament. In 1688 the problem was James II’s desire to achieve “the extirpation of the FEW SPARKS

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19 Winterbotham, _Commemoration_, 13.
OF LIBERTY” remaining. In that situation, God used William to save the nation.

Yet William’s authority was not necessarily divine: “the voice of the nation, thro’ its representatives” proclaimed a vacant throne, and then from gratitude made William king.

Winterbotham borrowed many of his political principles from the Unitarian Richard Price, who helped shape debate concerning government in the 1790s. Price had long advocated Dissenters’ political rights and religious liberty. In addition, he contended that government corruption had subverted the people’s rights that had been guaranteed in the revolution settlement of 1689. Price saw the king as a servant, while the people had the power to participate in, oversee, and control the government. He urged political reform; otherwise, the nation would experience a revolution.

Although Winterbotham used the political opinions of the heterodox Price, he expressed those opinions as an orthodox Dissenter. Therefore, Winterbotham shows that the reformist impulse was not limited to the heterodox, and that people of distinct religious backgrounds could share the same approach to politics.

Echoing Price, Winterbotham expounded three basic principles to be learned from 1688, the first being that “all government originates with the people.” Winterbotham did not use ‘people’ to refer to “a faction or a party, but the whole or at least a majority of the nation.” When the people chose William, they “FIXED THE TERMS ON WHICH THEY TENDERED HIM THE CROWN.” Indeed, “the liberties then secured were not

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22 Winterbotham, Commemoration, 14.
23 Winterbotham, Commemoration, 14-15.
24 Winterbotham, Commemoration, 15-16.
26 Winterbotham, Commemoration, 16.
requested as favors, but demanded as of right.”27 William had defended the Protestant interest, “for which the nation freely bestowed on him what they had A RIGHT TO DISPOSE OF; a Crown limited and guarded by law.” Yet William’s kingship was “not by conquest, but by the choice of the people thro’ their representatives.”28 Because Parliament acted to exclude Catholics from succession, Winterbotham argued that it was “therefore evident that the Crown of England is subject to the limitations of Parliament, as the representatives and trustees of the nation at large, and therefore must have originated with the people, in order for them to possess such a controlling power.” If the throne were ever vacant, Parliament had the power to choose a king because it represented the public.29

Winterbotham’s second principle from 1688 was that “the people have a right to cashier governors for misconduct.”30 Because government had no power from any source other than the people from which it derived, the people had the right to replace their governors.31 Winterbotham contended that the English constitution embodied the principle that “the power of government is a power exercised by delegation.” He used that idea to explain the events of 1688. There was “a mutual contract between the King and people” and James II had broken it: “James, in violating the laws, the condition of the contract, JUSTIFIED the resistance of the subject” and eventually the replacement of James as king. The people expressed themselves through Parliament: “the nation has DELEGATED its right of determining on the propriety of public concerns to the Parliament” and “nothing less than a majority of the nation can annul the Delegation.”

27 Winterbotham, Commemoration, 17.
28 Winterbotham, Commemoration, 18.
29 Winterbotham, Commemoration, 19-20.
30 Winterbotham, Commemoration, 16.
Despite his praise for Parliament, Winterbotham acknowledged that there would be a problem if Parliament tried to take over the executive power, which clearly was the king’s. Yet he expressed hope in the ultimate efficacy of Parliament.\textsuperscript{32}

The third principle of 1688 was that “the people have a right to change the form of their government if they think it proper to do so.”\textsuperscript{33} Winterbotham certainly did not expect regular changes in government. In his view, people would suffer long before acting: “The dread of innovation, and the vast importance of the subject will weigh too much on their minds to permit a change on trivial occasions, and will effectually prevent an undue exercise of this power.”\textsuperscript{34} Even so, power to change the structure of government was most secure when vested in the nation’s people, because the king and the legislature could be tempted to misuse it. Yet “in the body of the nation it can never be called forth, TILL CORRUPTION AND OPPRESSION HAVE SO FAR EXTENDED THEMSELVES AS TO RENDER ALL OTHER MEANS INEFFECTUAL.” Winterbotham stated that such conditions existed when the nation brought an end to the Stuarts’ reign.\textsuperscript{35}

Winterbotham believed that those three principles were “the principles contained in and established by that REVOLUTION which is the basis of the BRITISH GOVERNMENT.”\textsuperscript{36} If those principles had been remembered and “cherished,” and liberty been better guarded, then “the artful designs of DESPOTIC MINISTERS” would never have “been able to efface it as they have done.”\textsuperscript{37} Thus Winterbotham made the

\begin{itemize}
\item Winterbotham, Commemoration, 20-21.
\item Winterbotham, Commemoration, 21-22.
\item Winterbotham, Commemoration, 16.
\item Winterbotham, Commemoration, 23.
\item Winterbotham, Commemoration, 24.
\item Winterbotham, Commemoration, 17.
\item Winterbotham, Commemoration, 25.
\end{itemize}
transition to current conditions and complained that “the Government fixed at the Revolution which we this day commemorate, was inadequate to secure the blessings which all government ought to secure, or that the spirit of it is so departed from, as to render it impotent.”

Although there may have been structural imperfections in the settlement of 1688, “the great source of our evils takes its rise in a departure from its principles.”  As an example, Winterbotham argued that the government had abandoned its responsibility in the nation’s finances. National debt and interest had led to tax burdens that “in a time of peace while our Commerce is extended to a degree hitherto unknown, and while much is said of the goodness of our Constitution, fill our streets with beggars, our workhouses with poor, and our gaols with felons and debtors.” In such a statement, Winterbotham demonstrated that he paid attention to the lower classes, thereby contributing to the establishment’s perceptions of him as a radical.

Because the real problem was not in the constitution but in the abandonment of its principles, Winterbotham advocated parliamentary reform, but within the context of maintaining national institutions, not overthrowing them. He argued that the House of Commons lasting seven years directly violated the constitution. The settlement of 1688 included the right to frequent Parliaments, and Winterbotham claimed that every seven years was not frequent. That long tenure for Parliaments had created an electoral system in which some candidates spent vast sums to get elected, “while the HONEST and INDIPENDANT MAN, is deterred by the expence of a contested election, from even standing forward as a Candidate.” The political structure clearly limited opportunity.

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38 Winterbotham, *Commemoration*, 25.
40 Winterbotham, *Commemoration*, 27.
Winterbotham offered another complaint concerning the House of Commons: “the partial manner in which it is chosen is another manifest departure from the spirit of the constitution.” The root problem was that “the number of actual voters will scarce bear any comparison with the unrepresented part of the nation.”\textsuperscript{42} Besides leaving most of the nation underrepresented, the electoral system also allowed undue influence to accumulate in the hands of only few people: “The bill of rights declares the election of members of Parliament ought to be free—yet the greater part are returned by ARISTOCRATIC INFLUENCE, MINISTERIAL MANEUVERS, and ROTTEN CORPORATIONS.” As an example, Winterbotham claimed that the borough in which he preached was one of the best represented, but still only 163 individuals chose a member of Parliament for 12,000 residents, and many of those voting did so under direction and unlawful influence.\textsuperscript{43} Because of those electoral issues, representatives in Parliament had abandoned their responsibility to express the nation’s voice.\textsuperscript{44}

Moving from criticism of aristocratic influence in his own country, Winterbotham offered comments on France, “a nation we have long been led to condemn; oppressed by a TYRANT, and kept under by ARISTOCRATIC influence.” Yet the French had “founded government on the imprescriptible rights of man.” Even in late 1792 Winterbotham offered praise for the French Revolution: “This event, whether we view it as Christians, or Britons, ought to afford us joy.”\textsuperscript{45} Winterbotham clearly implied here that Christian and Briton were separate identities, but in this case, he found cause for celebration within each. Winterbotham could support the French Revolution as a

\textsuperscript{42} Winterbotham, \textit{Commemoration}, 29.
\textsuperscript{43} Winterbotham, \textit{Commemoration}, 30.
\textsuperscript{44} Winterbotham, \textit{Commemoration}, 31.
\textsuperscript{45} Winterbotham, \textit{Commemoration}, 32.
Christian, because it dealt a blow to popery and opened the possibility of spreading the truth. As a Briton, Winterbotham believed the French Revolution would be crucial in “preventing further wars, and as a consequence any greater accumulation of national debt.” He proved quite mistaken in that expectation of peace, but the war between Britain and France had not begun at the time of Winterbotham’s sermon. In a footnote, Winterbotham pointed out that he preached his sermon before the government in France had changed, and the king had not been on trial. Winterbotham argued that his sermon had no application to the new government situation in France.

In his closing admonitions, Winterbotham urged his congregation toward toleration. Because they had access to scripture, the members of the congregation should exercise their liberty and “take no doctrine on trust, however zealous the preacher may appear.” They needed to test the truth of any minister’s statements. At the same time, even if they disagreed with someone on religion, they should show toleration: “Persecute no man for his religious tenets however different from your own—Extend with pleasure to others the liberty you claim for yourselves.” Winterbotham encouraged his listeners to behave honorably toward others even if they disagreed on religious creeds.

Beyond acting out those principles themselves, the members of the congregation had a responsibility to “attend with diligence and care to the instruction of the rising generation.” That responsibility extended beyond parents: “the children of the poor are in a degree yours, and the greatest kindness you can possibly do them, is to attend to the

46 Winterbotham, Commemoration, 33.
47 Winterbotham, Commemoration, 33-34.
48 Winterbotham, Commemoration, 34.
49 Winterbotham, Commemoration, 35.
early cultivation of their minds.”50 In particular, Winterbotham stressed the necessity of teaching liberty: “it is your duty to instil into the minds of the rising Generation, proper principles of CIVIL AND RELIGIOUS LIBERTY, for nothing can be more prejudicial to their habits, or the freedom of the Land, than the inculcation of principles of blind passive obedience.”51 Freedom was so important that the nation’s people had to work toward reform, but not revolution:

As Britons in the present important crisis, it behoves you to act with that dignity, which has long characterized the Nation to which you belong—we labour under evils, but we need not throw ourselves into a state of anarchy and confusion to obtain redress; to this you should prove superior; we want neither Revolution nor Blood—A reform in the representative system is allowed by almost all parties to be necessary and essential to the continuance of our national prosperity; and if ever this is properly effected, every other evil will gradually cease to exist—It is therefore the duty of every Briton who values his individual or national prosperity, to unite in promoting to the utmost of his ability, every legal attempt for the obtaining of so desirable an end.52

Winterbotham celebrated his nation’s prosperity, but that never meant the nation had reached its potential. Therefore, he qualified his celebration of the nation and expressed his aspirations for the government, still using the context of educating the children:

Instead therefore of teaching your offspring blindly that they are governed by King, Lords, and Commons, teach them that these are men; that the excellence of their government is not in having King, Lords and Commons, but in King, Lords and Commons governing according to Laws, which secure the rights of every individual of the realm, and who are only worthy of esteem, while they respect and venerate these rights.53

50 Winterbotham, Commemoration, 35.
51 Winterbotham, Commemoration, 36.
52 Winterbotham, Commemoration, 36.
53 Winterbotham, Commemoration, 37.
Winterbotham defended one of those rights by asserting his right to preach his sermon: “I should have but a mean opinion of the boasted Liberty of my Country, if on this occasion I was not permitted freely to express my sentiments.”

Less than two weeks after that sermon, on 18 November 1792, Winterbotham preached the second sermon for which he faced prosecution. In it he explored the general principles of government, using Romans 13 as his text. He argued that in this chapter Paul provided a system of Christian politics. In that system, legal authority resided in the magistrate. In Winterbotham’s view, Paul asserted that it is natural to have degrees, and thus subordination, in society. Winterbotham argued that the apostle was wrong, because the magistrate’s authority “must depend on LOCAL CIRCUMSTANCES AND THE VOICE OF THE PEOPLE.” Winterbotham acknowledged the need for a chief magistrate, such as a king. Yet he distinguished between God, the basis of the magistrate’s authority, and the magistrate's use of that authority.

Using verse 4, in which Paul described the magistrate as God’s minister for good, Winterbotham outlined four ways the magistrate could effect good. In a natural sense, the magistrate protected individuals and property. In a moral sense, the magistrate instructed the ignorant, largely through punishing vice and rewarding virtue. In a civil sense, the magistrate extended liberty as far as possible without harming the community, until liberty impeded the social good. In a spiritual sense, the magistrate promoted religion. He could not prescribe a particular form of Christianity, or show favor to any one branch, but he could not disallow the free exercise of religion. In fact, the magistrate

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54 Winterbotham, Commemoration, 37.
55 Winterbotham, Commemoration, 39.
56 Winterbotham, Commemoration, 40.
57 Winterbotham, Commemoration, 41.
was “bound by the duties of his office to afford equal protection, and encouragement to every class of Christians in the exercise of their religious opinions and practices.” In those four ways, the magistrate should achieve the greatest social good using the least amount of property and infringing the least amount on individual liberty.

After discussing the magistrate’s responsibilities and stressing the importance of liberty in that context, Winterbotham addressed the duties of Christians. There was some ambivalence here; Christians were obligated to obey their government, but their obedience had limits. Winterbotham first addressed their obligations. Christians owed their subjection to higher powers, their governors, and the payment of tribute, or taxes. Such obedience was essential: “These are the undoubted duties of every member of a civil community and much more of Christians, who of all men are bound to keep and support order in Society, and while the magisterial powers are for good to them they are inexcusable if they do not.” If they failed to support order, Christians broke the command of God. Winterbotham placed limits on Christian obedience, though, in certain circumstances: “if on the contrary magisterial power is used for the purposes of Tyranny, and Oppression, and he that should be the minister of God for Good, becomes the Tyrant and Despot, the obligations to obedience and support undoubtedly cease.” Thus, Winterbotham opened the possibility of Christians resisting their government to preserve liberty.

In this sermon, Winterbotham used light as a metaphor for liberty and dark as a metaphor for oppression. He described his own time as darkness, largely because of its

58 Winterbotham, *Commemoration*, 42.
60 Winterbotham, *Commemoration*, 43.
61 Winterbotham, *Commemoration*, 43.
imperfect knowledge and moral deviation. Yet he also found reason to hope for the enlightenment of his own age, specifically in terms of the spread of the gospel, the coming end of slavery, the call for liberty, and the potential for religious toleration. To illustrate his view, Winterbotham used a verse from the same chapter of Romans: “The Night is far spent, the Day is at hand; let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armour of light.” Winterbotham used that verse as a way to interpret history, while looking forward to a future liberty of conscience. He referred specifically to the situation of the Gentile world, before the gospel spread, as a season of night. Men had succumbed to ignorance and superstition, and philosophy could neither lead to God nor end depravity. In their corruption, men had made images, in animal form, to represent God, and they had dishonored their own bodies. Then Christ came as the light of the world. Though the gospel represented a period of light, it was followed by a long-lasting Muslim and papal darkness, which lasted into Winterbotham’s own time: “This night has been long, and its darkness great, while its consequences have been in a great degree fatal NOT ONLY TO RELIGION, but to the PEACE, HAPPINESS, and PROSPERITY of nations and individuals.”

That darkness did not sink to the same depths as before the time of Christ, because “some rays of light and truth have made their appearance, and prevented a total relapse into Heathenism and Idolatry.” With the decline of papal influence, though, Winterbotham expressed optimism in the progress of evangelism: “the period is fast

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62 Winterbotham, Commenoration, 44.
63 Winterbotham, Commenoration, 52.
64 Winterbotham, Commenoration, 44; Romans 13:12; all scriptural quotations from the King James Version.
65 Winterbotham, Commenoration, 45.
66 Winterbotham, Commenoration, 46.
67 Winterbotham, Commenoration, 46-47.
approaching when the Gospel shall again shine forth in all its purity and lustre, and the knowledge of the Lord cover the earth as the waters cover the great deep.”

In addition, the new age of light would bring greater toleration:

The day is at hand when . . . Christians . . . will learn to esteem each other as brethren . . . each worshipping God according to the dictates of his conscience, none daring to make him afraid, and all finding that WHILE CONSCIENCE IS LEFT AT LIBERTY MEN CAN UNITE AS CITIZENS and CHRISTIANS; yea, as FRIENDS, tho’ they cannot with respect to religious sentiments see eye to eye.

With his optimism that a new day was dawning, Winterbotham exhorted his congregation to cast off darkness “in the uninterrupted light and enjoyment of God.” He encouraged his listeners to resist evil and to do good. In that context, he portrayed obedience as having “the utmost importance to a Christian course.” Winterbotham warned his congregation that disobedience could contribute to the coming of a more permanent darkness.

Winterbotham’s sermons sparked interest, partially because he preached them in Plymouth. The government worried about Plymouth, having placed it on a list of towns in which many people failed to adhere to proper principles. The government had even distributed 500 copies of loyalist songs to dock workers to try to overcome the town’s perceived radical tendencies. Winterbotham had already made himself known to the authorities through his efforts to intervene in a dispute over the water supply. Because of that, in December 1792 Plymouth’s mayor informed the Home Office of Winterbotham’s

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69 Winterbotham, *Commemoration*, 50.
70 Winterbotham, *Commemoration*, 53.
71 Winterbotham, *Commemoration*, 54.
72 Winterbotham, *Commemoration*, 58-60.
sermons. His letter reached London the week the government anticipated a rebellion, thereby solidifying the government’s determination to take action.\textsuperscript{73}

Frank Prochaska states that court cases concerning freedom of speech and press, such as Winterbotham’s, increased beginning in 1793.\textsuperscript{74} The government had little success in treason trials, so instead it used trials for seditious libel in an attempt to silence critics.\textsuperscript{75} Prochaska notes that the political climate heavily influenced the state trials of the 1790s: “Behind most of them was the assumption that defendants should be condemned, not because their opinions were untrue, but because they were untimely.”\textsuperscript{76} Before 1792, the judge decided guilt or innocence, while the jury determined the fact of publication. From 1792 on, though, the jury decided on the issue of sedition.\textsuperscript{77} The jury had to determine the presence of malicious intent, that is, words intentionally used to weaken the state without overtly threatening the king’s life.\textsuperscript{78}

Winterbotham was tried separately for each sermon, with the court dates on 25 and 26 July 1793. While in prison, Winterbotham had the trial record published, and he sarcastically dedicated the publication to the jury, for whom he had little respect. In his view, his case concerned a “question in which the dearest rights of Englishmen, and the happiness of every individual of the realm, was involved.” He believed that the jury either could have upheld the constitution or affirmed that no constitution existed. The jury’s guilty verdicts, which to Winterbotham meant a denial of the constitution, had only

\textsuperscript{73} Durey, “Trumpet of Sedition,” 151-52, 156-57.  
\textsuperscript{75} Prochaska, “English State Trials,” 66.  
\textsuperscript{76} Prochaska, “English State Trials,” 64.  
\textsuperscript{78} Prochaska, “English State Trials,” 65.
“served the cause of opposition to the governing powers.” Winterbotham condemned the jury: “by your verdicts you have sanctioned principles more tyrannic than ever the bloody despotism of France under its antient Monarchy did avow.” Furthermore, the jury had “violated the fundamental principles on which the British Government was first established, and made its laws a trap for the unwary, instead of a source of terror to the wicked.” Because of the jury’s failure, Winterbotham brought his case before the public.

For the first sermon, Winterbotham faced charges of “maliciously and seditiously intending to disquiet, molest and disturb the peace and common tranquility of our Lord the King, and of this Kingdom, and to traduce and vilify the happy Constitution and government of this Kingdom, and to bring the king and his government into hatred and contempt and to excite the subjects of the King to sedition, against his government.”

The specific charges credited Winterbotham with saying that the laws of 1688 were in disuse, approving the revolution in France, implying that England itself needed revolution, labeling national laws and taxes as oppressive, and claiming that Parliament had been dishonest in creating and then failing to reduce the national debt. Because he urged his congregation to stand for liberty, the government suspected Winterbotham of openly advocating revolution. That suspicion was further fueled by Winterbotham’s statement that the king had no right to be king, if he did not observe the laws.

79 William Winterbotham, The Trial of Wm. Winterbotham, assistant preacher at How’s Lane Meeting, Plymouth; before the Hon. Baron Perryn, and a special jury, at Exeter; On the 25th of July, 1793, for Seditious Words Charged to have been uttered in two Sermons preached on the 5th, and 18th of November, 1792, 3d ed. (London., 1794), v. Trial record also available from National Archives, TS 11 458 1524, Treasury Solicitor, King against William Winterbotham for sermon of 5 November and King against William Winterbotham for sermon of 18 November 1792.
80 Winterbotham, Trial, vi.
81 Winterbotham, Trial, 1.
82 Winterbotham, Trial, 1-4.
The prosecution attacked Winterbotham’s views in its attempt to portray the minister as seditious. The counsel for the crown outlined the government’s position in an opening address to the jury: “Without subordination, there can be no government.” Otherwise, anarchy would ensue. Because of the divine authority of government, preaching discontent was blasphemy. Furthermore, “to cry out against the government where there is no occasion, is a crime.”

The prosecution tied Winterbotham’s case to a wider issue, that British encouragement for the French had grown to the level of treason: “In all parts of the country, Persons were trumpeting forth sedition, till government found it necessary to interfere.” In that context, Winterbotham’s sermon of 5 November was “inflammatory,” because of its “tendency of exciting the people to sedition.” Finally, by delivering a political sermon, Winterbotham had betrayed his duty to preach the gospel.

The prosecution witnesses uniformly asserted the seditious nature of Winterbotham’s sermon. They were not members of the church or even regular attenders, though a few of them had attended previously. At least two prosecution witnesses attended on this occasion because they had heard there would be a political sermon. According to the witnesses, the congregation consisted of two hundred people. The prosecution witnesses disapproved of the entire sermon, although none of them could remember the biblical text for it. They claimed that the sermon had few innocent parts. They stated that Winterbotham had indeed made the claim that the current government

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84 Winterbotham, *Trial*, 5.
abused the laws. In their impressions, Winterbotham clearly was stirring up the people against the government.  

In its address to the jury, the defense counsel defended Baptists in general, before specifically defending Winterbotham’s right to preach as he had. The defense attorney portrayed Baptists as closer to the Church of England “than any other sect of dissenters whatever.” The two denominations agreed on much of their theology, except for baptism. Because of that commonality, the counsel attacked the assumption that Baptists always had negative views of the government. After trying to dismiss any preconceptions the jury may have had about Baptists, the defense counsel argued that Winterbotham had either not spoken the alleged words or the prosecution witnesses had changed his meaning by taking the words entirely out of context. The government had set aside 5 November to commemorate 1688, so Winterbotham had done nothing wrong in pointing out the principles embodied in the revolution of that year and where the government had departed from them. After all, Church of England ministers also delved into the principles of 1688 on that day, so doing so could not be a crime unless the government only accepted favorable comments from the pulpit. Winterbotham had the right, even if others disagreed with him, to speak and publish on the need for reform in the constitution, “if he has not seditious intent.” The defense attorney accused the prosecution witnesses of attending Winterbotham’s sermon with the intent of finding something with which to incriminate him. He criticized them for paying little attention to the sermon, because they could not remember the biblical text or any parts of the sermon

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86 Winterbotham, *Trial*, 7-23.
that were not seditious.\textsuperscript{89} He further attempted to discredit them by pointing out that none of them had made notes of the sermon until at least two months later.\textsuperscript{90} In contrast to the charges, Winterbotham had actually contended that no reason for revolution existed in Britain.\textsuperscript{91} Just because Winterbotham asserted the right to revolution did not mean he saw a need to exercise it.\textsuperscript{92} While Winterbotham had said that the king ruled by law rather than divine right, he never claimed that the present king had failed to keep the laws.\textsuperscript{93} The defense counsel wanted the members of the jury to understand that, even if they disagreed with Winterbotham’s political ideas, “it is the right of an Englishman to speak and write freely upon Government, provided he does it fairly and candidly.”\textsuperscript{94} Winterbotham may have been imprudent, but he was not seditious. The defense counsel concluded its address by tying together the religious and national identities in the idea of liberty: “It is not consistent with the spirit of Christianity, or the spirit of an Englishman, to convict a man for differing in opinion from you on a political subject.”\textsuperscript{95}

The defense witnesses included regular attenders of Winterbotham’s church, as well as friends and one-time business partners. Therefore, they were more familiar with his preaching and his ideas. They consistently testified that Winterbotham did not encourage them to imitate the French example. He had expressed the desire for more frequent Parliaments, but he had praised the constitution. Therefore, the charges against Winterbotham misrepresented his views. Far from encouraging sedition, Winterbotham had actually acquainted his congregation with the specifics of the English Bill of Rights,

\begin{footnotes}
\item Winterbotham, \textit{Trial}, 26.  
\item Winterbotham, \textit{Trial}, 27.  
\item Winterbotham, \textit{Trial}, 29.  
\item Winterbotham, \textit{Trial}, 32.  
\item Winterbotham, \textit{Trial}, 32-33.  
\item Winterbotham, \textit{Trial}, 35.  
\item Winterbotham, \textit{Trial}, 36.  
\end{footnotes}
which some of the witnesses had never read. Although only people from the lower and middle classes attended, the witnesses did not see that as a danger, as Winterbotham urged submission to the laws.\textsuperscript{96} The Reverend Mr. Gibbs, for whom Winterbotham served as an assistant, testified that if “Mr. Winterbotham had used any of the words, as laid in the indictment, I should have despised him, and should have deemed him an enemy of his King and Country, both of which I respect, and I would not have suffered him to continue with me as a minister.”\textsuperscript{97} Furthermore, if Winterbotham had proclaimed the message alleged by the prosecution, the congregation would have deserted him and the church.\textsuperscript{98} Other witnesses confirmed that opinion; they claimed they would have thought much differently of Winterbotham if he had preached sedition.\textsuperscript{99}

In its closing arguments, the prosecution argued that Winterbotham had improperly spoken on government from the pulpit because ministers received training in other subjects. In a footnote inserted for publication, Winterbotham disagreed. Though the prosecution had aimed its comment at Dissenters, Winterbotham asserted that much of Scripture concerns government.\textsuperscript{100} According to the prosecution, Winterbotham had compounded his error because of his congregation that day: “of all places, this was the most improper, in an assembly of between two and three hundred of low ignorant people.”\textsuperscript{101} Furthermore, the revolution of 1688 was “a subject that least of all becomes them or persons in their situation to enquire into.”\textsuperscript{102} While the prosecution maintained that discussions on government and the authority of the king posed a danger to the

\textsuperscript{96} Winterbotham, \textit{Trial}, 36-42.  
\textsuperscript{97} Winterbotham, \textit{Trial}, 64.  
\textsuperscript{98} Winterbotham, \textit{Trial}, 66.  
\textsuperscript{100} Winterbotham, \textit{Trial}, 67.  
\textsuperscript{101} Winterbotham, \textit{Trial}, 67-68.  
\textsuperscript{102} Winterbotham, \textit{Trial}, 68.
constitution, Winterbotham, in a footnote, argued that the principles of the revolution mattered to everyone. In fact, he believed he had an obligation to reflect on government, and criticized any suggestion otherwise: “BRITONS of every description . . . meditate on this open insult on your RIGHTS.”\(^\text{103}\) The prosecution, however, argued that problems arose even when the best men discussed the principles of government, so it was entirely improper for the ignorant to do so. That would lead to a situation in which people simply disobeyed when they disagreed with a law.\(^\text{104}\) In a footnote, Winterbotham responded by claiming that freedom included examining the king’s prerogative and its limits.\(^\text{105}\) The prosecution, in contrast, argued that Winterbotham should teach reverence for the throne and for the government: “We should confine ourselves to the constitution as it is at present, and give our governors credit for doing their duty.” Winterbotham thought such comments constituted a description of despotism and slavery.\(^\text{106}\)

Because of his questioning the government, the prosecution painted Winterbotham as seditious: “he is not a preacher of the doctrine of peace, but makes use of the pulpit for his own seditious purposes.”\(^\text{107}\) The prosecution even argued that Winterbotham had unduly influenced the defense witnesses: “I consider these poor men and women in a state of delusion.”\(^\text{108}\) Their delusion centered on the idea that Winterbotham had the right to preach as he did. Yet the prosecution contended that no rights existed independent of the Supreme Being, so an individual blasphemed if he refused to subordinate himself in society. Furthermore, each nation defined rights: “man has no rights but what society which he lives in allows him.” The prosecution denied the

\(^{103}\) Winterbotham, Trial, 68-69.
\(^{104}\) Winterbotham, Trial, 69-72.
\(^{105}\) Winterbotham, Trial, 70.
\(^{106}\) Winterbotham, Trial, 73.
notion of natural rights; there were simply “no absolute rights of man.” Therefore, Winterbotham’s attempted defense of rights represented both blasphemy and treason. In a footnote, Winterbotham agreed that mankind had no rights apart from God, but that human rights were independent of and superior to society. He argued that individuals had a right to object and present their objections to the community. Government itself did not confer rights, but carried out the responsibility for protecting rights. The prosecution, though, stuck to its definition of rights and sought to prove, not necessarily that Winterbotham spoke the exact words of the indictment, but that Winterbotham had preached with “a seditious tendency.” The prosecution left the jurors with this thought: “Though the witnesses may differ in opinion—it is for the Jury to decide whether Mr. Winterbotham meant to stir up his hearers to mutiny and rage, or to keep the people in that state of peace for which their pastors pray. The Jury will recollect the assembly was composed of between two and three hundred of the lowest of the people.”

The judge instructed the jury to determine whether Winterbotham had preached with seditious intent. The judge called the sermon improper, even if it had no seditious intent, because Winterbotham’s congregation consisted of the lowest class. Even so, the judge warned the jury that if they found Winterbotham guilty, his punishment would

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107 Winterbotham, Trial, 74.
108 Winterbotham, Trial, 76.
109 Winterbotham, Trial, 78.
110 Winterbotham, Trial, 79.
111 Winterbotham, Trial, 80.
112 Winterbotham, Trial, 83.
113 Winterbotham, Trial, 85.
ruin him. Therefore, he instructed the jury to “shew the utmost lenity in favor of the Defendant.” The jury returned a guilty verdict after two and a half hours.\textsuperscript{114}

The following day, in the trial for his 18 November sermon, Winterbotham faced the accusations of maliciously bringing contempt for government and exciting his congregation to sedition. Winterbotham was accused with equating his nation's government with darkness, persecution, tyranny, and with exhorting the population to achieve the liberty and equality of France.\textsuperscript{115} The prosecution attacked Winterbotham for using words of “the most inflammatory nature.” In the government’s view, Winterbotham, by applying his text to present times, aimed “at the total destruction and subversion of all the Governments of Europe.”\textsuperscript{116} The prosecution also took a dim view of the congregation: “the audience Mr. Winterbotham addressed was not an audience calculated to fathom the depth of political subjects, and therefore more easily deceived by specious pretences . . . no motive could be adduced that could have influenced Mr. Winterbotham at that time, to have gone into a political discussion, but that of exciting Rebellion and Discontent.” To add to Winterbotham’s quandary, by 18 November 1792, the French government had been overthrown and the king and queen imprisoned. The prosecution claimed that Winterbotham desired such events in his own country.\textsuperscript{117}

Winterbotham’s defense counsel again claimed that the prosecution witnesses had attended the sermon only to incriminate Winterbotham. Even if they remembered some of the sermon’s words correctly, they had certainly missed the meaning.\textsuperscript{118} The defense attorneys endeavored to show that the sermon was not seditious. They pointed to

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\item \textsuperscript{114} Winterbotham, \textit{Trial}, 86.
\item \textsuperscript{115} Winterbotham, \textit{Trial}, 89-90.
\item \textsuperscript{116} Winterbotham, \textit{Trial}, 90.
\item \textsuperscript{117} Winterbotham, \textit{Trial}, 91.
\end{itemize}
Winterbotham’s emphasis on obedience and subordination to the government, rather than encouraging his congregation to imitate the French.\textsuperscript{119} For the sake of the constitution and public justice, the defense pleaded with the jury to pay no attention to the previous day’s verdict, when jurors had convicted Winterbotham for his earlier sermon.\textsuperscript{120}

As in the earlier trial, the witnesses provided a sharp contrast. The prosecution produced only two witnesses, who had gone together to hear Winterbotham speak. Both claimed to have attended the sermon to defend Winterbotham, only to discover that the sermon was seditious. Neither could remember any passage of the sermon that was not seditious.\textsuperscript{121} While the defense witnesses estimated that 500 people had attended, they agreed that Winterbotham had not preached sedition to that crowd. In fact, Winterbotham said that magistrates were good. The witnesses steadfastly testified that the sermon simply did not contain the political meaning with which Winterbotham had been accused.\textsuperscript{122}

The judge instructed the jury to lay aside the testimony of one prosecution witness, as he had admitted copying his notes from the other witness. That left the prosecution’s case with the testimony, in the judge’s assessment, of one “youth.” In contrast, the judge pointed out that several respectable witnesses testified for the defense. They included regular attenders of the church at How’s Lane, and so were better qualified to assess Winterbotham’s doctrine. The judge emphasized that “they stated the Defendant’s sermon to breathe nothing but loyalty, peace, order, and obedience to the

\textsuperscript{118} Winterbotham, \textit{Trial}, 101-03. \\
\textsuperscript{119} Winterbotham, \textit{Trial}, 103-07. \\
\textsuperscript{120} Winterbotham, \textit{Trial}, 112-13. \\
\textsuperscript{121} Winterbotham, \textit{Trial}, 93-100. \\
\textsuperscript{122} Winterbotham, \textit{Trial}, 113-30.
Therefore, the judge concluded that “he could not think the Defendant guilty.” He again stressed to the jury that a guilty verdict would mean Winterbotham’s ruin. After five and a half hours, the jury returned a guilty verdict. Winterbotham officially surrendered 21 November 1793 and received his sentence six days later. His punishment consisted of four years in prison, two for each sermon, and a combined fine of £200. In addition, Winterbotham claimed legal and security expenses of more than £1000.

Upon his release in 1797, Winterbotham married Mary Brend, one of his defense witnesses, and returned to Plymouth as an assistant to Gibbs. After Gibbs’s death in 1800, Winterbotham became the church’s only minister. From 1804 to 1829 he served as minister at Shortwood church, Horsley, Gloucestershire. He stayed out of political controversy, and largely restricted his publications to association circular letters and a history of the Shortwood church. In his last public act, though, he signed a petition for Catholic emancipation. According to Durey, though Winterbotham never again ran afoul of the law, “he by no means reneged on his radical politics in later life.”

Winterbotham’s son praised his father for that consistency in his political principles, and argued that his father, even after his imprisonment, never retracted his views:

it may be a pleasure to know, that his political sentiments were unchanged to the last; that when the excitement of the disastrous period was over, he never regretted the course he had taken; and that at the close of his life, when his judgment had become matured; and when his mind was under the impression of the most chastened feelings, his views and wishes were still the same as at the commencement of his course. The foe of civil as well as of ecclesiastical tyranny, the energies of his youth were awakened

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in the struggle for American independence, while the last wishes of his heart were grateful in the anticipated emancipation of the Catholics.  

Winterbotham’s consistency centered on freedom: “In the political world, the deceased was known by his warm and devoted attachment to the principles of civil and religious liberty.” At the root of those convictions lay one important principle: “He called no man master.” Because of that independence, he demonstrated “a decided and manly attachment to those sentiments and practices he believed to be correct, without regard to personal consequences.” Other people came to accept the necessity of political reform in Britain, only reinforcing the value of Winterbotham’s constancy: “In respect to his political opinions, some (though they are a decreasing number) will yet differ from him; but there are few, it is presumed, even of these, who will not admire the sincerity, the candour, and consistency, which marked the whole of his public conduct.”

Joseph Kinghorn assessed Winterbotham as “not a man of extensive & keen research. His subjects are not handled in a manner I should call masterly.” Winterbotham’s lack of education and eloquence did not hinder his appeal: “Part of the popularity he has obtained doubtless arises from his having been persecuted.” Kinghorn combined admiration and dislike in describing Winterbotham: “I dare say he is a very honest man & will follow his conviction a long way, but he appears to have a very positive decided temper.”

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130 R. Winterbotham, “Memoir,” 226.
132 R. Winterbotham, “Memoir,” 228.
133 Joseph Kinghorn, Norwich, to David Kinghorn, Bishop Burton, 9 January 1798, Box 4/3/1, Angus Library, Regents Park College, Oxford.
Both the younger Winterbotham and Joseph Baynes, Winterbotham’s former assistant minister at Shortwood, offered commentary that may provide one reason for Winterbotham’s legal trouble. Simply put, he cared nothing for social distinctions. He addressed his sermons to all hearers, and was attentive even to the young.\footnote{R. Winterbotham, “Memoir,” 227.} Winterbotham possessed an “intense concern for the spiritual and final welfare of all committed to his charge.”\footnote{Joseph Baynes, The Fall of a Great Man Contemplated: A Sermon, occasioned by the death of the Rev. William Winterbotham, late pastor of the Baptist Church, Shortwood, near Nailsworth, Gloucestershire; preached at Wellington, Somerset, on Sabbath evening, April 12th, 1829 (Yeovil: W. Porter, 1829), 20.} Therefore, he made no class distinction in his ministry, even at Plymouth, with its large working class population. Yet, as the trial record shows, his attention to the lowest members of society was a major part of the government’s motivation to prosecute. Winterbotham preached in Norwich in early 1798, and Joseph Kinghorn’s report echoed other assessments of Winterbotham’s appeal: “all classes of men have been eager to hear him.”\footnote{\textsuperscript{136}}

Durey argues that both Winterbotham’s timing and his audience created the circumstances for his conviction. Durey concedes that Winterbotham’s first sermon was aggressive and offensive because he openly supported the French Revolution and encouraged parliamentary reform, thereby espousing the political views of radical reformers. Winterbotham’s view of 1688 also led him to emphasize popular sovereignty and the right to remove governors.\footnote{\textsuperscript{137}} Such views were usually at least acceptable, but because of the success of French republican armies and the imprisonment of the French king at the end of 1792, British fears of revolution and rebellion led to viewing Winterbotham as a subversive. Winterbotham may have contributed to that view through his lack of eloquence. Even so, Winterbotham faced prosecution primarily because of his
audience rather than his words: “Winterbotham was also preaching politics to the wrong people. Although most would have been his normal congregation—of all the Old Dissenting denominations, the Baptists ‘remained the most plebeian in their following’— in the circumstance of the time this alone would have been enough to warrant prosecution.”¹³⁸ On a fast day celebrating the nation’s deliverance in both 1605 and 1688, “all clergymen were expected to give sermons extolling the virtues of these events; Winterbotham’s fault was to use the opportunity to criticize the contemporary political system and to demand significant reforms.” Because of his strong views, his forceful character, and his lack of training, Winterbotham may have been closer to sedition than he intended.¹³⁹ Durey asserts that Winterbotham’s imprisonment served as a warning for all orthodox dissenters in the first year of the war with France to be cautious with their political comments.¹⁴⁰

Other scholars tend to agree that Winterbotham received harsh treatment. Jenny Graham and Nancy Murray agree that Winterbotham’s trouble stemmed from his emphasis on the idea that political power rested in the nation’s people.¹⁴¹ Even so, Graham argues Winterbotham’s case serves as an example of excessive punishment, or even persecution.¹⁴² J. E. Cookson concurs; Winterbotham’s case “suggested that the government would act more harshly if it saw the opportunity.”¹⁴³ Antagonism went

¹³⁶ Joseph Kinghorn, Norwich, to David Kinghorn, Bishop Burton, 9 January 1798.
¹⁴² Graham, Nation, Law, King, 503-04.
beyond the government, though. Winterbotham’s 1792 sermons stirred up sentiments against Dissenters in some of the West Country towns.\footnote{Cookson, \textit{Friends of Peace}, 135.}

Though Winterbotham called for reform rather than revolution, he highlighted how much the establishment feared the potential destruction of social order, or at least of a particular social order. Therefore, Winterbotham’s example detracts from Colley’s idea of unity within Protestantism. His case does support the contention of an identity based on history and institutions, though not based on an external threat. Winterbotham sharply criticized his government, arguing that the nation had failed to live up to its ideals, particularly concerning representation and individual liberty. Because he proposed reform, he offered a clear alternative to the Anglican hegemony that Clark depicts, though the establishment tried to enforce that hegemony in Winterbotham’s case. To Winterbotham, though, national unity could only develop from religious toleration, not religious hegemony. Winterbotham advocated toleration because he maintained an attachment to separate British and Baptist identities. Because of the distinctions in identity, Winterbotham could be both a faithful Baptist and a loyal Briton.
ROBERT HALL: ADVOCATE FOR LIBERTY

Robert Hall argued that an individual could be both an orthodox Christian and an advocate of liberty. In doing so, he emphasized humanity’s natural rights, which Christianity did nothing to diminish. In fact, Christians, and especially Dissenters, had an obligation to help protect individual rights. Hall also examined political theory. God had not instituted specific governments, but governments in general were essential for society. Hall advocated testing the value of any particular government by applying reason to assess the government’s effects on the people’s happiness. There is continuity of thought in Hall’s political works in the 1790s, in which he articulated clear aspirations for the nation and for Dissenters in Britain. In his first major work, *Christianity Consistent with a Love of Freedom*, published in 1791, Hall denied any mutual exclusivity between Christianity and freedom, while he argued that every individual had natural rights. In his second political work, *An Apology for the Freedom of the Press, and for General Liberty*, which first appeared in print in 1793, Hall ostensibly set out to defend the freedom of the press, but he delved more specifically into constitutional questions. By that time, the French had executed their king and declared war on Britain. Thus, circumstances clearly discouraged avid support for French revolutionary ideals. In addition, Hall had the example of Winterbotham’s legal trouble to deter him from making such bold political statements as he had in 1791. Even so, Hall remained consistent in his affirmation of rights, and in the role of Christians, particularly Dissenters, in protecting those rights. He continued to criticize his government and he proceeded at length to assert the need to reform Parliament. He still defended Dissenters from the accusation of
disloyalty and he stressed Christian obedience to the government. He continued to celebrate the French Revolution, although he expressed greater caution in doing so, and he clearly did not desire a similar revolution in Britain. By the early 1800s, Hall had modified his views owing to the devastation of Britain’s war with France. He valued peace and stability more than immediate political reform.

The loyalty of Baptists was called into question precisely because they stressed priorities, such as evangelicalism, other than supporting the existing order. Robert Hall represented the Baptist position in distinguishing between religious and political identities. He considered faith as an issue between the individual and God, outweighing any political considerations. He contended that the individual, and the individual’s moral development, came before the nation. Hall claimed that the alliance of church and state, far from being necessary, constituted an effort to destroy civil and religious liberties. Hall could accept a social hierarchy as necessary for order, but he still opposed the establishment view. To him, the heart of religion was the worship of God, not the construction of a moral code, which he saw as the Church of England’s emphasis. Because the establishment painted Dissenters as republicans and deists, Hall compared Dissenters with the early Christians who faced unwarranted persecution.

Hall embraced a national identity and he saw himself as patriotic because of his efforts to protect and restore the spirit of the nation’s constitution. He turned to English

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history to support his political views, while he urged Britons to protect that heritage. Hall clearly disagreed with any established church, and thereby illustrated the diversity among Protestants that necessitates a modification of Colley’s thesis. In addition, he praised the French Revolution, and even after he tempered that praise, his opposition to France stemmed much more from France’s threat to peace and order than any anti-Catholicism. Hall offered a plan for national reform, specifically the repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts and changes in parliamentary representation and duration. He thereby showed that such efforts were not confined to Clark’s heterodox elite. In separating himself from the establishment, Hall presented an alternative approach to government and he condemned the current political situation of his nation. At no point, though, did he call for revolution. Thus, like Winterbotham, Hall was simultaneously a loyal Baptist and Briton.

Hall, the youngest of fourteen children, was born in 1764 in Arnesby, Leicestershire, where his father was a Baptist minister. Hall was baptized in September 1778 and he entered the Baptist college in Bristol in October of that year. He spent the first half of the 1780s at King’s College, Aberdeen, returning to Bristol in March 1785 as an assistant to Caleb Evans at Broadmead Baptist Church. In August of that year, he added to his duties the position of classical tutor at the Baptist college. Though acclaimed as a preacher, Hall faced complaints that he was too general and that he often explored topics not directly related to the gospel.

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While in Bristol Hall showed the political views he demonstrated more fully in the 1790s. Bristol was a leading seaport, and a group of ministers had begun to seek the end of the slave trade. Though most merchants opposed abolishing the slave trade, the Bristol mayor called a public meeting for January 1788 to discuss the issue. Hall reported that more than 800 people signed a petition sent to Parliament urging the abolition of the trade. Hall himself had two letters published in February 1788 in the *Bristol Gazette*, though he did not sign them in his own name. In those letters, Hall condemned the slave trade as unjust and inhumane. He used the natural right to liberty as justification for his position. Along with its violation of rights, the slave trade reflected poorly on Britain. Yet Hall expressed fear that abolition would not be possible, because the economic power of a few individuals would counteract the majority’s political will.

In September 1790, Hall agreed to fill in for a month at the Baptist church at St. Andrew’s Street, Cambridge, after the death of its minister, Robert Robinson. He extended his stay and in July 1791, he accepted the long-term position of minister. Hall was more comfortable in Cambridge than he was in Bristol because “the Cambridge church prided itself on its tolerance and freedom of inquiry.” Thus, Hall did not face the same complaints he had in Bristol. In Cambridge Hall developed a reputation for paying particular attention to the poorest members of the church. In addition, he encouraged reading, prayer, and discussion groups. He enhanced his reputation for eloquent and energetic preaching, which even attracted university students to hear his sermons.

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10 Chadwick, “Hall.”

Hall based his ideas of reform on the idea of natural rights. He acknowledged John Locke as the originator of the concept of rights as the basis for government.\footnote{Robert Hall, An Apology for the Freedom of the Press, and for General Liberty. To which are prefixed remarks on Bishop Horsley’s Sermon, preached on the thirtieth of January last, 3rd ed. (London, 1794), 52.} All of humanity possessed basic freedoms: “there are natural rights, or in other words, a certain liberty which men may exercise, independent of permission of society.” Religion did not provide a basis for those rights, but religious expression was one of the natural rights. As an example, Hall argued that a man “must have a right to worship God after the mode he thinks acceptable; or in other words, he ought not to be compelled to consult any thing but his own conscience.” That right was complete, and therefore natural; it required no addition or subtraction, and Hall denied the possibility that that right was “entirely relinquished when we become members of society.”\footnote{Hall, Apology, 53.}

Hall rejected the argument that people gave up all their rights to join in a society, subsequently possessing only the rights granted by that society.\footnote{Hall, Apology, 53-54.} People had joined political societies primarily “to guard against the injury of others.”\footnote{Hall, Apology, 56.} That required giving up some rights, but “civil restraints imply nothing more, than a surrender of liberty in some points, in order to maintain it undisturbed in others of more importance.” Therefore, some rights had never been yielded. For example, individuals could use their

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item[12] Robert Hall, An Apology for the Freedom of the Press, and for General Liberty. To which are prefixed remarks on Bishop Horsley’s Sermon, preached on the thirtieth of January last, 3rd ed. (London, 1794), 52.
\item[13] Hall, Apology, 53.
\item[14] Hall, Apology, 53-54.
\item[15] Hall, Apology, 56.
\end{itemize}
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own reason to distinguish between truth and falsehood.\textsuperscript{16} Government should not interfere with the exercise of that right, because any interference would not add to the nation’s security. Any government that demanded the populace give up more liberty than necessary became tyrannical.\textsuperscript{17} Hall continued that line of reasoning by rejecting the notion that political society excluded any discussion of rights.\textsuperscript{18} Such exclusion would only create a horrible situation: “If a man should be unfortunate enough to live under the dominion of a prince, who, like the monarchs of Persia, could murder his subjects at will, he may be unhappy, but cannot complain.”\textsuperscript{19} Hall maintained that people had, in fact, retained most of their natural rights, and he argued that a “political arrangement is more or less perfect in proportion as it enables us to exert our natural liberty to its greatest advantage.”\textsuperscript{20}

When considering the basic relationship between Christianity and government, Hall contended that humanity’s natural rights existed before Christianity. He thereby separated political aspects of life from religious ones. Although Christianity improved the human condition, it could not diminish natural rights. This world served only as preparation for a future world, and Christians focused on that future. Government, however, existed in the present, with the goal of protecting individual rights. Therefore, government and religion were distinct, though both were necessary. People had to have government for any society, but they also needed Christian institutions to prepare them

\textsuperscript{16} Hall, \textit{Apology}, 57.  
\textsuperscript{17} Hall, \textit{Apology}, 58.  
\textsuperscript{18} Hall, \textit{Apology}, 58-59.  
\textsuperscript{19} Hall, \textit{Apology}, 59.  
\textsuperscript{20} Hall, \textit{Apology}, 61.
for their future home. Because of their different goals, government and religion did not exist in opposition to one another.\textsuperscript{21}

Because of the distinction between political and religious identities, Hall claimed that government should not establish a particular religious viewpoint. He argued that all established churches had negative effects. Early Christianity had flourished while it was officially suppressed, but official Roman protection had detracted from Christian piety.\textsuperscript{22} Hall contended that religion contributed to peace and order without state support, because “religion, if it have any power, operates on the conscience of men.” It could gain nothing through a close connection with the government. Quite the contrary, Hall asserted that the establishment of religion had led to evil, because it forced the magistrate to choose one religious system as the best.\textsuperscript{23} He explained what he perceived as the growing lack of Christian faith in Europe as the “natural and never-failing consequence of the corrupt alliance between church and state. Wherever we turn our eyes, we shall perceive the depression of religion is in proportion to the elevation of the hierarchy.”\textsuperscript{24} Here Hall distinguished between Dissent and the Church of England: “piety flourishes much more among dissenters, than among the members of any establishment whatever.”\textsuperscript{25} He rejected the notion that the interests of church and state were so closely intertwined that if individuals opposed one, they must necessarily be enemies of the other.\textsuperscript{26} Hall saw danger in any alliance between church and state: “The spiritual submission it exacts is unfavourable to mental vigour, and prepares the way for a servile acquiescence in the

\textsuperscript{22} Hall, \textit{Apology}, 80.
\textsuperscript{23} Hall, \textit{Apology}, 80-81.
\textsuperscript{24} Hall, \textit{Apology}, 82.
\textsuperscript{25} Hall, \textit{Apology}, 83.
\textsuperscript{26} Hall, \textit{Apology}, 84.
encroachments of civil authority.” In addition, such an alliance was not “likely to confine the obligation to obedience within any just and reasonable bounds.” Hall also argued that because the established clergy depended on the monarch for their incomes, they would blindly support their benefactor. Along with its detrimental effects, an established church served no useful purpose. All branches of Christianity supported submission to the government, so the nation had no need for a particular set of clergy to teach submission.\(^{27}\)

Hall accepted that many Anglican clergymen were virtuous, but he saw a problem in the Anglican hierarchy, which he referred to as “the high-church party.” That group had sounded an alarm during the effort to repeal the Test and Corporation Acts, thereby inflaming people against Dissenters.\(^{28}\) That party had also kept penal statutes against Dissenters on the books, preserving the possibility of prosecuting Dissenters.\(^{29}\) Hall believed that the Church of England as a whole violated Christian principles. He argued that Christianity “is a simple institution, unallied to worldly power, that a church is a voluntary society, invested with a right to chuse its own officers, and acknowledging no head but Jesus Christ, that ministers are brethren whose emolument should be confined to the voluntary contributions of the people.” Thus, Hall rejected the state’s establishment of a church, the hierarchy of that church, and the collection of taxes to support it. He believed his principles came from a higher authority than the Church of England.\(^{30}\)

Hall maintained that laws should not affect religion, even in the absence of an established church. He reiterated the distinction between religion and government: “if religion be really distinct from, and independent of human legislation, it cannot afford

\(^{27}\) Hall, *Apology*, 85-86.
\(^{28}\) Hall, *Apology*, 87.
\(^{29}\) Hall, *Apology*, 87-88.
\(^{30}\) Hall, *Apology*, 89.
any standard to ascertain its limits.” 31 No laws could ever improve Christianity. 32 While he acknowledged the value of laws for society, Hall saw a problem when they interfered with religion, and he argued that a Christian could violate the laws when they conflicted with faith. 33

At the same time, the expression of religious faith did not preclude the exercise of individual rights. 34 Therefore, in Hall’s view, Christians could become involved in political issues. A person of faith was not isolated from concerns outside religion. If Christians gave up all parts of their lives but worship, they would make themselves useless in terms of labor and learning. 35 Their ignorance would signal a return to savagery. 36 As an illustration of a pursuit outside Christianity, Hall stated that a Christian could engage in commerce. 37 An individual’s profession of faith did not interfere with commerce, but neither was it entirely separate. Theft or dishonesty in trade violated Christian principles. Thus, while Christianity did not keep someone from working in business, it did place limits on a Christian’s activities within that business. Similarly, Christians could become politically involved, as long as doing so did not violate their faith. 38 To illustrate his meaning further, Hall used science and art. Both of those pursuits preceded Christianity, but Christianity did not lead to their demise, because “they are intimately connected with the happiness and dignity of the human race.” Therefore, Hall argued that a Christian could pursue those interests as long as they did not interfere with sacred duties. Just as Christianity did not keep believers from participating in trade,
science, or art, it could not restrict them from political involvement. Hall acknowledged that Jesus did not meddle in politics or government, but he argued that Jesus had not intended for Christians “to consider themselves as idle or uninterested spectators on the great theatre of life.” If Christ had meant that, he would have taught people how to live without government. As it stood, political affairs were a part of life and Christians could participate in them. Jesus did refrain from interfering in political affairs, but to extend that example into a rule for all Christians was not valid, because “the whole weight of the argument rests upon a supposition, that it is unlawful for a Christian to sustain any other character in civil life, than that in which our Saviour literally appeared.” Jesus never practiced law or medicine, either, but those careers had value, even for Christians.

Having opened the possibility of Christian political involvement, Hall addressed the responsibility of Christian ministers in public affairs. He defended Dissenting ministers who faced criticism, not because they spoke on political topics, but owing to their deviation from the political views of the establishment: “Instead of submitting to be moulded by any adept in cringes, any posture-master of servility, they have dared to assume the bold and natural port of freemen.” Hall acknowledged that ministers needed to focus on their sacred duties, but he maintained that they could study government in their leisure time, without neglecting their pastoral responsibilities. Appropriate topics of study included the objectives of government and how to achieve those. To illustrate what ministers could do, Hall outlined two approaches to defending the French Revolution. One could defend the revolution on practical terms, but understanding the

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38 Hall, *Christianity Consistent with Freedom*, 50.
39 Hall, *Christianity Consistent with Freedom*, 9-12.
40 Hall, *Christianity Consistent with Freedom*, 51.
41 Hall, *Christianity Consistent with Freedom*, 52.
precise causes required a wealth of detail that most ministers had neither the time nor the ability to amass. On the other hand, the revolution involved “principles which are common to all times and places.” Ministers had access to those ideas and it was on that level that ministers could actively support the French Revolution: “the principles of government, as it is a contrivance for securing the freedom and happiness of men, may be acquired with great ease.”

Because most everyone could grasp the basic principles of government, reform required the right of public discussion. In fact, Hall viewed that right as the very basis of freedom: “The most capital advantage an enlightened people can enjoy is the liberty of discussing every subject which can fall within the compass of the human mind; while this remains, freedom will flourish; but should it be lost or impaired, its principles will neither be well understood or long retained.” Therefore, a government wronged its citizens if it allowed its magistrates to suppress opinions. To Hall, the magistracy never included that responsibility: “When a nation forms a government, it is not wisdom, but power which they place in the hands of the magistrate.” Magistrates misapplied their power if they judged the truth or error of opinions. After all, Christian truth did not rely on the magistrate’s approval for its power. Hall argued that expressing opinions was a right, while also claiming that it would benefit the nation: “Where the right of unlimited enquiry is exerted, the human faculties will be upon the advance; where it is relinquished, they will be of necessity at a stand, and will probably decline.” People needed to reflect on experience to see what had led to improvements for society. Such reflection did not

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42 Hall, *Christianity Consistent with Freedom*, 23.
43 Hall, *Christianity Consistent with Freedom*, 24-25.
44 Hall, *Christianity Consistent with Freedom*, 25-27.
signify a threat to society: “If we have recourse to experience, that kind of enlarged experience in particular which history furnishes, we shall not be apt to entertain any violent alarm at the greatest liberty of discussion.”\textsuperscript{48}

Hall pointed out precedents to support the value of a freedom of discussion. He used science as an example of a field of inquiry once subject to restraint, such as labeling as heresy the view of the earth as round. Yet disagreements accompanied scientific advancements and those had aided learning. Therefore, science had benefited from openness of inquiry.\textsuperscript{49} Such openness was crucial for the advancement of religion as well. Luther, by exercising his right of free inquiry, generated a religious reformation and rediscovered an early Christianity, untainted by abuses.\textsuperscript{50} Hall also turned to a precedent in his own country to illustrate the benefit of free inquiry: “Religious toleration has never been complete in England; but having prevailed more here than perhaps in any other country, there is no place where the doctrines of religion have been set in so clear a light, or its truth so ably defended.” Hall even praised deists such as John Locke for their precise reasoning in defending Christianity. Though Hall obviously disagreed with them on some points, he believed that the deists’ free discussion had benefited religion.\textsuperscript{51}

Having argued for the value of free inquiry in general, Hall moved to an argument supporting the freedom of the press, particularly concerning political issues. As government was a human institution, and especially because it affected everyone’s happiness, it was “the proper province for freedom of discussion.” Because of its role in public discourse, the press provided the best support of liberty by facilitating “the

\textsuperscript{46} Hall, \textit{Apology}, 3.
\textsuperscript{47} Hall, \textit{Apology}, 3-4.
\textsuperscript{48} Hall, \textit{Apology}, 4.
\textsuperscript{49} Hall, \textit{Apology}, 5.
controol of the public mind over the conduct of ministers.” A free press was crucial to a free society: “While this remains we cannot be enslaved; where it is impaired or diminished, we shall soon cease to be free.” The government tried to take away that freedom if it accused of sedition those who questioned the form of government.52

Hall believed that the freedom to discuss government would “issue in the firmer establishment of truth.” He did not mean that his government had failed completely. As a loyal Briton, he praised his nation’s constitutional tradition: “I am persuaded whatever imperfections may attend the British constitution, it is competent to all the ends of government, and the best adapted of any to the actual situation of this kingdom.”53 Yet he consistently argued for the people’s right to appraise their constitution:

Is our constitution a good one, it will gain in our esteem by the severest enquiry. Is it bad, then its imperfections should be laid open and exposed. Is it, as is generally confessed, of a mixed nature, excellent in theory, but defective in its practice; freedom of discussion will be still requisite to point out the nature and source of its corruptions and apply suitable remedies. If our constitution be that perfect model of excellence it is represented, it may boldly appeal to the reason of an enlightened age, and need not rest on the support of an implicit faith.54

The British people had the right to assess their government: “Government is the creature of the people, and that which they created they surely have a right to examine.” Hall’s justification rested on his belief concerning government that God had “left every point relating to it to be settled by the consent and approbation of mankind.”55 Because government originated with the people, political power never became “inalienable and independent.” The authority to govern never grew into a right of property, even if the

50 Hall, Apology, 6.
51 Hall, Apology, 7.
52 Hall, Apology, 8.
53 Hall, Apology, 9.
54 Hall, Apology, 9-10.
55 Hall, Apology, 10.
same person or group of people exercised that authority for a considerable time. In addition, governing was never “held for the sole use of the owner,” but for the benefit of the community.\(^{56}\) Therefore, government depended on the nation’s people: “Being derived from the will of the people, explicit or implied, and existing solely for their use, it can no more become independent of that will, than water can arise above its source.”\(^ {57}\) In Hall’s view, the people retained their right to discuss government, and even had the power to revoke their government’s authority.\(^ {58}\) Claiming that the British constitution was the best in the world did not abrogate that right: “If the excellency of a constitution then is assigned as the reason that none should be permitted to censure it, who, I ask, is to determine on this its excellence?” If the people, through the exercise of their reason, determined the constitution’s excellence, then they required free inquiry concerning it. If the ruler alone determined the worth of the constitution, Hall declared that Britain would be no different than Turkey.\(^ {59}\)

Any restriction of discussing the constitution had negative effects. Hall argued that such a restriction could only have one goal: “An enquiry respecting the comparative excellence of civil constitutions can be forbidden on no other pretence, than that of its tending to anarchy and sedition.” Hall saw danger in that accusation: “when the example has been once introduced of suppressing opinions on account of their imagined ill tendency, it has seldom been confined within any safe or reasonable bounds.”\(^ {60}\) Hall thought freedom of expression so vital that he did not want to suppress the writings of religious skeptics, even if they caused some people to lose their belief in God.

\(^{56}\) Hall, \textit{Apology}, 11.
\(^{57}\) Hall, \textit{Apology}, 11-12.
\(^{58}\) Hall, \textit{Apology}, 12.
\(^{59}\) Hall, \textit{Apology}, 13.
Suppression would only mean more power for the magistrate. Hall argued that free inquiry posed no danger in his country, but that the government faced a genuine threat:

The real danger to every free government is less from its enemies than from itself. Should it resist the most temperate reforms, and maintain its abuses with obstinacy; imputing complaint to faction, calumniating its friends, and smiling only on its flatterers, should it encourage informers, and hold out rewards to treachery, turning every man into a spy, and every neighbourhood into the seat of an inquisition, let it not hope it can long conceal its tyranny under the mask of freedom.”

Hall rejected limits on political discussions even in the 1790s: “this is not a season for drawing off the eyes of mankind from political objects.” In fact, Hall argued that such reflections had become more crucial: “An attention to the political aspect of the world, is not now the fruit of an idle curiosity, or the amusement of a dissipated and frivolous mind, but is awakened and kept alive by occurrences as various as they are extraordinary.” Hall advocated political discussions because the events “of Europe never presented such a spectacle before, and it is worthy of being contemplated, with the profoundest attention, by all its inhabitants.” Hall encouraged the application of human reason to understand politics and government. He thought the nation would benefit by employing as many minds as possible toward that end.

Hall included Christians in his vision of open political discussions. In his view, Christianity contributed to cherishing freedom. Because of that, Christians had a greater responsibility to protect individual rights: “to watch over the interests of our

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60 Hall, Apology, 13.
61 Hall, Apology, 13-14.
62 Hall, Apology, 14-15.
63 Hall, Christianity Consistent with Freedom, 75.
64 Hall, Christianity Consistent with Freedom, 76.
65 Hall, Christianity Consistent with Freedom, 76-77.
66 Hall, Apology, Preface ii.
67 Hall, Apology, Preface ii-iii.
68 Hall, Christianity Consistent with Freedom, 18.
fellow-creatures in this respect, is a branch of the great duty of social benevolence.”

Hall praised anyone “who in times like the present, watches over the edifice of public liberty, repairs its foundations, and strengthens its cement, when he beholds it hastening to decay.” Christians needed to use their talents for the general benefit of society, particularly in preserving freedom: “where this ability exists, it is not diminished by our embracing christianity, which consecrates every talent to the public good.”

Within that context, Hall portrayed a special role for Dissenters in Britain concerning the principles of government: “There is no class of men to whom this species of knowledge is so requisite, on several accounts, as dissenting ministers.” The restricted status of Dissenters in society led them to a wider range of interests in contemplating government, thereby leaving them “as the natural guardians, in some measure, of our liberty and rights.” Dissenters had the responsibility to protect individual freedom from the establishment. In contrast, Hall painted the Anglican clergy as staunch supporters of prerogative and arbitrary power: “The boasted alliance between church and state, on which so many encomiums have been lavished, seems to have been little more than a compact between the Priest and the Magistrate, to betray the liberties of mankind, both civil and religious.” He called on Dissenters to take a different position, so “that, at all events, there may remain one asylum to which insulted freedom may retire unmolested.” The need to protect liberty was great enough to “justify every dissenting minister in well-timed exertions for the public cause.”

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69 Hall, *Christianity Consistent with Freedom*, 19.  
70 Hall, *Christianity Consistent with Freedom*, 19-20.  
71 Hall, *Christianity Consistent with Freedom*, 20.  
72 Hall, *Christianity Consistent with Freedom*, 27.  
73 Hall, *Christianity Consistent with Freedom*, 28.  
74 Hall, *Christianity Consistent with Freedom*, 29-30.  
75 Hall, *Christianity Consistent with Freedom*, 29-30.
Dissenters supported parliamentary reform to “restore the vigour of a sinking constitution.” Hall explained why Dissenters gravitated toward reform: “Exposed to pains and penalties, excluded from all offices of trust, proscribed by the spirit of the present reign, menaced and insulted wherever they appear, they must be more than men if they felt no resentment, or were passionately devoted to the ruling powers.” Dissenters recognized the benefits of their nation’s constitution, but they discerned a need to modify it: “Their only wish is to see it reformed, and reduced to its original principles.” Such a desire did not mean that Dissenters advocated revolution, or believed that revolution would be necessary:

From the joy which dissenters have expressed at the French Revolution, it has been most absurdly inferred, that they wish for a similar event in England; without considering that such a conclusion is a libel on the British constitution, as it must proceed on a supposition that our government is as despotic as the ancient monarchy of France.

Because of such misunderstandings in their society, Dissenters awaited the judgment of God and of posterity. In the future “it will be seen they are a virtuous and oppressed people, who are treading, though with unequal steps, in the path of those illustrious prophets, apostles, and martyrs, of whom the world was not worthy.”

Dissenters found common ground among themselves, and distinguished themselves from the establishment, in their concern for the liberty of individual conscience: “The religious opinions of dissenters are so various, that there is perhaps no point in which they agreed, except in asserting the rights of conscience against all human controul and authority.” As early as Elizabeth’s reign, Dissenters “began to discern the

76 Hall, *Apology*, 91.
77 Hall, *Apology*, 92-93.
78 Hall, *Apology*, 93.
79 Hall, *Apology*, 94.
impropriety of all religious establishments whatever.”82 Dissenters desired toleration not just for themselves, but for everyone: “they claim no other liberty than what they wish the whole human race to possess, that of deciding on every question where conscience is concerned. It is sufferance they plead for, not establishment; protection, not splendour.” Because of their emphasis on conscience, Dissenters were the “least likely to disturb the peace of society.”83

Because of the importance of Dissenters in national reform, Hall complained about their loyalty coming into question. He believed that Dissenters’ views had been misrepresented by people who acted “as if an attachment to the king were to be measured by an hatred to Dissenters.”84 Hall wanted the nation to make up its mind: “If dissent be in truth, a crime of such magnitude, that it must not be tolerated, let there be at least a punishment prescribed by law, that they may know what they have to expect, and not be at the mercy of an enraged and deluded populace.” Yet Hall clearly disagreed that Dissent was a crime. Dissenters distinguished themselves “only by embracing a different form and system of worship.” They were just as moral and just as virtuous as Anglicans, and often were more serious about and more devoted to their faith.85

Hall used history to defend Dissenters against the suspicion of disloyalty. He argued that Dissenters were not responsible for Charles I’s death, because most members of Parliament at the time remained in the Church of England.86 Dissenters had assisted the restoration of the monarchy in return for liberty of conscience. Dissenters had

80 Hall, Apology, 95.
81 Hall, Apology, 96.
82 Hall, Apology, 79.
83 Hall, Apology, 80.
84 Hall, Apology, 74.
85 Hall, Apology, 75.
86 Hall, Apology, 76.
opposed the arbitrary rule of James II, while the conservative Anglican hierarchy had advocated passive obedience. Dissenters had raised troops to fight for the house of Hanover in the rebellions of 1715 and 1745. Hall believed his recounting of Dissenters’ actions proved “sufficient to establish their loyalty beyond suspicion.” Yet Dissenters continued to face prejudice, though they had remained unaware of the level of feeling against them until they worked to repeal the Test and Corporation Acts. Hall stated that Dissenters “ventured on a renewal of our claim as men, and as citizens; but had not proceeded far before we were assailed with the bitterest of approaches.” Hall believed that the Birmingham riots represented a culmination of the reaction against Dissenters. To Hall, though, Dissenters simply asked for the rights of full citizenship.

In his defense of Dissenters’ rights in political issues, Hall denied a necessary connection between political reform and heterodox theology. The principles of freedom were not restricted to sects such as the Unitarians. Hall did not see a decision on Christ’s divinity as a prerequisite to determining an appropriate form of government. Therefore, he argued that “there is no foundation in the nature of things, for imagining any alliance between heretical tenets and the principles of freedom.” Hall turned to the time of Charles I, contrasting the Puritans’ faith and support of freedom with the Cavaliers’ irreligion and support of arbitrary power. The orthodox Puritans had preserved the constitution. Since that time, in Hall’s view, “the Dissenters descended from those illustrious ancestors, and inheriting their spirit, have been foremost in defence

87 Hall, Apology, 77-78.
88 Hall, Apology, 90.
89 Hall, Christianity Consistent with Freedom, 55-56.
90 Hall, Christianity Consistent with Freedom, 56-57.
91 Hall, Christianity Consistent with Freedom, 58.
92 Hall, Christianity Consistent with Freedom, 17.
of liberty.” Hall urged them to continue in that role: “to abandon principles that Dissenters have defended, for no other reason than that the Unitarians chance to maintain them, would be a weakness of which a child might be ashamed!” The Unitarians advocated freedom largely because they desired protection as a minority group, not because of a connection between their religious and political beliefs. To Hall, freedom had no connection to any particular religious sentiment. Therefore, he rejected the implication that supporters of political reform were by definition heretical.

In light of the orthodox Dissenters’ responsibility in the nation, Hall considered how “to distinguish those transactions which are parts of God’s plan of government.” In doing so, he maintained a distinction between religious faith and political identity. He argued that “reason and experience, determined in their exertions, by a regard to the general happiness of mankind,” the efficacy of government. Hall acknowledged the necessity of government, but the form of government was flexible, depending on circumstances: “Some species of government is essential to the well-being of mankind, submission to some species of government is consequently a duty; but what kind of government shall be appointed, and to what limits submission shall extend, are mere human questions, to be adjusted by mere human reason and contrivance.” Hall desired a government in alignment with God’s will, and he believed that the only way to determine how well a government agreed with God’s will was “to consider its influence

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93 Hall, Christianity Consistent with Freedom, 59.
94 Hall, Christianity Consistent with Freedom, 62.
95 Hall, Christianity Consistent with Freedom, 17-18.
96 Hall, Christianity Consistent with Freedom, 61.
97 Hall, Christianity Consistent with Freedom, i.
98 Hall, Christianity Consistent with Freedom, 33.
99 Hall, Apology, Preface vi-vii.
on the happiness of society.” If a government was “conducive to general good, we may fairly presume it concurs with the will of the Deity; but if it appear pregnant with the most mischievous consequences, it must disclaim such support.” God did not impose governments but was pleased by those that led to the greatest happiness. Hall concluded that free governments produced more happiness than arbitrary ones.

Hall believed that a free government was one in which the nation’s people held ultimate political power. Any ruler “must be ultimately referred back to the explicit or implied consent of the people.” Otherwise, that ruler simply used force to maintain his position. Hall, reminiscent of Richard Price and William Winterbotham, contended that the people always have the right to change their rulers and their form of government. Rulers “are appointed by the community to execute its will, not to oppose it; to manage the public, not to pursue any private or particular interests.” Hall did not use that argument to justify a refusal to submit to the authorities. Governments “are to be respected and obeyed, as interpreters of the public will. Till they are set aside by the unequivocal voice of the people, they are a law to every member of the community. To resist them is rebellion.” Yet recognizing the people as the source of civil power “turns blind submission into rational obedience, tempers the passion for liberty with the love of order.” In effect, Hall desired a happy medium between anarchy and oppression.

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100 Hall, Apology, Preface vii.
101 Hall, Apology, Preface viii.
102 Hall, Apology, Preface ix.
103 Hall, Apology, 62.
104 Hall, Apology, 62-63.
105 Hall, Apology, 63.
106 Hall, Apology, 64.
trusted the people’s capacity to find that medium: “if the labouring part of the people are not competent to chuse legislators, the English constitution is essentially wrong.”

Once he argued that Christians could engage in political matters, and that the people could effect change in their government, Hall urged Christians to support political reform, particularly the goal of religious freedom. Freedom ought to mean more to Christians than to unbelievers because liberty of conscience and freedom of inquiry were essential to their faith. Hall contended that “a full toleration of religious opinions, and the protection of all parties in their respective modes of worship, are the natural operations of a free government; and every thing that tends to check or restrain them, materially affects the interests of religion.” Yet religious freedom was generally not the case in reality. Because of the power of religious faith, rulers attacked it for the “independence it inspires,” thus trying to rule individual consciences. Hall offered a test for governments by stressing the value of individual conscience: “The question is, can every form of government furnish a security for liberty of conscience; or, which is the same thing, can the rights of private judgment be safe under a government, whose professed principle is, that the subject has no rights at all, but is a vassal dependent upon his superior lord?” With that in mind, Hall offered a political approach for Dissenters concerning liberty: “whoever is acquainted with the value of religious freedom, will not be content to suspend it on the clemency of a prince, the indulgence of ministers, or the liberality of bishops, if such a thing ever existed; he will never think it secure, till it has a constitutional basis.”

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107 Hall, Apology, 70.
108 Hall, Christianity Consistent with Freedom, 12.
109 Hall, Christianity Consistent with Freedom, 14.
110 Hall, Christianity Consistent with Freedom, 15.
the nation in “practice brands with proscription a disgrace on a numerous class of inhabitants on account of their religion.”  

Therefore, Hall advocated the repeal of the Test Act, which imposed legal discrimination against Dissenters, as an immediate goal of religious freedom. He described the Test Act as not only useless, but also detrimental to British society. Parliament had enacted the legislation “to secure the nation from popery,” but that danger no longer existed. Therefore, the Test Act was continued “for the express purpose of preserving the church from the inroads of Dissenters.”  

Far from protecting social order, laws such as the Test Act negatively affected society. Hall portrayed all efforts to secure religious doctrines through law as futile. Even further, “every attempt that has been made to uphold religion by the civil arm, has reflected disgrace upon its authors.”  

Hall complained specifically about the Test Act’s discrimination against Dissenters: 

It proscribes not an individual who has been convicted of a crime, but a whole party, as unfit to be trusted by the community to which they belong; and if this stigma can be justly fixed on any set of men, it ought not to stop here, or any where, short of the actual excision of those who are thus considered as rotten and incurable members of the political body.  

Hall denied that Dissenters represented such a terrible danger, but even if they did, the Test Act was useless: “If we are the persons it supposes, its indulgence is weak and contemptible.”  

If Dissenters represented no threat, the Test Act discriminated against them for no reason: “if we are of a different description, the nature of its pretensions is so extraordinary as to occasion serious alarm, and call aloud for its repeal.”  

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111 Hall, Apology, 109.
112 Hall, Christianity Consistent with Freedom, 63.
113 Hall, Christianity Consistent with Freedom, 68.
114 Hall, Christianity Consistent with Freedom, 65-66.
115 Hall, Christianity Consistent with Freedom, 69.
116 Hall, Christianity Consistent with Freedom, 69.
117 Hall, Christianity Consistent with Freedom, 69.
kept Dissenters from full citizenship: it is “no less than a political annihilation, debarring
them, though their talents were ever so splendid, from mingling in the councils, or
possessing any share in the administration of their country.” 118

Hall pointed out that the established church had existed long before the Test Act,
and maintained that the Church of England would not disintegrate without such
legislation. 119 Even if the repeal of the Test Act meant the overthrow of the established
church, a highly improbable result, at least no one, in the hope of gaining office, would
show a mere surface attachment to the Church’s principles “from corrupt and sinister
motives.” 120 Hall divided the people who qualified for government office under the Test
Act into two types, those who believed in the articles of the Church of England, and so
had no issue with taking Anglican communion, and those who disapproved of the
Church’s doctrines, and so “have qualified themselves for trust by a solemn act of
religious deception.” Because the Test Act influenced only the latter group, the security
it provided was “founded in a flagrant violation of truth.” 121 Thus, the Test Act only
“spread amongst all orders of men a contempt for sacred institutions, to inthrone
hypocrisy, and reduce deception to a system!” 122 As the Test Act blended religious and
political interests, it secularized the gospel by forcing those aspiring to civil office to
display a specific religious belief, whether or not they were sincere in that belief. 123 Hall
contended that taking bread and wine in the parish church failed to provide firm evidence
of belief anyway. 124

118 Hall, Christianity Consistent with Freedom, 70.
119 Hall, Christianity Consistent with Freedom, 63.
120 Hall, Christianity Consistent with Freedom, 67-68.
121 Hall, Christianity Consistent with Freedom, 65.
122 Hall, Christianity Consistent with Freedom, 66.
123 Hall, Christianity Consistent with Freedom, 70-72.
124 Hall, Christianity Consistent with Freedom, 66-67.
In addition to his call for religious toleration, Hall urgently pleaded for a reform of Parliament, beginning with representation. He defined representation as faithfully expressing the sentiments of the people.\textsuperscript{125} The nation’s citizens needed Parliament to speak for them: “the people of England can have no liberty, that is, no share in forming the laws, but what they exert through the medium” of the House of Commons. Commons had become “the column on which the whole fabric of our liberty rests.”\textsuperscript{126} Too narrow a representation, though, doomed the House of Commons to failure in its responsibility. Hall complained that representation had remained the same despite the decline in population of some towns and the rise of others.\textsuperscript{127} In addition, too few people could vote: “The disproportion between those who vote for representatives and the people at large is so great, that the majority of our House of Commons is chosen by less than eight thousand, in a kingdom consisting of as many millions.” Thus, the Commons clearly failed to represent the people.\textsuperscript{128} Therefore, Hall suggested enlarging the voting base. Doing so would decrease bribery and corruption in elections and allow people genuinely to express themselves. Hall proposed that every householder be allowed to vote, or every man of a certain age. With such a broadening of the vote, Hall was optimistic that no candidate or party could ever spend enough money to bias voters’ opinions. He looked forward to the outcome: “from the whole there would result that general impression, which would convey with precision the unbiassed sense of the people.”\textsuperscript{129}

Hall also recommended shortening each Parliament to a duration of only one year. To support his position, he used the precedent of Alfred’s great council, which had been

\begin{footnotes}
\item[125] Hall, Apology, 30-31.
\item[126] Hall, Apology, 30.
\item[127] Hall, Apology, 31.
\item[128] Hall, Apology, 32.
\end{footnotes}
required to meet at least once a year. In addition, the settlement of 1688 provided for
frequent Parliaments. Yet in 1716, Parliament passed a septennial act, which set the
maximum duration at seven years.\textsuperscript{130} Hall contended that seven years was clearly too
long: “It is intolerable, that in so large a space of a man’s life as seven years, he should
never be able to correct the error he may have committed in the choice of a
representative.” Septennial Parliaments allowed for corruption, as members remained in
office for years. The people had no remedy because of the time between elections.\textsuperscript{131} If
Parliament lasted too long, the members grew isolated from their constituents: “The
union between a representative and his constituents, ought to be strict and entire; but the
septennial act has rendered it little more than nominal. The duration of parliament sets its
members at a distance from the people.”\textsuperscript{132} Hall rejected the idea that annual Parliaments
would increase the tumult surrounding elections. He believed that annual elections
would lead to more peaceful contests: “Render a seat in the House of Commons of less
value, and you diminish at once the violence of the struggle.”\textsuperscript{133}

In Hall’s view, the House of Commons needed to reestablish its independence,
both from the king and from the House of Lords.\textsuperscript{134} A member of Parliament could show
integrity only if he voted his conscience.\textsuperscript{135} Hall complained about the increased
influence of the crown, owing to its power of patronage. Because of royal influence, the
constitution was no longer balanced.\textsuperscript{136} If swayed by royal patronage, a member grew to

\textsuperscript{129} Hall, \textit{Apology}, 34.
\textsuperscript{130} Hall, \textit{Apology}, 34-35.
\textsuperscript{131} Hall, \textit{Apology}, 36.
\textsuperscript{132} Hall, \textit{Apology}, 31, 37.
\textsuperscript{133} Hall, \textit{Apology}, 39-40.
\textsuperscript{134} Hall, \textit{Apology}, 30.
\textsuperscript{135} Hall, \textit{Apology}, 40-41.
\textsuperscript{136} Hall, \textit{Apology}, 97.
depend on the executive branch for material gain.\textsuperscript{137} In addition, Parliament’s duration caused members to become compliant with the government’s ministers.\textsuperscript{138} The biggest problem Hall detected in Parliament, though, centered on class:

The necessity of reform in the constitution of parliament is in nothing more obvious than in the ascendancy of the aristocracy. This Colossus bestrides both houses of parliament; legislates in one and exerts a domineering influence over the other. It is humiliating at the approach of an election, to see a whole county send a deputation to an Earl or Duke, and beg a representative as you would beg an alms.\textsuperscript{139}

Hall decried the situation of having family members, such as a father and son, sit in the House of Lords and the House of Commons, respectively. In such situations, the two houses of Parliament forfeited the balance that existed between them.\textsuperscript{140}

Hall also criticized the behavior of MPs, especially since they failed to act as the people’s representatives. Instead of disagreeing on principles and working toward legislation of value to the nation, members contested for profit and power.\textsuperscript{141} If a member displayed more interest in personal gain than in his political principles, he ended up following the leader of a faction.\textsuperscript{142} In the absence of clear principles, freedom declined: “After the manner of the ancient factions, we hear much in England of the Bedford party, the Rockingham party, the Portland party; when it would puzzle the wisest man to point out their political distinction. The useful jealousy of the separate orders is extinct, being all melted down and blended into one mass of corruption.”\textsuperscript{143} Hall saw only one potential

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\item Hall, \textit{Apology}, 31.
\item Hall, \textit{Apology}, 37.
\item Hall, \textit{Apology}, 41.
\item Hall, \textit{Apology}, 42.
\item Hall, \textit{Apology}, 42-43.
\item Hall, \textit{Apology}, 44.
\item Hall, \textit{Apology}, 45.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
bright spot in Parliament, Charles James Fox, who consistently criticized royal influence and supported parliamentary reform.\textsuperscript{144}

Besides the need for religious toleration and parliamentary reform, Hall noted other specific problems that were contributing to Britain’s decline. National debt and taxes had risen “to a degree unexampled in any other age or country.”\textsuperscript{145} Hall directly referred to the taxation as oppressive, although Winterbotham had been prosecuted, in part, for expressing a similar idea.\textsuperscript{146} Hall also disagreed with the maintenance of a standing army.\textsuperscript{147} Hall offered a solution to these problems. The only way to stave off ruin and secure liberty was to reform the representation of Parliament.\textsuperscript{148} Hall insisted that the nation could not alleviate discontent by delaying reform.\textsuperscript{149} He likened reform to surgery, “but since the constitution must undergo it or die, it is best to submit, before the remedy becomes as dangerous as the disease.” He desired reform before revolution became necessary and he used the French Revolution as a reason to avoid delay in reforming Britain. Hall did not want a similar upheaval in his nation.\textsuperscript{150} He contended that if the French had resisted arbitrary rule, then never “would the people have been impelled to the dire necessity of building the whole fabric of political society afresh.”\textsuperscript{151}

To preserve the nation’s constitutional heritage, Hall tried to stir his fellow citizens from their complacency: “Let not the name of Britons, my countrymen, too much elate you.”\textsuperscript{152} The nation’s people could express themselves through Parliament: “That

\begin{footnotes}
\item \textsuperscript{144} Hall, Apology, 45-46.
\item \textsuperscript{145} Hall, Apology, 97.
\item \textsuperscript{146} Hall, Apology, 115.
\item \textsuperscript{147} Hall, Apology, 100.
\item \textsuperscript{148} Hall, Apology, 96, 109.
\item \textsuperscript{149} Hall, Apology, 46.
\item \textsuperscript{150} Hall, Apology, 47.
\item \textsuperscript{151} Hall, Apology, 47-48.
\item \textsuperscript{152} Hall, Apology, 106.
\end{footnotes}
Assembly which sits by right of representation, will be little inclined to oppose your will, expressed in a firm, decisive manner."\textsuperscript{153} Even government ministers could not resist the people’s wishes: “at their peril will they attempt to intimidate a nation.”\textsuperscript{154} Affirming the British heritage, though, extended beyond political reform. Hall urged compassion for the poor, including reductions in their tax burden and increased opportunities for education.\textsuperscript{155} He censured his nation for “forgetting in the midst of wars, negotiations and factious disputes, that the true end of civil polity is the happiness of the people.”\textsuperscript{156} The need for change had become so great that Hall stated that the “present crisis, in my apprehension, is the fullest of terror and of danger, we have ever experienced.” Yet he saw the threat to Britain as internal rather than external.\textsuperscript{157} Hall believed that his nation headed toward political ruin because of arbitrary rule, and “the tame subdued spirit of the nation.”\textsuperscript{158} He believed that “in the present crisis of things, the danger to liberty is extreme, and it is required to address a warning voice to the nation, that may disturb its slumbers.”\textsuperscript{159} In that context, Hall urged reform: “To reconcile the disaffected, to remove discontents, to allay animosities, and open a prospect of increasing happiness is yet in our power. But if a contrary cause be taken, the sun of Great Britain is set fore ever, her glory departed.”\textsuperscript{160} To Hall, only two political parties existed, “the patrons of corruption, and the friends of liberty.”\textsuperscript{161}

\textsuperscript{153} Hall, \textit{Apology}, 107.
\textsuperscript{154} Hall, \textit{Apology}, 108.
\textsuperscript{155} Hall, \textit{Apology}, 110.
\textsuperscript{156} Hall, \textit{Apology}, 111.
\textsuperscript{157} Hall, \textit{Apology}, 113.
\textsuperscript{158} Hall, \textit{Apology}, 113-14.
\textsuperscript{159} Hall, \textit{Apology}, Preface xvii.
\textsuperscript{160} Hall, \textit{Apology}, Preface xviii.
\textsuperscript{161} Hall, \textit{Apology}, 115.
Hall rejected the notion that reform must wait for favorable circumstances, such as success in war. He claimed that timing should not affect the reform effort if it were genuinely necessary: “If it be not requisite to secure our freedom, it is vain and useless; but if it be a proper means of preserving that blessing, the nation will need it as much in peace as in war.” According to Hall, his government acknowledged no need for reform in a time of peace and prosperity while it rejected reform during wartime as inappropriate. Hall found that position absurd: “as the nation must always be in one or other of these situations, the conclusion is, the period of reform can never arrive at all.”

Hall sharply criticized the establishment’s attitude that reform was unnecessary. He believed that the government feared reflection: “There cannot be a clearer symptom of the decay of liberty than the dread of speculative opinions.” Though the English had a tradition of speculative thought, citizens “are now taught to fear it more than death.” Part of that fear grew out of what Hall interpreted as a system of spies and informers, a situation that discouraged defense of the constitution: “Under the torpid torch of despotism the patriotic spirit has shrunk into a narrow compass.” Supporters of the status quo had one basic problem: “They cherish to excess the forms, while they repress the spirit of the constitution.” Therefore, “the people are instructed to confound anarchy with reform.” Hall never accepted the idea that reform would lead to social upheaval. Furthermore, he attacked the notion that national success depended solely on the government in its existing form. If prosperity derived from the government, “that

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164 Hall, *Apology*, 50.  
constitution which is now affirmed to be the best, must be allowed during the American war to have been the worst.\textsuperscript{170}

While advocating reform, Hall also asserted the necessity of submission. He argued that the people owed submission whether or not they had conferred authority on the government.\textsuperscript{171} Refusal to submit would render society impossible: “Social order would be inevitably dissolved, if any man declined a practical acquiescence in every political regulation which he did not personally approve.”\textsuperscript{172} Submission was a duty “founded on principles which hold under every government.” A government’s authority “signifies a right to demand obedience.”\textsuperscript{173}

In explaining the duty of submission, Hall argued that Christians did not submit from some unique characteristic of their religion, “but from the utility and necessity of civil restraints.”\textsuperscript{174} Christians needed to recognize that government served a crucial function as “a salutary institution, appointed to restrain and punish outrage and injustice, but exhibiting to the quiet and inoffensive, nothing of which they need be afraid.” Because of the necessity of government, Christians should know that “their religion conferred upon them no civil immunities.” They were subject to the laws “which could be justly imposed by the civil power.”\textsuperscript{175} That obligation never ended, so long as the government met its obligations: “Under every form of government, that civil order which affords protection to property, and tranquillity to individuals, must be obeyed.” Hall claimed that even admirers of the French Revolution, if they had lived in France, would

\textsuperscript{169} Hall, \textit{Apology}, 104.  
\textsuperscript{170} Hall, \textit{Apology}, 105.  
\textsuperscript{171} Hall, \textit{Apology}, Preface xi.  
\textsuperscript{172} Hall, \textit{Apology}, Preface iv-v.  
\textsuperscript{173} Hall, \textit{Apology}, Preface v.  
\textsuperscript{174} Hall, \textit{Christianity Consistent with Freedom}, 44-45.  
\textsuperscript{175} Hall, \textit{Christianity Consistent with Freedom}, 45.
have submitted to the government. They would “have yielded a quiet submission to its laws, as being conscious, the social compact can only be considered as dissolved, by an expression of the general will.”\textsuperscript{176}

Despite the need for submission, Hall placed limits on acquiescence. He wondered: “Is it best for the human race that every tyrant and usurper be submitted to without check or control?”\textsuperscript{177} He clearly believed in limits on submission and he even stated that “the doctrine of passive obedience is so repugnant to the genuine feelings of human nature, that it can never be completely acted on.”\textsuperscript{178} As an historical precedent for limits on passive obedience, Hall referred to the English barons at Runnymede, whose actions led to the Magna Carta and its restrictions on the king’s power.\textsuperscript{179} Their example meant that “the freedom of the British constitution flowed from a departure from passive obedience.” Resistance was a necessary part of the constitution.\textsuperscript{180} Therefore, Hall rejected arguments for total submission: “With whatever colours the advocates of passive obedience may varnish their theories, they must of necessity be enemies to the British constitution. Its spirit they detest; its corruptions they cherish.”\textsuperscript{181}

To defend limits on submission, Hall disagreed with the establishment’s interpretation of Romans 13, in which Paul urged believers to be subject to the governing authorities. That passage was “the strong hold of the doctrine of passive obedience and non-resistance.” Yet Hall pointed out that Paul wrote the passage in a time when early Christians were “just emerging from the shades of ignorance, and awakened to new hopes.” Therefore, they faced the temptation of thinking that the laws did not apply to

\textsuperscript{176} Hall, \textit{Christianity Consistent with Freedom}, 46.
\textsuperscript{177} Hall, \textit{Apology}, Preface viii.
\textsuperscript{178} Hall, \textit{Apology}, Preface ix.
\textsuperscript{179} Hall, \textit{Apology}, Preface xii.
them in their privileged position of knowing the gospel.\textsuperscript{182} If they had succumbed to that temptation, they would have discredited Christianity and Rome would have punished them. Because of those circumstances, \textquotedblleft it was proper for the Apostle, to remind Christians, their religion did not interfere with the rights of princes, or diminish their obligation to attend to those salutary regulations, which are established for the protection of innocence, and the punishment of the guilty.\textquotedblright\textsuperscript{183} To supplement his argument, Hall also asserted that passages from I Peter 2, in which Peter urged Christians to submit to government ordinances, also meant that Christians must obey. Again, they had no religious exemption from obedience.\textsuperscript{184} Yet their obedience was never absolute.

Hall then explored the possibility of dissolving the government if it ultimately failed to correct itself. The reason citizens submitted to government was its \textquotedblleft tendency to do good,\textquotedblright and \textquotedblleft wherever therefore this shall cease to be the case, submission becomes absurd.\textquotedblright\textsuperscript{185} Hall believed that the exercise of reason could assess the government’s failure: \textquotedblleft at what time this evil shall be judged to have arrived, or what remedy it may be proper to apply, christianity does not decide, but leaves to be determined, by an appeal to natural reason and right.\textquotedblright Even Christians had no responsibility to submit to an evil government.\textsuperscript{186} To support that argument, Hall turned to the apostle Paul. As described in Acts 16, when beaten and imprisoned without trial, Paul asserted his rights as a Roman citizen and forced the magistrates to apologize. Far from quietly submitting, Paul

\textsuperscript{180} Hall, \textit{Apology}, Preface xii-xiii.
\textsuperscript{181} Hall, \textit{Apology}, Preface xiii.
\textsuperscript{182} Hall, \textit{Christianity Consistent with Freedom}, 42-43.
\textsuperscript{183} Hall, \textit{Christianity Consistent with Freedom}, 44.
\textsuperscript{184} Hall, \textit{Christianity Consistent with Freedom}, 47.
\textsuperscript{185} Hall, \textit{Christianity Consistent with Freedom}, 45.
\textsuperscript{186} Hall, \textit{Christianity Consistent with Freedom}, 46.
claimed “I was free born.”\textsuperscript{187} Hall denied that Paul ever meant that believers owed unlimited submission or obedience.\textsuperscript{188}

Though he placed limits on submission, Hall denied the validity of an armed revolution: “For any particular number of persons to set themselves by force to oppose the established practice of a state, is a plain violation of the laws of morality, as it would be productive of the utmost disorder; and no government could stand, were it permitted to individuals, to counteract the general will.” A government must punish those who attempted a forceful overthrow. Those who asserted their liberty must do so through normal channels, not through a revolution.\textsuperscript{189} Events in France had led to a fear of revolution in England.\textsuperscript{190} Yet Hall argued that an English revolution was only a remote possibility: “Nothing but an obstinate adherence to abuses, can ever push the people of England to that fatal extremity.”\textsuperscript{191} For Hall, though, the friends of liberty and supporters of reform did not advocate a revolution in his country: “Instead of wishing for a similar event in England, they are intent on reform chiefly to avoid that necessity.” Again, he urged his countrymen to find a middle road of reform between anarchy and despotism.\textsuperscript{192}

Because of his political views, Hall knew he would face criticism, but he dismissed his critics as power hungry: “It seems a favourite point with a certain description of men, to stop the progress of enquiry, and throw mankind back into the darkness of the middle ages, from a persuasion, that ignorance will augment their power, as objects look largest in a mist.”\textsuperscript{193} Hall denied that he contributed to factionalism: “It is

\textsuperscript{187} Hall, \textit{Christianity Consistent with Freedom}, 49.
\textsuperscript{188} Hall, \textit{Christianity Consistent with Freedom}, 58.
\textsuperscript{189} Hall, \textit{Apology}, Preface iv.
\textsuperscript{190} Hall, \textit{Apology}, Preface xvii.
\textsuperscript{191} Hall, \textit{Apology}, Preface xviii.
\textsuperscript{192} Hall, \textit{Apology}, 119.
\textsuperscript{193} Hall, \textit{Apology}, Preface ii.
easy to brand a passion for liberty with the odious epithet of faction; no two things, however, can be more opposite. Faction is a combination of a few to oppress the liberties of many; the love of freedom is the impulse of an enlightened and presiding spirit, ever intent upon the welfare of the community."\textsuperscript{194} To illustrate his position, Hall made a distinction in contemporary British politics: “Every tory upholds a faction; every whig as far as he is sincere and well informed, is a friend to the equal liberties of mankind.” Rejecting the notion that such a friend of liberty threatened society, Hall described the characteristics of a genuine patriot: “a closer assimilation to that great Being, who appears under the character of the avenger of the oppressed, and the friend and protector of the human race.”\textsuperscript{195}

In contrast, Hall interpreted recently formed loyalist associations as evidence of tyranny. They had sprung up to show support for the government and to counteract the perceived threat of insurrection, which Hall denied as a genuine possibility.\textsuperscript{196} Hall accused the associations of suppressing the diffusion of principles. The loyalists had “an express view to extinguish opinions, and to overthrow freedom of enquiry by the terrors of criminal prosecution.”\textsuperscript{197} Hall deemed their actions unnecessary because “the British constitution hath provided ample securities for its stability and permanence.” The Attorney General prosecuted sedition, and the king could use the militia if public order was threatened. Far from exerting a positive influence, the loyalist associations posed a danger to society: “The law hath amply provided against overt acts of sedition and disorder, and to suppress mere opinions by any other method than reasoning and

\textsuperscript{194} Hall, \textit{Christianity Consistent with Freedom}, 54.
\textsuperscript{195} Hall, \textit{Christianity Consistent with Freedom}, 55.
\textsuperscript{196} Hall, \textit{Apology}, 16.
\textsuperscript{197} Hall, \textit{Apology}, 17-18.
argument is the height of tyranny.” The government survived by the general opinion of its excellence. The use of neither force nor terror, of which Hall accused the associations, helped the government’s reputation.\textsuperscript{198} Hall rejected the notion that the associations helped the nation, because they, in fact, inhibited the right of inquiry and discussion. Furthermore, the constitution was not worth keeping if doing so required restrictions on that right: “Freedom of thought being intimately connected with the happiness and dignity of man in every stage of his being, is of so much more importance than the preservation of any constitution.”\textsuperscript{199} Hall desired a society of openness: “it is infinitely better a multitude of errors should be propagated than one truth be suppressed.”\textsuperscript{200}

Hall considered the associations useless in attaining their goals. Their attacks only publicized the ideas with which they disagreed. If an idea were wrong, open inquiry and discussion would show it as such. Hall trusted in the power of truth to overcome falsehood without the use of violence.\textsuperscript{201} The associations claimed that they tried to support the government, but Hall countered: “if the government wishes to become more vigorous, let it first become more pure, lest an addition to its strength should only increase its capacity for mischief.”\textsuperscript{202} He believed the associations merely wanted “to withdraw the public attention from real grievances to imaginary dangers.” Thus, they raised the alarm of republicanism, but remained silent on the need for government reform. The associations drowned out genuine complaints.\textsuperscript{203} The associations also failed to prevent riots, and instead generated them, with Birmingham as an example.\textsuperscript{204}

\textsuperscript{198} Hall, \textit{Apology}, 18-19.  
\textsuperscript{199} Hall, \textit{Apology}, 20.  
\textsuperscript{200} Hall, \textit{Apology}, 21.  
\textsuperscript{201} Hall, \textit{Apology}, 22.  
\textsuperscript{202} Hall, \textit{Apology}, 23.  
\textsuperscript{203} Hall, \textit{Apology}, 24.  
\textsuperscript{204} Hall, \textit{Apology}, 25.
Hall also accused the associations of misrepresenting their opponents’ calls for equality as a demand for equal property. Hall stated, however, that advocates of liberty “never intended there any thing more than equality of rights – as opposed to feudal oppression and hereditary distinctions.” The people had equal property rights, but not the right to equal possession of property. In Hall’s assessment, all of the loyalist associations concurred “in establishing a political test, on the first appearance of which the friends of liberty should make a stand . . . the precedent is fatal, and the moment subscription becomes the price of security, the rubicon is passed.” Narrowing the range of tolerated opinions signified despotism.

Though most of his political reflection concerned his own country, Hall did consider the French example. Like Winterbotham, Hall expressed optimism concerning the French Revolution: “The empire of darkness and despotism, has been smitten with a stroke which has sounded through the universe.” He thought such an event signaled a new age for humanity:

we need not wonder, if, amidst events so extraordinary, the human character itself should appear to be altering and improving apace. That fond attachment to ancient institutions, and blind submission to opinions already received, which has ever checked the growth of improvement, and drawn on the greatest benefactors of mankind danger, or neglect, is giving way to a spirit of bold and fearless investigation. Man seems to be becoming more erect and independent. He leans more on himself, less on his fellow-creatures. He begins to feel a consciousness in a higher degree of personal dignity, and is less enamoured of artificial distinctions.

The French Revolution inspired reflection, which Hall hoped would give rise to new opinions and new policies, that is, a fresh perspective on government. He looked forward

205 Hall, Apology, 27.
206 Hall, Apology, 29.
207 Hall, Christianity Consistent with Freedom, 77.
208 Hall, Christianity Consistent with Freedom, 78-79.
to the end of tyranny and the end of wars. Yet he criticized his own nation’s response to the French. Hall argued that Britain’s government ministers had opposed the French Revolution long before the king’s execution. Thus, they showed themselves hostile to the fall of despotism: “Intent on the destruction of liberty in one country, they were disconcerted seeing it revive in another.” In contrast to his government, Hall described the French Revolution as “the most splendid event recorded in the annals of history.” Because of that, Hall expressed doubt about the value of the war. He could support it if Britain fought to preserve treaties or national honor. Yet if the government prosecuted the war to restore France’s former government, or to oppose freedom and rights, “it will be the last humiliation and disgrace that can be inflicted on Great Britain.”

In the third edition of the *Apology*, Hall refused to retract his previous statements, instead claiming that the principles he offered had been justified: “uninstructed by our calamities, we still persist in an impious attack on the liberties of France, and are eager to take our part in the great drama of crimes which is acting on the continent of Europe. Meantime the violence and injustice of the internal administration keeps pace with our iniquities abroad. Liberty and truth are silenced.” Hall further condemned his nation: “An unrelenting system of prosecution prevails.” Hall directed his attack toward one individual, William Pitt, prime minister at the time. Hall described Pitt as a “shameless apostate,” “a veteran in frauds while in the bloom of youth,” experienced in “falsifying every promise.” Pitt had failed in his leadership role and had provided “no security

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209 Hall, *Christianity Consistent with Freedom*, 78-80.
211 Hall, *Apology*, 118.
213 Hall, *Apology*, Advertisement i.
214 Hall, *Apology*, Advertisement i-ii.
against the great antagonist and destroyer of liberty, the employment of military power by
the chief magistrate.”\textsuperscript{216} Hall believed that Pitt should be removed from office: “Too long
has he insulted the patience of his countrymen.”\textsuperscript{217}

While offering that assessment of his own nation, Hall admitted that his hopes
concerning the effects of the French Revolution had been dashed. In doing so, he
demonstrated a change in his views. In fact, he began to express a strand of
conservatism. He had hoped for a “mild philosophy” to spread, but the continent had
become desolate and miserable. Thus, Hall grew uneasy: “the seeds of public
convulsions are sown in every country of Europe (our own not excepted).”\textsuperscript{218} He feared
“the overthrow of all governments.” Therefore, he urged his readers to reflect on how to
avert such a calamity. He directed them to reject a firm attachment to both “antiquated
forms” and “useless innovations.” The change in government that Hall sought required
an effective combination of tradition and change.\textsuperscript{219}

By the beginning of the nineteenth century, Hall had softened his rhetoric even
further as he shifted from the positions expressed in his 1791 and 1793 publications. He
began to think that Christians lost their way if they became too involved in politics. In
addition, he lost his enthusiasm for the French Revolution and described it as an example
of infidelity.\textsuperscript{220} Instead of praising them for their protection of natural rights, Hall
criticized the French for their ignorance of human nature.\textsuperscript{221} Napoleon was in power by
this point, so the French Revolution had officially ended. The French threat to all of
Europe, though, seemed greater than ever, and Hall exhorted his nation to defend order.

\textsuperscript{216} Hall, Apology, Advertisement iii.
\textsuperscript{217} Hall, Apology, Advertisement v.
\textsuperscript{218} Hall, Apology, Advertisement v.
\textsuperscript{219} Hall, Apology, Advertisement vi.
\textsuperscript{220} Hall, Apology, Advertisement vi.
\textsuperscript{221} Hall, Apology, Advertisement vii.
Hall used a sermon of thanksgiving for the Peace of Amiens, signed in 1802, to express his support for peace in the interests of security, prosperity, and religion. That last was most important for Hall because he interpreted the war as God’s punishment of humanity: “It is the garment of vengeance with which the Deity arrays himself, when he comes forth to punish the inhabitants of the earth.” Hall was convinced that the war was not worth its cost, and he believed that he had a responsibility as a minister to point out the war’s detrimental effects. He lamented that “half a million of beings, sharers of the same nature, warmed with the same hopes, and as fondly attached to life as ourselves, have been prematurely swept into the grave; each of whose deaths has pierced the heart of a wife, a parent, a brother, or a sister.” He viewed such a war as a function of humanity’s worst aspects: “neither the fury of wild beasts, the concussions of the earth, nor the violence of tempests, are to be compared to the ravages of arms... nature in her utmost extent, or, more properly, divine justice in its utmost severity, has supplied no enemy to man so terrible as man.” Hall also opposed the war for its disruption of trade, which had increased poverty even in areas that did not see fighting. In addition, the war also negatively affected morality, because it included killing: “Whatever renders human nature amiable or respectable, whatever engages love or confidence, is sacrificed

224 Hall, Reflections on War, 66.
225 Hall, Reflections on War, 70.
226 Hall, Reflections on War, 71.
at its shrine.” That violated the good will that humans owed one another: “The sword, and that alone, cuts asunder the bond of consanguinity which unites man to man.”

Because of the violent nature of the war, Hall called on all the involved governments to avoid any possible renewal of the conflict:

If statesmen, if christian statesmen, at least, had a proper feeling on this subject, and would open their hearts to the reflections which such scenes must inspire, instead of rushing eagerly to arms from the thirst of conquest, or the thirst of gain, would they not hesitate long, would they not try every expedient, every lenient art consistent with national honour, before they ventured on this desperate remedy, or rather, before they plunged into this gulf of horror? Christian compassion held a greater priority than national pride, and it represented the only hope to avoid plunging into war again. Hall believed the war to be so bloody because it was a contest of principle: “On one side an attachment to the ancient order of things, on the other a passionate desire of change . . . pretensions to freedom pushed to madness and anarchy.” In that clash, Hall praised his nation for its calm: “it is a pleasing reflection, that at a period when the spirit of giddiness and revolt has been so prevalent, we have preferred the blessings of order to a phantom of liberty, and have not been so mad as to wade through the horrors of a revolution to make way for a military despot.” The British people had preserved their constitution after all.

More importantly, Hall urged his nation to “cherish the spirit of religion.” Hall wanted his country to avoid the fate of France, which God had punished for its impiety: “he neither let loose an inundation of barbarous nations, nor the desolating powers of the universe: he neither overwhelmed them with earthquakes, nor visited them with

227 Hall, Reflections on War, 72.
228 Hall, Reflections on War, 71.
229 Hall, Reflections on War, 77-78.
230 Hall, Reflections on War, 80.
pestilence. He summoned from among themselves a ferocity more terrible than either.”

Genuine Christian faith, however, could save Britain from that end:

> Our only security against similar calamities is a steady adherence to this religion; not the religion of mere form and profession, but that which has a seat in the heart; not as it is mutilated and debased by the refinements of a false philosophy, but as it exists in all its simplicity and extent in the sacred Scriptures; consisting in sorrow for sin, in the love of God, and in faith in a crucified Redeemer. If this religion revives and flourishes amongst us, we may still surmount all our difficulties, and no weapon formed against us will prosper: if we despise or neglect it, no human power can afford us protection. Instead of showing our love to our country, therefore, by engaging eagerly in the strife of parties, let us choose to signalize it rather by beneficence, by piety, by an exemplary discharge of the duties of private life, under a persuasion that man, in the final issue of things, will be seen to have been the best patriot, who is the best christian. He who diffuses the most happiness, and mitigates the most distress within his own circle, is undoubtedly the best friend to his country and the world, since nothing more is necessary than for all men to imitate his conduct to make the greatest part of the misery of the world cease in a moment.

Thus, Hall called on his nation to put its Christian beliefs into action. In fact, actions mattered more than beliefs or institutions. Hall had distanced himself from his earlier vehemence in urging reform, instead placing a higher priority on religious faith.

Later in his career, Hall continued to support causes he viewed as just, including itinerant preaching. Hall suffered a mental breakdown in November 1804, though, and eventually resigned his post at the Cambridge church in March 1806. Yet he recovered and in October 1807 became the minister of a church at Harvey Lane, Leicester, where he remained for almost two decades. In 1815 Hall embarked on a dispute with Joseph Kinghorn concerning communion, arguing that a church could not deny communion to other Christians who were not members of that particular church. In 1826 Hall returned

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231 Hall, *Reflections on War*, 80.
233 Hall, *Reflections on War*, 82.
234 Hall, *Reflections on War*, 82.
to Bristol as pastor of Broadmead church, where he had been an assistant many years before. In considering Hall’s legacy, two important points emerge. First, despite his earlier criticism of the government, Hall’s reputation as an orator helped build respect for Baptists. Second, his advocacy of peace and of rights contributed to the nineteenth-century Baptist consciousness.

Hall clearly associated himself with a national identity, and he valued his nation’s heritage. He believed in the efficacy of Parliament as an institution. Yet its corruption and its failure to represent people adequately created a need for reform. Hall advocated reform, but not revolution. He consistently argued for the existence of natural rights, specifically the freedom of worship and the freedom of inquiry. He defended the right of citizens to reflect on their government. In doing so, Hall expressed a desire for full citizenship, without restrictions on his activities owing to his religion. He called for the repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts, which discriminated against Dissenters, whom Hall portrayed as unquestionably loyal, and in fact, the guardians of the nation’s liberty. He urged Dissenters to support governmental reform, particularly a return to Britain’s constitutional tradition, to increase the people’s happiness. Yet he saw reason and experience rather than Christian faith as the basis for his political views. Therefore, he reinforces the notion of separate national and religious identities in contrast to Colley’s view that the two went together. Hall’s plan for reform demonstrates an alternative view of government that extended beyond Clark’s concept of the heterodox elite. At the same time, Hall’s opposition to the establishment represents the diversity of views within orthodox Protestantism. When Britain faced the ongoing threat of Napoleonic France,

235 Chadwick, “Hall.”
Hall deviated from his call for reform, but only because his desire for peace and security preempted his desire for political reform. Even so, he still desired change; he just began to focus on religious renewal. As an orthodox Dissenter, Hall desired national reform.

Mark Wilks was an ardent supporter of the French Revolution and equally passionate critic of the British government. In religion he was an evangelical and in politics a Whig. Wilks consistently praised the French Revolution as an example of freedom. He acclaimed the advent of the National Assembly and the end of the aristocracy. God had approved the French Revolution for its goodness. Because of that, Wilks expressed optimism concerning the lasting effects of the revolution. He concluded that believed his government could learn from the French example how better to protect rights and increase happiness. Contrasting Britain and France, Wilks “saw the French government as a gift of God, far more perfect than the sadly corrupted British one.”¹ He criticized the religious discrimination in Britain and applauded the religious toleration in France. While pointing to the differences in the two nations, Wilks did not advocate revolution in Britain, but he vehemently called for reform. He emphasized the need to protect liberty, such as the right to reflect on political issues, and the right to circulate political ideas. Wilks urged using reason to fashion a better nation. In these aspirations, Wilks stressed the value of the individual and the equal rights of citizens. He desired greater social equality in Britain. In addition, he argued that citizens had a responsibility to oversee Parliament.

Wilks’s example represents a need to refine the arguments of Colley and Clark. In contrast to Colley’s argument concerning the growth of a British national identity in

the eighteenth century, Wilks most often referred to his nation as England rather than as Britain, though he did use the latter term on occasion, especially when referring to Parliament. In addition, Wilks was neither anti-French nor anti-Catholic. Though he claimed a willingness to defend his country, he disagreed with his government. He clearly rejected political restrictions on Dissenters as well as the limited representation of Parliament. He considered France’s new system better. In highlighting rights and equality, Wilks shows that alternatives to the establishment went beyond Clark’s heterodox elite. Wilks was orthodox in his theology, yet he sharply criticized the government and called wholeheartedly for reform.

Wilks became the pastor of the second Baptist church in Norwich, St. Paul’s, in 1788. St. Paul’s was of Methodist origin, and Wilks himself was a Methodist until his marriage, when he adopted Baptist tenets. He fathered eight children and, by one assessment, struggled to earn enough to support his family. Wilks ran a farm and even tried his hand as a businessman by establishing a bath house in 1789. Wilks had little training in theology, but he exerted considerable political influence in Norwich.²

Norwich had long served as an administrative and ecclesiastical center. By the 1790s, though, Bristol, Birmingham, and Manchester had all passed Norwich in population, so it was no longer the realm’s second city. Norwich’s population was no longer growing. In fact, the city experienced a net emigration in the 1790s. The population still amounted to approximately 40,000, with the total of the city and surrounding areas reaching 100,000. Norwich had some textile manufacturing, but it had

failed to compete with other industrial centers, marking it as the largest city to experience relative decline because of industrialization in the eighteenth century.³ Norwich’s economy depended on trade, particularly overseas commerce. That dependence made the city’s economy vulnerable during war, especially considering Norwich had already lost its favorable position in some overseas markets. The working class relied on the export industry, thus developing an interest in peace so that trade with the continent could continue unabated. Therefore, economics rendered the French war unpopular in Norwich. The outbreak of war with France in 1793 led to sharply increased unemployment. In 1795, the combination of high wheat prices and high unemployment led to some rioting. Also in that year a special assembly of the corporation petitioned the king to end the war that had almost destroyed Norwich’s trade and reduced most of its residents to poverty.⁴ By 1800, Norwich was home to 16,000 indigent poor.⁵

The French Revolution and its economic disruptions contributed to increased political activity in Norwich, especially among people not involved before. New political clubs organized and they grew increasingly partisan. Several of the new organizations supported reform. Members of the Norwich Revolution Society, an upper middle class organization founded in 1788, believed that every citizen of the nation possessed the same rights unless an individual had forfeited them for some reason.⁶ Events in France in 1789 did nothing to slow reforming sentiment; the majority of Norwich residents

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expressed joy at the destruction of the Bastille. Even after reports of violence in France, declining employment and rising bread prices motivated reform efforts. The Norwich Patriotic Society, successor to the Revolution Society, was established in 1795 to work toward enlarging the electorate and requiring annual Parliaments, as well as coordinate the various groups for political reform. With similar goals, members of the Norwich Society for Political Information advocated suffrage for every male, and annually elected Parliaments. Because of the steady call for reform, conservatives and the national government viewed Norwich as factious and radical.

Despite that view, Norwich exhibited a balance in its politics. Local Tory and Whig leadership came from Norwich’s social elite, but there was virtually no aristocratic influence on Norwich elections. Both parties had significant financial support, which led to relatively balanced elections, as neither side possessed an overwhelming advantage. In the 1790s the Whigs connected the war with Norwich’s economic trouble and demanded peace. The Tories, mostly Anglicans, focused on the ideological threat of the French Revolution. They worried about social order. Yet Dissenters had such good relations with both Tories and Anglican clergy that they were rarely attacked. In fact, Norwich stood out as an exception to the nationwide violence against the Dissenters who in 1791 commemorated the anniversary of the fall of the Bastille. Norwich simply had little religious animosity. Religious differences exerted so little effect on municipal elections

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7 Jewson, Jacobin City, 15, 30.
9 Jewson, Jacobin City, 32-33.
10 Fawcett, “Provincial Enlightenment,” 14; Jewson, Jacobin City, 100.
that Anglicans and Dissenters often supported the same candidate for Parliament. One exception to that rule was William Windham, a conservative Whig who switched to the government’s party in 1794 when he became Minister of War. His change generated bitterness among Dissenters, who unsuccessfully worked against his reelection in 1794 and 1796. Eventually, Dissenters contributed to the successful effort to oust Windham. To insure his continued election, he began to run for office in a borough controlled by the Duke of Buckingham. Norwich voters elected a Unitarian for Parliament in 1802.

Dissenters, under Unitarian leadership, clearly influenced Norwich’s political direction. At the end of the eighteenth century, they increasingly supported anti-government candidates for Parliament. In 1761, 70 percent of Norwich Dissenters voted for the administration’s candidates, but their support had fallen to 20 percent in 1780. By 1802, almost 90 percent of Dissenting voters cast their ballots for candidates who opposed the current administration. The influence of Dissenters went beyond their votes. Dissenters had served as aldermen and at least one had served as mayor. They ignored the legal restrictions against them to hold such offices, but their political activity reflected their prosperity. Their political success inspired reform efforts, because Dissenters clearly represented no threat to civil order. Therefore, they wanted to remove all restrictions on their political activities nationwide. By the end of the eighteenth century, though, Protestant Dissenters had become the most powerful political influence

in Norwich, and they offered encouragement and intellectual leadership to working-class political clubs. Their activities made Norwich the center of regional organizations supporting parliamentary reform in the 1790s.\textsuperscript{15}

The Baptists participated in Norwich politics and even held municipal office. Church discipline forbade them from taking the Anglican sacrament, but if elected without having done so, they had the protection of the annual Indemnity Acts unless someone specifically challenged their election. For example, the municipal elections of 1801 were disputed because several candidates could offer no certificate of having taken communion in the Church of England within the last year. In new elections, most of the disputed candidates again received the necessary votes, including two deacons of St. Mary’s Baptist Church, the largest Baptist church in Norwich. They assumed their offices without further challenge, showing that voters did not see religious affiliation as a hindrance.\textsuperscript{16}

Wilks took a leadership role in Dissenting political activity. He was a member of the Norwich Revolution Society.\textsuperscript{17} He announced the result of treason trials at his Baptist meeting house in November 1794.\textsuperscript{18} At a meeting of the Norwich Patriotic Society in November 1795, he criticized the bills that became the Treasonable Practices and Seditious Meetings Acts, which outlawed holding meetings with more than fifty people without first notifying a magistrate and allowed punishment for inciting contempt of the king. Wilks proposed a petition against those bills, and the Society eventually garnered 5000 signatures before sending the petition to Charles Fox, a prominent Whig

\textsuperscript{15} Goodwin, \textit{Friends of Liberty}, 151-57.
\textsuperscript{16} Jewson, \textit{Jacobin City}, 103-05, 112.
MP who generally supported parliamentary reform efforts.\textsuperscript{19} In a piece that appeared in the *Norfolk Chronicle* in 1797, Wilks hinted that the king had become so unpopular, that if he continued to do nothing in terms of political reform, then he would lose his throne.\textsuperscript{20} Wilks became an organizer of Baptist activists, whose ranks included artisans, particularly weavers. He effectively served as a liaison with reformist party leadership and publicans and helped lead electioneering for Whig success.\textsuperscript{21}

Wilks combined his belief in the freedom of religious expression and in the right to espouse political views in that he did not shy away from political topics in his sermons. Like Winterbotham and Hall, Wilks defended his right to do so: “Should any ask, why I trouble my head about politicks, and especially in the pulpit, my answer would be, because *so is my will*. And so is my will, because, there exists no law, human or divine, that renders such a line of conduct reprehensible.”\textsuperscript{22} Wilks claimed the right of political speeches or sermons was his and everyone else’s: “All nations, and the individuals of all nations, are concerned in politicks; to preach or write, therefore, on political subjects, is only to meddle with our own concerns.”\textsuperscript{23}

Wilks praised the French Revolution for its impact on individual liberty.\textsuperscript{24} He used biblical support for the celebration of liberty. The title page to Wilks’s 1791 sermon to commemorate the storming of the Bastille included a quotation from Leviticus 25:10:

“And ye shall proclaim . . . liberty throughout all the land, unto ALL the inhabitants

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\textsuperscript{17} Goodwin, *Friends of Liberty*, 158.
\textsuperscript{18} Graham, *Nation, Law, King*, 625.
\textsuperscript{20} Graham, *Nation, Law, King*, 791.
\textsuperscript{21} Weinzierl, “Norwich Elections,” 172-73, 177.
\textsuperscript{22} Mark Wilks, *The Origin and Stability of the French Revolution: A Sermon preached at St. Paul’s Chapel, Norwich, July 14, 1791*, 3\textsuperscript{rd} ed. (Norwich, 1791), 1.
\textsuperscript{23} Wilks, *Origin and Stability*, 1.
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thereof; it shall be a jubilee unto you, and ye shall return every man to his possession.”

Wilks clearly defended the idea that people’s liberty had been lost or taken away, and that the French Revolution represented a freeing of slaves or servants, thereby becoming a cause for joy. There was only one human race, created by God, so it was wholly appropriate to celebrate what happened in a different country. Wilks unabashedly praised the revolutionaries in France: “To conceive of a country where Government was the source of misery, is painful in the reflection; to conceive of the ruin of that Government, and of one reared on the immutable basis of natural right, must inspire triumph. Such was and is the Government of France; and to congratulate the happy change, I preach, and write.” He believed it was his right to do so.

Wilks justified his support of the French Revolution by arguing that it came from God. After his preface in the same commemorative sermon, Wilks quoted Acts 5:39: “If it be of God, ye cannot overthrow it.” That statement reflects Wilks’s belief in the godliness of the revolution and in its lasting nature. It did not threaten social order. Wilks continued to argue that God favored the French Revolution by drawing a comparison with Jesus: “Jesus Christ was a Revolutionist; and the Revolution he came to effect was foretold in these words, ‘He hath sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound.’” Therefore, the French Revolution was just as important to political liberty as Christ had been for spiritual liberty. Jesus included the apostles in the mission to turn people toward God, but “in this work the Apostles were interrupted by the Aristocrates and High Churchmen of those days,”

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24 Jewson, Jacobin City, 26-27.
25 Wilks, Origin and Stability, title page.
27 Wilks, Origin and Stability, 2.
specifically a Jewish Council. Based on that example, Wilks portrayed the French Revolution as one opposed by English aristocrats and high churchmen, but concluded that “the French Revolution is of God, and that no power exists, or can exist, by which it can be overthrown.” Thus his comparison was complete; the French Revolution was just as important in regenerating humankind, just as reviled as the revolution of Jesus himself, and just as permanent, because it was part of God’s will. In addition, Wilks’s faith did not lead him to support the status quo, but instead to advocate change.

Wilks did not think that the revolution had been accomplished supernaturally, but simply that God was present at and approving of the revolution. The revolution itself did not require a miracle, indeed, “such were the causes leading to it, that God, and God only could have prevented it.” The French Revolution was inevitable because the government did not have sufficient finances to support itself. After government efforts to create new taxes and credit, the meeting of the Estates General became the nation’s salvation.

Despite the general financial causes of revolution, Wilks saw God’s hand in the revolution, particularly in the character and achievements of the National Assembly. Wilks defended the National Assembly against its critics: “In my opinion, that wisdom, mercy, fidelity, and disinterested virtue, which have appeared on the very face of all the actions of the National Assembly, cannot fail to endear them to the unbiassed, and to

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render those great men objects of wonder, admiration and praise.” Wilks interpreted their unselfishness as virtue. Members of the Assembly preferred “the general good to their own personal and private advantage.” Representatives of provinces with special tax privileges were willingly gave those up. Wilks celebrated that attitude: “Self-denial is the brightest of all virtues; a virtue, which adorns and aggrandizes the character of the National Assembly.” Wilks wished that his government displayed such sacrifice: “Political suicide, is a French virtue, that must reflect dishonour on a British Parliament, and raise the reputation of the National Assembly beyond the reach of praise.”

Offering sharp criticism of narrow or private interests in Britain, Wilks contended that the French acted for the whole of the nation. Their success came from their pure motives: “The salvation of their country was the object of their pursuit . . . and their country is saved.”

Going further than his refusal to acknowledge selfishness in the Assembly, Wilks emphasized the effectiveness of its members: “The low cunning of Statesmen appears to have no existence among French reformers; but that wisdom which dictates the best lawful means of obtaining an end, they appear to possess in a very large degree.” The ability of individual members made the difference: “the assembly is composed of men of the soundest judgment, and of the most extensive legislative capacity.” As such, the Assembly had attacked the principles of the previous regime without demanding revenge.

35 Wilks, Origin and Stability, 12.  
37 Wilks, Origin and Stability, 22-23.  
38 Wilks, Origin and Stability, 22.  
39 Wilks, Origin and Stability, 23.  
40 Wilks, Origin and Stability, 12.  
41 Wilks, Origin and Stability, 12.  
He praised the Assembly for preventing anarchy and confusion, while defending individual rights and eliminating an unjust penal code.\textsuperscript{43}

Even in the face of opposition that charged them with being savages, the members of the Assembly showed compassion and remained untainted by bloodshed.\textsuperscript{44} Though that changed, Wilks’s sermon was in 1791 and he remained optimistic about France’s immediate future. At the Estates General, the nobility and clergy accused the representatives of the Third Estate of treason and kept them, by force, from entering their meeting place. Yet the members of what became the National Assembly did not react violently: “to their eternal honor be recorded, and that in \textit{capitals of gold}, they coolly repair to a neighbouring tennis court, and there swear, in the presence of God, never to separate, till they had achieved the regeneration of France.”\textsuperscript{45} Such character served as evidence of God’s approval: “it appears, that every virtue has been displayed in the conduct of the Assembly, and that the Revolution has been effected by no means but those dictated by virtue, that great and glorious event, must, from this circumstance, have received a tinge which determines its morality, and justifies the hypothesis, that it is of God.”\textsuperscript{46} Thus, Wilks attributed a religious nature to the French Revolution.

Wilks accepted that no revolution was necessarily good, but he concluded that the French Revolution was, in fact, a good one. He explained its value: “It is the downfall of tyranny, despotism, and oppression. . . . the assertion of those rights which come within the just claims of millions of men. . . . It is giving to France a government more perfect

\textsuperscript{44} Wilks, \textit{Origin and Stability}, 15.
\textsuperscript{45} Wilks, \textit{Origin and Stability}, 19.
\textsuperscript{46} Wilks, \textit{Origin and Stability}, 25.
than accident has formed in any other part of the world.”

Though he had described the revolution as godly, Wilks contended that the French had achieved success through the use of reason, a focus on natural rights, and the goal of general happiness. Wilks also praised the revolution because the French had used reason to protect individual rights: “It is the restoration of millions of our fellow creatures to their natural, sacred, and inviolable rights, who have hitherto lived on the smiles of a tyrant, or perished at his frowns.” Thus, the revolution had ended a variety of abuses by both government and clergy and, indeed, had let to “a constitution, which has liberty and equality as its basis.” The people as a whole were free and equal: “The nation having recovered its sovereignty, contains no citizens but what are equal in their rights.”

Because Wilks assumed that God despised tyranny and oppression, he attributed to God the destruction of the France’s oppressive government: “If it be true, that whatever hand establishes freedom, dispenses the gift of God, the Revolution is beyond all doubt that gift; and gratitude must for ever bind that favoured nation, to exclaim, in the language of inspiration, ‘Thanks be to God for HIS UNSPEAKABLE GIFT!’”

Wilks also saw God’s providence in the failed efforts of the National Assembly’s opponents. The government changed ministers and brought troops to cut off Paris from Versailles, but Parisians rose up to fight such a restriction and soon they were confident enough to storm the Bastille. The initial Parisian rising, “under God, was the salvation of the country.” Yet the rising did not spark a wave of violence. In 1791 Wilks could praise God for the relatively peaceful transfer of power in France: “it is to his good, and

49 Wilks, Origin and Stability, 33.
50 Wilks, Origin and Stability, 34-38.
superintendent providence; the French must attribute the preservation of their country from being deluged in human blood, and from all the dreadful horrors of a civil war!”

Wilks also believed God had led Lafayette to prevent the Versailles Corps of Guards from carrying out an attack on the Parisians. In addition, Wilks thanked God for the capture of the French king before Louis could raise troops in Europe. It was a pleasure for Wilks “to see a rebel against the nation secured to prevent its ruin!”

France potentially faced foreign threats, but Wilks expressed confidence in the permanence of French reforms: “I will venture to foretell, that though thousands may fight against the liberties of France, they shall not prevail, and that no weapon formed against that nation shall prosper. A government founded in justice, has the approbation of heaven, and by heaven approved, Omnipotence shall be its defence!”

Foreign opposition to the revolution could not overturn it. Wilks encouraged the French: “Entertain no apprehensions of a league of foreign powers. Be assured, that when a whole nation wishes to be free, there is no power on earth that can hinder it.” Wilks also believed in the peaceful nature and the positive effects of the French Revolution. France could not threaten other nations:

The Revolution is formidable to no free nation whatever, it is a Revolution benign in its very nature and principles, and as it was never intended to destroy, but to confirm all lawful authority, it must be every where salutary in its effects.—It will, in process of time, enlighten the darkest corners of the globe, and diffuse every where the salutary rays of freedom and happiness.

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51 Wilks, Origin and Stability, 39.
52 Wilks, Origin and Stability, 39.
53 Wilks, Origin and Stability, 40-41.
54 Wilks, Origin and Stability, 51.
55 Wilks, Origin and Stability, 52.
56 Wilks, Origin and Stability, 53-54.
Wilks argued that his nation in particular had no reason to oppose the French Revolution and he expressed optimism concerning England’s reaction to France: “instead of the English opposing the Revolution in France, they have the most pleasing conceptions of its happy influence; they consider it so replete with good to this nation, as to demand, not their annual commemoration merely, but their everlasting thanksgiving and joy.”

While arguing that France was safe from foreign intervention, Wilks contended that the French Revolution could not be overthrown internally, either, primarily because of French unity. Because the French had abolished the hereditary nobility and its rights and privileges, the former aristocracy had lost the power with which to threaten the new government. Wilks expressed confidence that the French, who had embraced the principles of liberty, could not be defeated. Internal stability grew from unity. The French people, united in a common cause, exemplified peaceful change: “Thanks be to God, these endeavours have not been in vain! instead of the nation being torn to pieces by a mob of democracies, we see a union of hearts that nothing but heaven can excell.”

Religious toleration also contributed to unity:

Two millions of dissenters from the national religion, (not embittered against the Government as in this country, by being condemned without trial, and punished without crime) forget all differences in religion, and unite hand and heart, in support of the common cause, in support of a constitution of consistency and justice, which knows no man but in the character of a citizen.

That sense of equality and unity assured the long-lasting effects of the revolution. Yet unity did not require unanimity of religious identity. By contrasting French toleration

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with the British example, Wilks expressed his disdain for the enforcement of one religious identity, which required discrimination against other denominations.

By comparing God’s providence for both Britain and France, Wilks concluded that Britain needed reform. God had foiled the Gunpowder Plot during the reign of James I as well as efforts to disrupt the French Assembly. Thus, Wilks equated the significance of 14 July in France and 5 November in England; both nations had been saved in similar fashion. Where the French followed through by instituting liberty, England had failed to live up to its special status, despite having its own revolution. The government had moved away from the ideals of 1688, thereby creating the need for change. Wilks wanted the government to return to 1688’s principles: “I sincerely wish the Government of England was in practice what it is in theory, there would then be little need either for Revolution or reform.” Thus, Wilks clearly stated that England needed either significant reform or another revolution, as tyranny and oppression had become characteristics of the British government.

Wilks not only protested the government in and of itself, he also ridiculed two sectors of English society, the aristocracy and the Church of England, for opposing the French Revolution out of their fear of “bloody democracy and atheism.” He questioned whether “real patriotism, and genuine christianity inspire these fears?” To Wilks, Christianity, patriotism, and revolution could and should go together. Wilks acknowledged that the privileged classes did have reason to fear revolution:

’Tis the proud Peer, to whom a remote ancestor has transferred, through the corrupted blood of a degenerate posterity, a name, which he ought to

61 Wilks, Origin and Stability, 34-38.
63 Wilks, Origin and Stability, 46.
64 Wilks, Origin and Stability, 48-49.
feel as a reproach rather than an honour; this is the man, who may dread the influence of the French example, and expect that day, when the British Commons shall decree, that hereditary nobility be for ever abolished; that the titles of Prince, Duke, Count, Marquis, Viscount, Baron, Esquire, &c. shall neither be assumed by, or be given to any person whatever; these must look forward with disgust to the approach of that period when we . . . shall hear no more of his Excellency, Highness, Eminence, and Greatness; when personal merit shall be thought the noblest title to honour. 65

Wilks decried his nation’s maintenance of an outdated, and unequal, social structure, as evidenced by the aristocracy. He also attacked the existing hierarchy by criticizing some Church of England practices, while admitting that the French Revolution should have made the Anglican clergy uncomfortable:

The dignified pluralist, who enjoys the revenues of churches he has never seen, cannot look at the example of France, without fearing, lest some unhallowed hands, some confiscators of sacred property, should interfere with the possessions of the church, and by a more equal distribution of them, save from misery and beggary, the half-famished Clergy of his diocese—This is the man who may justly dread the example of France, and tremble at the prospect of that period, when the people of England will no longer bear to see a Bishop of Durham, or Winchester, in the possession of ten thousand pounds a year, for doing nothing, while the poor laborious Curate has to serve three churches for thirty or forty pounds per annum. 66

Although he hoped that the French Revolution would serve as an example of reform for his own nation, Wilks stated that the revolution, at least in one sure, specific way, already benefited England. It would help prevent another war between those two countries. Their previous wars had been so expensive that England had incurred a large debt out of its need to hire foreign soldiers and support a standing army of its own. 67

Therefore, the French Revolution allowed England to save money and lives: “the greatest part of our national debt, together with all our load of taxes, originate with the French;

66 Wilks, Origin and Stability, 48-49.
that the unsupportable burdens under which we groan, are the fruits of the perfidy and restless ambition of her old government.—But now, thank God, the scene is changed! hail the Revolution! that stems the torrent of British blood.”

Because of the debt incurred during war, with subsequent interest and taxes to fund it, Wilks thought the government would bankrupt itself in wars with France: “From my heart I fear that the ruin of this nation had been inevitable but for the Revolution in France.”

The benefits of peace meant that Britain could not actively oppose the French: “Thus indirectly interested in the Revolution of France, interested in its effects, and partakers of its fruits, there can be no reason to suppose the British Government beholds it with aversion.”

While he misstated his government’s position, Wilks contended that the French Revolution had created an opportunity for peace. There were conditions, though: “If England . . . avoids that restless ambition she has spilt seas of blood, and spent millions of money to correct, we shall in future live as sister nations, with no emulation, but that of provoking to love and good works.” Wilks placed the responsibility for peace on the British government.

Wilks had an opportunity a few years later, after the Terror in France, which included 25,000 executions in 1793 and 1794, and during a war between Britain and France, to revise his ideas concerning the French Revolution and the British government. Charles Jewson contends that by 1795, especially in light of Winterbotham’s conviction, Wilks had become more cautious than he had been just a few years prior. Yet Wilks

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68 Wilks, Origin and Stability, 59.
69 Wilks, Origin and Stability, 62.
70 Wilks, Origin and Stability, 63.
71 Wilks, Origin and Stability, 60.
72 Jewson, Jacobin City, 68-70.
continued to agree with the principles of the French Revolution and to offer scathing criticism of the British government. He remained consistent in his political views.

In collection sermons to defray the costs of several defendants who had been acquitted of high treason in 1794, Wilks criticized those whom he called “wanton alarmists” for raising the unfounded cry of treason. Thomas Hardy and eleven other leaders of the London Corresponding Society had urged parliamentary reform and subsequently faced the accusation of inspiring rebellion and war against the king and his ministers. On the Hardy verdict, Wilks proclaimed: “Hear, Englishman, . . . with grateful thankfulness to God! Hear the foreman of the jury, as the mouth of all, give the lie to the lip of slander, and rescue innocence from the jaws of death, by the just and inevitable reply of NOT GUILTY!!!” While celebrating the defendants’ acquittal, Wilks used his sermons to air his own political views.

Wilks attacked the passage of both the Treasonable Practices and the Seditious Meetings Acts in 1795. Wilks compared the government, with its new restrictions on speech, press, and assembly, to Athaliah in the account of II Kings, as opposed to God. The prophet Elisha had anointed Jehu king of Israel to rid the nation of its evil king, Joram, the son of Ahab and Jezebel. Ahaziah, king of Judah, also evil in the sight of God, joined Joram, a relative by marriage, to meet Jehu in battle. Ahaziah subsequently died from wounds inflicted by Jehu’s troops. At that point, Ahaziah’s mother, Athaliah, seized power for herself. She had her grandchildren through Ahaziah killed, except for Joash, who was hidden by his nurse at the temple in Jerusalem. Wilks lamented such

73 Mark Wilks, *Athaliah; or the Tocsin Sounded by Modern Alarmists. Two Collection Sermons, towards defraying the Expence of the Defendants in the Late Trials for High Treason: Preached on the Nineteenth of April, 1795, in St. Paul’s Chapel, Norwich* (Norwich: J. March, 1795), i.
behavior: “Grandmothers have been thought more fond of their grandchildren than of their own; yet here we find Ahaziah’s own mother, the murderer of Ahaziah’s own sons.”\(^{76}\) After six years, Joash was anointed and crowned as king, prompting the following reaction: “Athaliah rent her clothes, and cried, Treason, Treason.”\(^{77}\) She was put to death almost immediately. Wilks argued that Athaliah had returned in those accusing reformers of treason: “Has not the ghost of Athaliah lately haunted the pulpit, the bar, the senate, the court; and has not the cry of *Treason!* *Treason!* been vociferated through every part of our distracted island by the worst of characters?”\(^{78}\) Specifically, Wilks criticized his government’s accusations of treason against Hardy and the other defendants. Moreover, he emphasized that a grandmother abandoned her obligation to protect and care for her grandchildren in a selfish drive for personal power. He then connected that image with magistrates and other government officials in Britain, who were then failing to protect the interests of the people as a whole, preferring to protect their own privileged positions.

Wilks argued for greater rights for all people in Britain based on the actions of the acquitted defendants. Having noted that the word ‘citizen’ inspired the most dread among conservatives, Wilks justified the defendants’ use of it. He contended the word was much better than most titles, such as ‘holiness,’ ‘highness,’ and ‘grace.’\(^{79}\) He believed that such aristocratic titles served only as partitions between people.\(^{80}\) He continued his sharp criticism of the British social structure:

\(^{75}\) Wilks, *Athaliah*, 2.  
\(^{77}\) II Kings 11:14.  
\(^{79}\) Wilks, *Athaliah*, 12.  
A lord in a village is tantamount to a lion in a wood; his imaginary greatness excites universal fear, and the poor villagers conceive of him, as some barbarians do of the devil, as a being that must be worshipped, that he may not destroy. Notwithstanding the word citizen has so much to recommend it to general use, as it is an epithet expressive of the doctrine of equality, of the annihilation of slavery and vassalage; of the abolition of privileged orders and feudal customs, it is not strange it should excite disgust—but as it means only a freeman, the adoption of it cannot be treason.\(^{81}\)

By emphasizing the word citizen, Wilks advocated greater equality in British society, particularly through the abolition of aristocratic social distinction.

Wilks also championed the defendant’s dissemination of political principles, such as books explaining the revolutionary ideas of France. The circulation of a document did not mean the acceptance of its principles; it simply implied curiosity. People who circulated books simply wished “to promote a spirit of inquiry.”\(^{82}\) According to Wilks, a Christian had an obligation to investigate and then hold to what is good, so “must he be hung, drawn, and quartered, if he speculate in politics?”\(^{83}\) As he had done earlier, Wilks steadily claimed the right to investigate and discuss politics. He condemned any other approach: “May the angry seas lift their waves, and deluge *that country* and wash away the stains of *that government*, where it is a crime to hazard an opinion, to sow the seeds of knowledge, and to fan the sparks of political inquiry, by the circulation of books!”\(^{84}\)

In addition, Wilks defended the practice of sending letters of congratulation to France. He claimed that as a British subject he would resist foreign invasion. Yet the defendants and the British people as a whole should be free to send congratulatory letters

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\(^{82}\) Wilks, *Athaliah*, 16.
\(^{83}\) Wilks, *Athaliah*, 17.
\(^{84}\) Wilks, *Athaliah*, 17.
on the important events in France. Wilks even hoped for more chances: “Would to God that I had an opportunity of hazarding my neck, by sending congratulatory epistles to all the countries on the globe, where despotism now prevails, on the establishment of constitutions, like that established in the memorable year of 1789!” He continued to celebrate the French example while offering the suggestion that his own nation was despotic by comparison for outlawing such correspondence.

Wilks claimed the people had the right to meet in political assemblies. He believed that such meetings organized by the defendants were clearly legal: “As, therefore, the peaceful assembling of men to deliberate on the best mode of promoting the public welfare is prohibited in none of our statute-books, where is the man that can have the audacious impudence to call the legality of such meetings in question?” Wilks argued that the English themselves had created the relevant precedent for political gatherings, because William of Orange had depended upon such an assembly for his throne:

. . . does not everyone know how anxious he was to obtain an express declaration of the will of the people, as a thing essential to the validity of his title? Was not a convention called, which invested him with authority to call a parliament? Was not the settlement made under this authority, and is it not in virtue of that authority, the glorious house of Brunswick holds it title to the British throne? Thus, Wilks used the events of 1688 to support the notion that political authority stemmed from the people. He thereby equated the British example with what had happened during the French Revolution and argued that because political assemblies

represented the foundation of the British monarchy, their existence could not legitimately be called into question.

Wilks supported the defendants’ calls for citizens’ oversight of Parliament. In fact, he called for more people to show an interest in their government: “till societies are formed in all parts of the kingdom, to investigate the theory and practice of government; till there is some grand bond of union between those societies; till the great bulk of the nation has some legal and powerful control over the constituted authorities, we shall never see golden days fruitful of golden deeds!” Wilks, Athaliah, 29. Parliament clearly needed watching. Members of the House of Commons were trustees, but “shall we appoint men to act for us in concerns of the first importance, and not watch and examine whether they transact the business to which they have been appointed, with ability and fidelity? Fools only will be inattentive to the conduct of their servants, and knaves only will dread the eyes of scrutiny.” Wilks, Athaliah, 30-31. The Commons was not permanent, and therefore, the people exercised some control over it. Wilks professed respect for majesty, ministers, and parliament, but “it surely is not treason to suppose them liable to err.” Indeed, they “have erred exceedingly,” and therefore required oversight.

After offering, in general terms, his own defense for the acquitted, Wilks returned to the anti-aristocratic theme of his earlier sermon commemorating the French Revolution. He singled out those who opposed reform for criticism:

. . . the revolution in a neighbouring nation, and particularly the abolition of the privileged orders, has spread general alarm in the aristocracy of this country: those therefore, interested in the detestable law of primogeniture, and other inequalities of rank; those interested in the perpetuity of the

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89 Wilks, Athaliah, 29.
90 Wilks, Athaliah, 30-31.
91 Wilks, Athaliah, 31.
92 Wilks, Athaliah, 34.
defects of government, are like Athaliah become wanton alarmists, and are seeking their own political preservation in the disgrace and ruin of virtuous men.  

The British nobility had sounded the alarm of treason, not because it was appropriate and necessary, but simply for control. The aristocracy wanted “to accuse the innocent in order to impose on the ignorant, and to impose on the ignorant in order to facilitate the designs of the malevolent.” After having labeled them as evil, Wilks placed British nobles in a category with Danton, Robespierre, and Marat, other “cursed Athaliahs.”

In condemning the treason charge, Wilks compared the reformers and Jesus, as he had done in connecting the French Revolution to Christ. Wilks attributed the idea of freedom to Jesus. The Jewish rulers who opposed Jesus were the enemies of freedom because they sent spies to trap Jesus in his own words: “they are called spies, because employed to watch, tempt, seduce, and destroy the most innocent and pure of all beings.” In Wilks’s view, that was exactly what the British aristocrats had done; they had hired spies to trap reformers, specifically Hardy, into a treasonable act or statement. The spy was to report incriminating information, but if “the spy finds the virtue of the person he attacks, invulnerable, and fails to seduce, he must deliver him upon a false charge.” That charge was treason, and Hardy and the others were “tried for the same offence imputed to the son of God.” Speaking truth, as Wilks believed Hardy had done in advocating parliamentary reform, was Christlike. Thus, Hardy and the others had faced vehement and vicious opposition, as Jesus had. Yet where God’s purpose allowed

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93 Wilks, Athaliah, 37.
94 Wilks, Athaliah, 37.
95 Wilks, Athaliah, 40.
96 Wilks, Athaliah, 44.
97 Wilks, Athaliah, 44.
98 Wilks, Athaliah, 47-49.
99 Wilks, Athaliah, 54.
Jesus to be put to death, Wilks argued that if not for “the interposition of a gracious God, these sheep, designed for the slaughter, would have died the victims of intolerant knaves!”  

Wilks used examples from both the Old and New Testaments to continue his comparison of biblical figures with Hardy and the others. Returning to the previous story of Athaliah, Wilks focused on Jehoiada, an adviser to Joash, the young king of Judah. He protected Joash and helped him become a good, reforming king, with effective administration, at least until Jehoiada’s death. Despite his value to the nation Jehoiada could not avoid accusations from his enemies: “Jehoiada was a priest and a patriot too, yet treason! treason! was bellowed out against him.”  

Wilks also pointed to the prophet Jeremiah: “Is it any wonder then, that a man, who dared to reprove the great, should be represented at court, as the worst of criminals; should have sedition and treason laid to his charge, should be thrown into a dungeon worse than the Bastille, and that vile miscreants near the throne, should endeavor to procure his death?”  

As the establishment had accused Hardy and the others of treason for questioning the government, Jeremiah’s enemies had tried to besmirch the prophet’s character. Even Jesus, the Son of God, holy and good, was “represented as a drunkard and a glutton, as a licentious abettor of the crimes of men, and died as a traitor against the civil government.”  

Through the examples of Jehoiada, Jeremiah, and Jesus, Wilks portrayed the reformers’ accusation of treason as a badge of godliness and honor.

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100 Wilks, Athaliah, 56-57.
101 Wilks, Athaliah, 57.
103 Wilks, Athaliah, 66.
104 Wilks, Athaliah, 70-71.
Furthermore, Wilks argued that they had acted of the deepest loyalty to their nation. They were good citizens, innocent of treason, which Wilks described as:

... to be moved and seduced by the instigations of the devil, wholly to withdraw our cordial love and true obedience from our sovereign lord the king,--to strive to stir up, move, and excite rebellion and war against his majesty,--to subvert the government, to depose our sovereign lord the king from the royal state, title, power, and government of this kingdom, and to bring, and put our said lord that king to death, would be bad indeed!"\(^{105}\)

In fact, there would be "no punishment too severe to be inflicted on such traitors."\(^{106}\) Yet Hardy and company did not want to overthrow the government or subvert the king’s authority: “So far from these persons being capable of such deeds, I believe them, and all the societies in this kingdom, implicated in the same charge, to be the most virtuous characters.”\(^{107}\) Far from displaying treasonous behavior, the defendants had demonstrated “their moral conduct, their peaceable deportment, their patriotic zeal, their real concern for the reformation of government, and the salvation of their country.”\(^{108}\) Thus, support for reform had become, for Wilks, a mark of patriotism. Therefore, he attributed the real treason to opponents of reform.

Wilks translated his support for reform into direct political action. In July 1794, he opposed the standing MP for Norwich.\(^{109}\) By that time, William Windham was Secretary of War, and he had expressed disgust that the defendants had been acquitted of treason.\(^{110}\) Wilks claimed that his opposition to Windham “arose from no personal disrespect, nor from any view of incompetency on his part in point of talents; but from a

\(^{105}\) Wilks, Athaliah, 72.
\(^{106}\) Wilks, Athaliah, 73.
\(^{107}\) Wilks, Athaliah, 72-73.
\(^{108}\) Wilks, Athaliah, 74.
\(^{109}\) Wilks, Athaliah, 34.
\(^{110}\) Jewson, Jacobin City, 49, 52; Wilks, Athaliah, 77.
Wilks also opposed Windham, because he believed the MP had changed his political views:

Mr. Windham very well knows, that when he appeared in the character of a true patriot, -- when it was his creed, that the influence, of the crown had increased, was increasing, and ought to be diminished, . . . when he was found the vigilant guardian of the life, liberty, and property, of his constituents,-- when no horrid imprecation from his all-erring lips had blasted our commercial interests, . . . when he had not frowned on freedom, . . . he was respected, yes loved.\(^{111}\)

Gaining power had led to the shift in political views: “Mr. Windham knows he was never despised by the whig interest in this city, till he appeared in the character of war-minister, and the enthusiastic abettor of the most disgraceful and perilous measures, ever pursued by weak and wicked men.”\(^{112}\)

Wilks continued to disagree with Windham and reaffirmed his view of the defendants’ innocence: “For my own part, I have formed my opinion, I have viewed them as England’s truest friends, I conceive of their conduct as truly imitable, and maintain it to be the duty of every man, who wishes his country well, to join these conspirators hand in hand, and with all their heart and soul to pursue a reform in parliament.”\(^{113}\) Though they had been tried for treason, they had aspired to truly admirable goals. Wilks agreed with their call for a clear change in government. Wilks opposed the structure of the government and the limited opportunity to participate in the process of government. He argued that protecting the people’s interests should be paramount. He illustrated his ultimate political aim through a question: “Ought the commons house of parliament to be composed of ACTUAL representatives of the whole commonalty of Great Britain?”\(^{114}\)

\(^{111}\) Wilks, Athaliah, 80-81.
\(^{112}\) Wilks, Athaliah, 81.
\(^{113}\) Wilks, Athaliah, 87.
\(^{114}\) Wilks, Athaliah, 92.
Despite such strong statements, Wilks himself was never prosecuted. This is especially surprising since he preached his Athaliah sermon after the Terror in France and during the heat of the war with France. He consistently supported the French Revolution and its ideals. Wilks continued to attack the aristocracy, the Church of England, and Parliament. He came closer than Winterbotham and Hall to advocating revolution, but still he stopped short. Although he seemed to desire the demise of both the nobility as a class and the Church of England as a state institution, Wilks did not want to bring an end to Parliament. He simply believed the institution needed reforming. In his arguments for change, Wilks focused on equality; he rejected the existing social structure. His Protestantism did not mean that he fully embraced national identity as defined by the establishment, and his orthodoxy did not keep him from sharply criticizing the establishment and urging political reform. In fact, his faith influenced him to see reform, in terms of equality, rights, and toleration, as godly.
JOSEPH AND DAVID KINGHORN: QUIET BAPTISTS

To Joseph Kinghorn and his father, David, religion was far more important than national identity. Their faith was central to their aspirations, more so than loyalty to their nation. Yet they saw themselves as British and expressed their gladness to be British. Their identity as Christians and as Baptists was separate from their identity as Britons, however, and religion claimed a higher priority. They articulated their views of their nation in religious terms. The Kinghorns used faith as a way to measure the government’s effectiveness and the nation’s success. They consistently expressed their trust in God rather than in human institutions. Unlike Winterbotham, Hall, and Wilks, neither Kinghorn was outspoken on political issues. They neither wrote political pamphlets nor had any political sermons published in the 1790s. Indeed, they exercised considerable caution to protect themselves from persecution and prosecution. Even so, they criticized the national government’s leaders for their insincere faith and the established church for its corruption of Christianity. Their Christian identity clearly diverged from the establishment’s definition of a Christian.

The Kinghorns help illustrate the variety of Baptist political views in the 1790s. The father proved more nationalistic than the son. He interpreted his nation as God’s chosen land, even comparing Britain to Israel. He supported the war effort and the government’s prosecution of the war, though he found only a defensive war acceptable. He saw Britain’s internal stability as more important than any assertion of rights or liberty. Unlike Winterbotham, Hall, and Wilks, David Kinghorn denied the overwhelming need for political reform. Yet Joseph Kinghorn expressed greater doubt
concerning his country. He questioned the purpose of war and a Christian’s role in war. In addition, he doubted the wisdom, motives, and godliness of national leaders. He could not place his trust in the British government or even in the British people, but only in God. His political views were similar to, though not as extreme as, those of Winterbotham, Hall, and Wilks. He did not focus on rights or liberty, but instead preferred to consider godliness and the state of the nation’s morality. Though neither Kinghorn expressed extremely reformist political views, they did see problems in their nation, in terms of both religion and government.

The Kinghorns, despite their public silence on political issues, demonstrate the diversity within Protestantism concerning religious and national identities. They disagreed with their government, desired the end of the established church, and advocated national moral reform. Therefore, they do not fit within Colley’s portrayal of a closely unified British nation. At the same time, both father and son displayed strong anti-Catholic sentiments, supporting Colley’s contention to some extent that anti-Catholicism contributed to national identity. Yet the younger Kinghorn expressed some optimism for the French Revolution, instead of showing a consistent anti-French outlook. Both Kinghorns show that a desire for reform extended far beyond Clark’s concept of a heterodox elite. They questioned their nation’s morality and its people’s faith. They believed God especially favored Britain, but that the nation failed to live up to its moral calling. Although the Kinghorns rarely participated in political agitation, they desired change, particularly the repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts. They viewed issues through the lens of their Christianity and their identity as Baptists, and found their nation lacking in Christian faith.
Joseph Kinghorn was born in 1766. His self-educated father, David, was a shoemaker and a Baptist preacher in Newcastle upon Tyne. After gaining a reputation for his preaching, David Kinghorn accepted a pastoral position and moved the family to Bishop Burton in Yorkshire in 1771. He tutored Joseph, his oldest son, who became an apprentice to a maker of clocks and watches in Hull in 1779. The son came home after four months, though, because of ill health. He then became a clerk in a Northumberland lead works in 1781. His father baptized him in 1783, and subsequently Joseph Kinghorn began to train in public speaking. In 1784 he began four years of study at the Baptist academy in Bristol. He served at a church in Fairford for several months in 1788, but he was not strict enough a Calvinist for the congregation. In 1789 he became the pastor of St. Mary’s Chapel, the largest Baptist church in Norwich. In addition to his responsibilities for Sunday services, Kinghorn offered weeknight lectures and informal Sunday evening prayer meetings. He also served on the committee of the Baptist Missionary Society.¹

Although Kinghorn held liberal political views, he kept them quiet. He feared misrepresentation so much that he once took the script of a fast day sermon into the pulpit with him to defend himself against unwarranted accusations.² Yet Kinghorn was not entirely removed from political issues. In 1789 Norwich Presbyterians, Independents, and Baptists met to work for repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts. Kinghorn accepted the responsibility for acquainting Baptists with the issue. He had little hope of repeal, but

thought “it right to do what we can, for the sake of posterity.”³ His church also faced political considerations. The St. Mary’s congregation excluded one member because he took communion in the Church of England to advance his career, specifically to gain a position working for the king.⁴ Though Kinghorn did not join an explicitly political society as Wilks had, he became a member of the Speculative Society, which was formed in 1790. For the next several years, the Society, which also included Anglican clergy, a Unitarian, a Presbyterian, an Independent, and Catholics, met every two weeks for debates of important issues. Kinghorn also received an invitation to defend Christianity in another society that gathered for political and religious debates.⁵ Although he refrained from political activism, he endorsed a letter from Robert Hall asking for Kinghorn’s recommendation of Hall’s Apology for the Freedom of the Press. Kinghorn also ordered three dozen copies of the work. He showed a keen interest in the French Revolution and his nation’s response to France, and he explored such issues with his father. After he settled in Norwich, owing to the impossibility of frequently visiting his parents, he agreed with his father to exchange letters each month. Though often focused on theological questions, the Kinghorns’ correspondence gives insight into the views of both men as they reported and reflected on the events of the 1790s and contemplated God’s plan in those circumstances.⁶

Both Kinghorns offered consistently negative views of Catholics and thus offer some support for Colley’s contention of anti-Catholicism as a factor in British identity.

³ Joseph Kinghorn, Norwich, to David Kinghorn, Bishop Burton, 2 November 1789. The letters between the Kinghorns are available in Box 4/3/1, Angus Library, Regents Park College, Oxford.
⁴ Jewson, Kinghorn’s Meeting, 10-11.
They viewed the 1797 accord between the pope and Napoleon as a significant threat to Britain. David Kinghorn stated that:

> Time will discover whether the Pope, and his son Buonaparte, are falsch or faithfull to their promises. I know not how others think, but the printer of hull intelligencer says the Gates of hell have prevailed against the Church of Rome. So they laugh, at the pope’s treaty with french Atheists. May the Lord grant us a speedy peace, or keep them out of england; we do not want to see their faces here, nor to hear them preach their Gospel; for I fear it would not be Glad tidings of salvation.

The nation needed protection from the French army and from European Catholics. Therefore, Kinghorn perceived an external threat. His son concurred in his assessment of the pope’s interaction with Napoleon: “As to the Most holy Father & his Dear Son they are no doubt sweet creatures both of them. Their correspondence deceives no body. I doubt not the alliances you refer to were designed to ruin England--whether that will be the case God only knows--But I am very apprehensive tho the Pope saves his bacon this time.”

He was not so harsh in describing the person of the pope: “I have really been pitying the Pope, tho not friend as you know to the Vicar of St. Peters, tho the system has been Diabolical and is still poisonous, yet it is a pity a poor old man of 85 cannot die in peace; he has been a harmless character as far as I know on the whole & cannot live much longer.”

His father could also show sympathy for the pope while condemning the Catholic Church. Yet the elder Kinghorn also feared the elevation of reason to divine status in France in place of Catholicism: “I hope they will not be so cruel to put the old man to death, tho they may call him an Idolater, the worshipping saints tho evil, is not so

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7 David Kinghorn, Bishop Burton, to Joseph Kinghorn, Norwich, 25 March 1797.  
8 Joseph Kinghorn, Norwich, to David Kinghorn, Bishop Burton, 11 April 1797.  
9 Joseph Kinghorn, Norwich, to David Kinghorn, Bishop Burton, 6 March 1798.
bad as burning incense to a strumpet, as the Goddess of reason.”  While commiserating with the pope’s situation, Joseph Kinghorn did not let the emigrant clergy of France off so lightly: “How the Emigrants have had in every country in Europe to feel the distresses to which their ancestors exposed the Protestants!” Thus, the priests received their comeuppance for having been the proponents of a false religious system.

Despite his anti-Catholicism, Joseph Kinghorn distinguished between Catholic and French identities, and thereby reinforced his separation of religious and national identities. Therefore, instead of consistently viewing France as a threat, he initially expressed considerable enthusiasm for the French Revolution: “I rejoice in my very heart at the destruction of that most infamous place, the Bastille, which the populace are regularly demolishing without an interruption from Government, who evidently dare not meddle with them.” Even after Britain went to war with France, Kinghorn maintained that the revolution had positive effects: “Can we wish the destruction of a people who have just risen from slavery and on whose existence perhaps the freedom of Europe depends?” He saw no need for England to follow France’s example, but if France returned to the conditions of the monarchy that preceded the revolution, then “the people would be nothing. Would not their destruction effectually rivet the chains on ourselves?” He saw a clear connection between liberty in France and liberty in Britain. Far from railing against France, he argued that Britain needed the French example.

His father never expressed such feelings for the revolution. In fact, David Kinghorn denied the progress of liberty in France: “they say they are fighting for their

10 David Kinghorn, Bishop Burton, to Joseph Kinghorn, Norwich, 17 March 1798.
11 Joseph Kinghorn, Norwich, to David Kinghorn, Bishop Burton, 6 March 1798.
12 Joseph Kinghorn, Norwich, to David Kinghorn, Bishop Burton, 3 August 1789.
13 Joseph Kinghorn, Norwich, to David Kinghorn, Bishop Burton, 12 March 1793.
liberty, What Liberty? To rob plunder murder violate the laws of God, and the sacred bonds of marriage, if that is liberty what is slavery?"¹⁴ He grew even more pessimistic: “I cannot say my speculations are at an end in regard to France; for it is now appearing to be, what I have always thought it would be, viz a Scene of Blood, and end in the destruction of those who have begun and carried on the Mischief. And it will be well if it does not bring on an awful event upon many besides Frenchmen.”¹⁵ Instead of serving as an example of freedom, France had become the source of death and devastation. Even the younger Kinghorn changed his mind and by the end of 1790s offered this condemnation of the French: “besides their cruelties, which are unequalled by any thing lately in Europe – their being most of them Infidels & many of them Atheists . . . I think every expectation is cutt off for Europe in general except from Gods providence. All those notions of liberty which the French revolution very generally raised a few years ago are at an end, they are the tyrants not the deliverers of men.”¹⁶ He did not criticize the French simply for being French, but because they had failed to fulfill the potential of the revolution’s promising beginning.

David Kinghorn displayed a tendency to interpret major events such as the French Revolution and Britain’s war with France as part of God’s plan. Doing so gave him hope that the gloomy present he perceived in the middle of the war would transmute into joy. Although Kinghorn desired peace, he acknowledged that God might use the war to advance his purposes. Kinghorn submitted to God’s will, even if it meant the continuation of war: “May the God of peace direct our rulers to such measures as will bring about a lasting and honourable peace, speedily if it be his will. If not, may we learn

¹⁴ David Kinghorn, Bishop Burton, to Joseph Kinghorn, Norwich, 23 March 1793.
¹⁵ David Kinghorn, Bishop Burton, to Joseph Kinghorn, Norwich, 20 April 1793.
the voice of the rod, and improve it to our own advantage, and his glory, and the good of fellow men.”17 Kinghorn relied on his belief that God delivered the faithful and punished the wicked: “Happy the man whose hopes rely on Israels God he made the sky, and earth and sea and all their train, and none shall find his promise vain.” He consistently returned to his explicit trust in God no matter the outcome. Whether or not events appeared to benefit Britain, Kinghorn focused on his obligation as a believer: “the way of Duty is the way of safety and of peace, of conscience, and of joy in God thro our Lord Jesus Christ.”18

Kinghorn interpreted the war based on Christian, not national, goals and he thought that the war had already advanced the Christian cause. More people in Britain had begun to study the Bible, and “the present appearance of things seem to be opening a way for the spread of the Gospel into the eastern nations.”19 The spreading of the gospel, despite the war, caused Kinghorn to wonder if Christ would return soon: “It makes me think, the set time to favour Zion is to come.”20 Joseph Kinghorn, though, expressed surprise that people grew so excited about places so distant and so uncertain as halfway around the globe. His evangelical focus lay in Britain: “Whereas we have at home many places where the Gospel is unknown.” Christians needed to go to those places.21 Both Kinghorns embraced evangelicalism, and even in the midst of war, they continued to focus on religious goals.

God’s use of the war for evangelism confirmed the Kinghorns’ belief in God’s plan, and they believed that France acted within God’s purposes. The elder Kinghorn

16 Joseph Kinghorn, Norwich, to David Kinghorn, Bishop Burton, 3 April 1798.
17 David Kinghorn, Bishop Burton, to Joseph Kinghorn, Norwich, 7 February 1795.
18 David Kinghorn, Bishop Burton, to Joseph Kinghorn, Norwich, 23 March 1793.
19 David Kinghorn, Bishop Burton, to Joseph Kinghorn, Norwich, 20 April 1793.
argued that the French punished the unfaithful, beginning with themselves: “I think they are the instruments of God’s Vengeance, and the rod of his Anger to punish one another for a season and to bring a further rod upon themselves and upon others.” To punish false-hearted people who claimed belief in God without reflecting that belief in their lives, God used France: “As they appear to me to be the rod of God’s anger, against an hypocritical people, how far they may be permitted to proceed I know not, but hitherto they seem to be a terror to neighbouring nations, and to ours in particular at present.” Britain itself stood in danger of God’s wrath exercised through France. At no point did Kinghorn suggest that the French government exemplified Christian belief: “it is astonishing, if the reports be true, that the chief rulers of the French are Atheists, that such men should be the instruments of doing that strange work; Yet God hath usually made use of such, to punish hypocrites; as well as to exercise the faith and patience of his sincere worshippers.” His son responded:

that good men are not employed in God’s work is not strange. . . a good man could not fulfill many of God’s designs. The hand of God appears so completely in all this, that I can do little more than say his counsel shall stand & he will do all his pleasure. If the shaking of the nations is to extend to England it will take place, and all the use we can make of any apprehensions we may have of consequences, is to endeavour to have our minds prepared for what may be God’s will. The French are now awfully scourges on the Continent, but when they have answered their end as awfully will they be punished.

Thus, both Kinghorns demonstrated a pattern of interpreting major events and their effects on the British nation through Christian faith.

20 David Kinghorn, Bishop Burton, to Joseph Kinghorn, Norwich, 17 March 1798.
21 Joseph Kinghorn, Norwich, to David Kinghorn, Bishop Burton, 20 December 1796.
22 David Kinghorn, Bishop Burton, to Joseph Kinghorn, Norwich, 23 March 1793.
23 David Kinghorn, Bishop Burton, to Joseph Kinghorn, Norwich, 17 March 1798.
24 Joseph Kinghorn, Norwich, to David Kinghorn, Bishop Burton, 3 April 1798.
Because he judged national well-being through his faith, David Kinghorn thought that God’s plan could conceivably include punishment for Britain. Although the British had been immensely blessed, they had turned away from their Christian faith and morality:

I fear a scourge is coming on us as a nation for our Infidelity. No nation has enjoyed greater privileges, and perhaps none have more abused them. May the Lord in mercy look upon us and turn us to himself by pouring a spirit of prayer and supplication upon us, that we may plead with him as a God of Mercy not to deal with us according to our sins but according to his mercy to blot out our transgressions, and to sanctify us and make us holy, as he that hath called us is holy, in all manner of conversation and godliness.\(^{25}\)

To illustrate the impermanence of any nation, including his own, Kinghorn used the Old Testament example of Israel going from a position of strength to a state of captivity in Moab and Assyria. Much like Israel, Britain had no guarantee that its power and prosperity would continue: “the Glory of any country, or nation, or state, may be destroyed, while the state still remains, and its former glory be brought to contempt.”\(^{26}\)

Kinghorn’s criticism of his nation extended beyond the established church, the government, and the aristocracy: “It is to be lamented, as a sad sign of approaching calamity, that real piety is apparently losing ground among the bulk of dissenters. If this is the case no wonder if a scourge follows it.”\(^{27}\) Because Dissenters had grown unfaithful, they had contributed to earning their nation’s punishment. They could not believe themselves especially holy and thus immune to God’s discipline.

Despite the possibility of the war as divine punishment, David Kinghorn desired victory for Britain. Yet he relied, not on national power, but upon God for that victory:

\(^{25}\) David Kinghorn, Bishop Burton, to Joseph Kinghorn, Norwich, 12 December 1795.  
\(^{26}\) David Kinghorn, Bishop Burton, to Joseph Kinghorn, Norwich, 28 October 1797.  
\(^{27}\) David Kinghorn, Bishop Burton, to Joseph Kinghorn, Norwich, 10 June 1797.
“There is certainly a great number of serious praying people in this Land, and as religion has hitherto had protection and encouragement as you observe, I also hope that all the noise of the French invasion will either be frustrated, or should they be permitted to land, they will be defeated in their design. The Lord God omnipotent reigneth.”

Again, he trusted only God to defeat the French: “we hope that God will by some Instrument, either destroy or deprive them of every ship they have, rather than permit them to land in England.”

He expressed some doubt whether God intended to save the British, though, because of their unfaithfulness. When considering the French, Kinghorn stated:

“Whatever may be in future I hope they will not prevail so as to destroy the nation at this time, tho alas religion in many places is very low.”

His son agreed with his connection of religion to the war’s outcome: “May the Lord grant us the continuance of Peace among ourselves as a nation; and the Blessings of the Gospel & hearts to improve it to his Glory; and then we need not fear the French. Tho they have been a server rod in Gods hand, I hope their work is near done.”

God had used France to discipline wrongdoers and unbelievers, but the Kinghorns hoped England would save itself by holding on to the gospel. They interpreted the nation’s security and unity in religious terms, but they were neither Anglican nor heterodox. They represented a view of orthodox Dissenters.

The conflict with France led the Kinghorns to explore motives for war, and they did so from their Christian perspective. David Kinghorn opposed war in general as it usually began from a desire for aggrandizement: “Let the Politician plot and scheem and dig deep to hide his counsel from the Lord, that he may overturn states and swim in

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28 David Kinghorn, Bishop Burton, to Joseph Kinghorn, Norwich, 17 February 1798.
29 David Kinghorn, Bishop Burton, to Joseph Kinghorn, Norwich, 3 November 1798.
30 David Kinghorn, Bishop Burton, to Joseph Kinghorn, Norwich, 17 February 1798.
31 David Kinghorn, Bishop Burton, to Joseph Kinghorn, Norwich, 3 November 1798.
Blood to obtain wealth and the applause of murderers and robbers.” He relied on God’s leadership to avoid that situation: “May the Lord in his mercy confound the counsels of all those who delight in war, Tyranny, and oppression, for the sake of enriching themselves by spoiling others.” Kinghorn did not think that every war stemmed from greed, though, and he believed protecting the country provided an acceptable reason for war. In that sense, fighting France became worthwhile: “Whenever war is necessary and just for the defence of the civil and religious rights of the nation against violaters of any kind, I think it my duty heartily to pray for success to our arms, and I think the present is just. Perhaps it might have been avoided, and I wish that it had been prevented, provided it could have been done with the safety of the nation and of those allied to our state.” The nation’s safety was crucial, and France represented a genuine threat that deserved a military response: “while the French were threatening the destruction of all kings it is enough to make Europe look about them. It need not be expected that monarchs whether absolute or limited will resign their dignity at the Barking of every Dog that shews his Teeth. Nor are all people so tame as to let france set up a universal monarchy under the pretence of a free republic.”

Thus, because of the threat to Britain, the war was worth fighting.

Joseph Kinghorn communicated greater reservations concerning the war. He argued that according to Micah 4:3, there would come a time when no nation would lift up the sword against another nation. To some extent, he believed that prophecy had been fulfilled because “a much smaller part of a nation are engaged in war than in old days.” For example, while soldiers fought, business continued. War affected fewer people. Kinghorn even expressed optimism that fighting itself had become less violent: “May it

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32 David Kinghorn, Bishop Burton, to Joseph Kinghorn, Norwich, 23 March 1793.
not be also, that the present system of war is less savage than formerly & that this may be a step towards the nations learning war no more.”

His father, however, disagreed that Micah’s prophecy had been fulfilled in any way. People still fought wars. Before war could end altogether, Turkish, papal, and French power all had to be destroyed. While Joseph Kinghorn’s Christian identity led to his optimism peace, his father’s faith identity did not preclude war.

Though David Kinghorn argued for the war’s necessity, he disagreed with any religious justification for war, and he distinguished between a nation’s and a Christian’s response to war. He believed there was enough biblical precedent for Christians to avoid resisting evil rather than rising up in arms to defend their religion. For support, Kinghorn turned to Matthew 5:38-39, where Christ told his followers not to resist an evildoer, I Thessalonians 5:15, in which Paul warned his readers against responding to evil with evil, and Romans 12:19-21, in which believers were instructed to feed their enemies and overcome evil with good. Reflecting on those passages, Kinghorn concluded that “no kind of reasoning has any weight with me which opposes the plain dictates of Christ and his Apostles.” Therefore, the Christian response to attacks on their faith should be submission. Kinghorn refused to accept the defense of religion or the spread of religion as justification for war: “it is all a farce to talk of fighting for religion, they who talk at that rate whether papists or protestants have something else in view than religion, they only make it a stalking horse to conceal their worldly motives from the people, and engage those that are religious to espouse the same cause.” He opposed any war for gain in which religion became a mere covering. Christianity should not cause a war: “never

33 Joseph Kinghorn, Norwich, to David Kinghorn, Bishop Burton, 15 January 1799.
34 David Kinghorn, Bishop Burton, to Joseph Kinghorn, Norwich, 26 January 1799.
once in the New Testament, have we a hint about fighting, but what condemns it.”

Though Christians should avoid war, sometimes their nation had to fight. Yet Kinghorn continued to argue that war for gain was still simply wrong: “even to civil rulers in my opinion war is unjust, except for the purpose of self defence.” In the end, Kinghorn returned to his faith in God’s providence: “But enough of this. May the Lord grant a speedy restoration of peace and a continued enjoyment of it if it be his will, and scatter the proud who delight in war.”  

Joseph Kinghorn extended the discussion on the appropriateness of war for a Christian nation to question Britain’s imperial acquisitions. He criticized fellow believers and even his own denomination for acquiescing in the growth of empire: “And what are conquests for the sake of territory or wealth? Especially when achieved by a Christian nation . . . For my part I am astonished that the cause of religion holds up its head at all - especially among the Baptists.” A Christian nation simply should not conquer others. For example, “surely European nations are guilty of vile iniquity in the sight of God for their conduct in India.” The growth of empires represented sin because “lust of riches and territory was the motive.”

Joseph Kinghorn also contemplated the role of an individual Christian in war and the circumstances that could justify an individual Christian’s participation in war. He, like his father, rejected a religious veneer for war, and he contended that even fighting for religious liberty could not justify engaging in war. Kinghorn was so averse to Christians fighting that he questioned whether Christians “had any business to meddle in the mischiefs in our kingdom” during the time of Charles I and Oliver Cromwell. He

35 David Kinghorn, Bishop Burton, to Joseph Kinghorn, Norwich, 18 October 1794.
36 Joseph Kinghorn, Norwich, to David Kinghorn, Bishop Burton, 2 December 1794.
acknowledged that in some cases it would be better for Christians to resist oppression, “but the idea of spreading desolation & death among innocent and guilty is so opposite to Christianity that things must be very desperate indeed before it can be justified for my part I confess I know not where to draw the line.” If a tyrannical prince ruled a nation, he could inflict injustice on Christians while they might have the power to stop him. Yet Kinghorn could not assert that they should stop him. His answer to the dilemma simply was that “I should not know what to reply.” He could not decide if war had any overall positive effects for Christians. He clearly stated, though, that if Christians fought, they should restrict themselves to a defensive war. Otherwise, they could “draw the sword at any time in the cause of justice and may assist a desolating system without guilt!”

When considering why Britons actually fought in the 1790s, both Kinghorns argued that soldiers did not fight primarily for religion or for their nation’s honor. Early in the war, David Kinghorn claimed that “all are heartily united against the French, except the poor sailors who do not love going on board of a Man of War, and their wives &c.” Yet later in the decade, he found that men did not volunteer out of political loyalty or religious faith, but out of self interest, specifically reacting to the threat of a French attack: “A general alarm seems to have seized the minds of people respecting the French invasion, and many who never trembled at the word of God, seem to tremble for fear of the French.” His son noted that volunteers joined the armed forces to maintain some personal control over their lives in the face of an invasion threat:

> a great number in most of our parishes have entered into Associations to arm & be trained, but a great deal of this is that they may avoid as much as possible the power of Government by being Volunteers and prescribing as

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37 Joseph Kinghorn, Norwich, to David Kinghorn, Bishop Burton, 7 October 1794
38 David Kinghorn, Bishop Burton, to Joseph Kinghorn, Norwich, 23 March 1793.
39 David Kinghorn, Bishop Burton, to Joseph Kinghorn, Norwich, 12 May 1798.
far as they can their own terms. They had rather associate agreeing to defend themselves and each other within the limits of Norwich & its boundaries, (wc. make in all a circle of about 5 miles diameter) than give in their names to Government to be ruled by it altogether.40

Yet nothing, not patriotism, not religion, not fear, could convince the younger Kinghorn to volunteer: “I have hitherto lived & I hope I shall continue to do so, a man of peace, for public opinion seems to be desirous of protecting Black Cloth. I am no well wisher to the French, but my constitution & habits are so un-martial that I co.d do very little to hurt them if they were here.”41

Despite his ambivalence concerning Christians and war, Joseph Kinghorn sharply criticized his government’s declaration of fast days. To him, the practice violated Christian principles by exploiting religion for nationalistic purposes. Kinghorn expressed disdain when the king proclaimed a general fast as Britain prepared in 1793 for what Kinghorn interpreted as an unnecessary war: “For my part I am very sorry for it — The appointment of a Fast before a stroke has been struck or calamity in any way felt is unusual, to say that War is the calamity that calls for humiliation is very singular since it appears to one that this war might easily have been avoided.” In addition, Kinghorn doubted whether the very government ministers who called for the fast actually humbled themselves before God. He distinguished between Christian believers and government leaders: “Is the nation to be commanded to pray for the success of our arms that their prayers may aid the designs of those who regard not God nor consider the operation of his hands?” Because the government actually seemed to desire war, the nation needed to repent, but Kinghorn doubted the efficacy of the declared fast day: “That we are guilty enough as a Nation is alas too true — but will this Fast pardon our injustices? The

40 Joseph Kinghorn, Norwich, to David Kinghorn, Bishop Burton, 2 May 1798.
prayers of the wicked will not be heard neither fast-day nor feast-day.” He specifically included the Anglicans in his condemnation: “While a fawning clergy are seeking preferment by sacrificing conscience calling a worldly system the Church of Xt. and increasing the national guilt by their very prayers!” Kinghorn preferred to trust God rather than the British government, the Church of England, or his own judgment: “In the confusion of nations I cannot discern my way but God guides all.” He acknowledged that he responded passionately to the insincerity of both church and state, but he felt justified: “You will wonder perhaps that I have expressed myself with so much warmth on this subject — However I have repressed & not enlarged.” The establishment had strayed far from Christian principles. Yet Kinghorn wanted to confine his comments to the private letter with his father: “Tho here in the confidence of epistolary correspondence I have said more than perhaps you ever heard me say on those subjects yet I am sufficiently convinced of the necessity of caution in public.”

During the war, Kinghorn continued to criticize the government for its practice of declaring fast days and for the war itself: “So we are to have another Fast day! And the cry of War still prevails! Where it will end God only knows. The War party may perhaps have sufficient reason to repent defiling their hands with blood.” He regretted the war’s destruction and condemned those who advocated war as appropriate policy: “I only feel grieved for the innocent who are involved in the calamities brought on them by others. As to those who delight in War - let them take it and its consequences. Were they only involved I should not mind it but it is a pity the innocent should be forced to

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41 Joseph Kinghorn, Norwich, to David Kinghorn, Bishop Burton, 2 May 1798.
42 Joseph Kinghorn, Norwich, to David Kinghorn, Bishop Burton, 12 March 1793.
suffer with them.” Kinghorn clearly rejected the notion that Britain had to fight the war.

Furthermore, he denounced his nation’s leaders for their ungodliness:

The notion of a public Fast appointed by a privy council for imploring God to help this nation to kill other people is horrid and not the less so when we consider that the greatest part of our great men are deists & probably do not believe at all in Gods hearing prayer. The characters of men high in rank are not such as to lead us to think they can have any religion and for them to call on a nation to fast & pray can be nothing but either state policy or refined hypocrisy—indeed gross hypocrisy for one would think no body could be deceived by it—And yet there is doubtless the greatest need for the serious part of men to look up to God for direction but that does not lessen the wickedness & folly of men who persist in Iniquity & cry to God for help in it.43

Kinghorn demonstrated the distinction between religious and national identities, and he portrayed his nation’s leaders as non-Christians.

David Kinghorn, though, expressed more support for the government. He argued that national leaders should be allowed to govern, but he believed in God’s ultimate control of the situation:

it is our duty to pray for them that God would so guide and direct them and all their counsellors to such measures as he will be pleased to bless for the peace prosperity & general benefit of the nation where we dwell, for mankind at large, and of his church and interest in the world in particular. It is no part of our business to censure the conduct of those in civil authority.44

He disagreed with his son’s criticism of the government, especially during the war: “For as we are informed from the throne, that the present warr is just and necessary; it is not our business to dispute either the one or the other, but we ought to consider it as the design of God, that it is to be continued to bring about some of his great designs.”45

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43 Joseph Kinghorn, Norwich, to David Kinghorn, Bishop Burton, 27 January 1795.
44 David Kinghorn, Bishop Burton, to Joseph Kinghorn, Norwich, 7 February 1795.
45 David Kinghorn, Bishop Burton, to Joseph Kinghorn, Norwich, 7 February 1795.
Where Joseph Kinghorn’s faith had led him to question the war and the government, David Kinghorn’s faith gave him reason to support both.

In direct contrast, to Winterbotham, Hall, and Wilks, the elder Kinghorn maintained that Christians had no responsibility for political involvement. He depicted religion and politics almost as opposites: “Politics are more attended to by many than Piety. . . . But the Gospel of God is the Gospel of Peace proclaiming good will toward men, whereas Politics generally is of a quite contrary nature, neither producing peace on earth, nor good will to our neighbour, much less to those we esteem enemies.” Therefore, he avoided political activities and urged his son to avoid them as well: “I am glad that you meddle so little in these things, as to give offence to some, by not entering into the same spirit with them, better to offend men than God, and wound the Gospel by a Political Spirit and disquisitions which have no connection with the work of a Christian minister.” Political activism would only harm a pastor’s ministry. Kinghorn expressed a conservatism reminiscent of the government’s position in Winterbotham’s trials: “it is the foolishest thing immaginable to treat upon any thing of the kind in a congregation composed chiefly of the lower class of People, and even in private conversation it generally tends to heat the spirits of men without any good attending it.”

David Kinghorn wanted to avoid any disruption that would result from leading a congregation into political discussions. He placed a high priority on Britain’s internal stability: “Tho for my own part I am averse to warr, and wish as much as possible to live peaceably with all men, I would pray for success against an open enemy a thousand times rather than once desire an internal broil. I fear the latter, a thousand times more than the former.” He criticized agitators for reform precisely because they disrupted society. He
distrusted reformers in general, referring to them as “violent fellows,” who “would be tirants if they had power.” He had read that Norwich weavers received eight shillings per week to attend clubs and alehouses, and to be available to join a demonstration for reform. He told his son that if such was the case, then “some sons of Belial among you who have been endeavouring to blow up the coals of Dissention into a flame and bring England into the same miserable condition of France.” He denied the benefit for Britain of a revolution similar to France’s: “I am inclined to think that such policy as that is hatched in Hell.” The French Revolution had only created chaos: “The Mobs and tumults of France and the distress the people in general must be brought into in their present state is horrible to the conception. May the Lord grant that my eyes may never see nor my ears hear of the same calamities befalling England.”

Social stability outweighed any need for reform.

Kinghorn rejected the practice of petitioning the king with complaints against government ministers. He claimed that “I never expect that such noise and bustle will ever be of any avail, or of any benifitt to the cause of civil or religious liberty.” Therefore, even where liberty did not exist, agitation could not lead to greater freedom. In fact, criticizing the government harmed the nation: “It is a bad sign of the Indignation of the Lord against us as a nation, when we hear that our enemies abhor us, and the people of our own nation make such a clammour against those who are at the helm of publick affairs.” Kinghorn acknowledged the good intentions of some political reformers, but he still denied the overall value of their efforts: “I do not mean to apply the charrecter of wicked to all those that petition, . . . but I fear there are some Satan’s,”

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46 David Kinghorn, Bishop Burton, to Joseph Kinghorn, Norwich, 17 February 1798.  
47 David Kinghorn, Bishop Burton, to Joseph Kinghorn, Norwich, 7 February 1795.
are at the bottom of all the tumults in Ireland, in the fleet, and here at home who wish to set, and keep the nation at variance.” He returned to his preference for internal stability: “I sincerely wish for peace, but I dread a tumult in our own nation, as a greater evil than war with an open enemy, so long as it is kept out of our own land.”

In contrast, Joseph Kinghorn blamed military and local government officials for the civil disruptions during the war. In particular he reported a disturbance in Norwich in May 1797, during which soldiers “completely gutted 2 public houses where the Democrats held their Clubs.” One landlord was hurt, “many people got black eyes, & broken heads, & the whole city was thrown into a panic.” The violence resulted from the announcement of a political lecture, “& the soldiers intending to shew their regard to King & Constitution & an opposition to some hand bills which have been circulated.” The offenders came from an Irish regiment of horse, whose “officers have oft complained of the difficulty of keeping them under subjection.” While criticizing that lack of discipline, Kinghorn also took issue with Norwich’s government:

The civil Magistrates were quite frighted, as indeed they commonly are in any real danger. They can swagger in their gowns to Church & to the Halls either to dine or talk about trivial things, & they can hang a poor thief whom a judge has condemned & whom no body tries to rescue – all this they do well enough – but when activity is required & courage is wanted they are as bad as a parcell of old women.

He did not blame those who had planned the political lecture, and he did not deny them the right to meet. Instead, he argued that the authorities failed in their responsibility to protect order.

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48 David Kinghorn, Bishop Burton, to Joseph Kinghorn, Norwich, 23 March 1793.
49 David Kinghorn, Bishop Burton, to Joseph Kinghorn, Norwich, 10 June 1797.
50 Joseph Kinghorn, Norwich, to David Kinghorn, Bishop Burton, 1 June 1797.
Both Kinghorns believed that another of the nation’s institutions, the Church of England, had failed in its Christian duty, and they denied the need for any established church. Joseph Kinghorn even stated that the Church of England was worse than the Catholic Church. Rome had deviated farther from true Christianity on issues such as transubstantiation and images, but it held a stronger claim for religious authority.\footnote{51} In addition, far from supporting religion, the established church hindered Christian faith: “Really I cannot help thinking that if National establishments were annihilated genuine Christianity would soon make a flourishing appearance.”\footnote{52} An established church could harm the progress of religion by misunderstanding and misrepresenting Christianity: “As to national Churches thinking themselves right that may be true - but that does not make them so & because all Europe have gone on the national plan it does not add a single grain to the evidence of that truth. Perhaps all national churches are more a part of Antichrist than is usually supposed. Because their first principle is wrong.”\footnote{53} His father elaborated. A national church by definition included all people, adults, children, and infants. Yet that violated Christian principles: “the essence of the Christian Chh as such, includes only professed believers; unbelievers are of right excluded.”\footnote{54} Therefore, an established church, because it failed to exclude unbelievers, lost its validity. The Church of England served as an example of that difficulty because “infant Baptism is so connected with a National Church that they cannot be separated.” If baptism represented an initiation into Christianity, then all who were baptized supposedly made a profession

\footnote{51} Joseph Kinghorn, Norwich, to David Kinghorn, Bishop Burton, 16 June 1795.  
\footnote{52} Joseph Kinghorn, Norwich, to David Kinghorn, Bishop Burton, 12 March 1793.  
\footnote{53} Joseph Kinghorn, Norwich, to David Kinghorn, Bishop Burton, 29 December 1795.  
\footnote{54} David Kinghorn, Bishop Burton, to Joseph Kinghorn, Norwich, 9 January 1796.
of faith, whether or not they actually believed in Christ. The Kinghorns could not accept such an outcome and so they rejected the national church’s definition of Christian.

The younger Kinghorn refrained from denying a ruler’s right to choose a particular religion. He simply distinguished between that choice and establishing a religion. Whatever religion the prince professed would be protected by law and most people would follow that religion as well, but an established state religion placed demands on people to profess it “and from which they are not to deviate except by favor.” An established church generated discrimination against those whose religious views differed: “An act of Toleration in itself asserts that people ought to believe differently - but they are tolerated from political reasons not as men doing right who ought on that account to be protected but as men whose weakness it is better to bear with than attempt to punish.” Therefore, an established church created a situation in which the government might fail in its responsibility to protect citizens: “tho a good act of Toleration renders the subject equally secure as if he was of the establishment yet it proves that the spirit of the government is that of establishing a religion of their own & not protecting men in the profession of what they believe.”

In spite of that criticism, the elder Kinghorn did not consider established churches as entirely negative. They might even have positive effects “in a country like ours where liberty of conscience is tolerated, without which it sinks into the worst kind of tirrany. A national establishment has this advantage that it keeps up the form of religion among those who deny the power of it, and serves to keep those in countenance who are truely

55 David Kinghorn, Bishop Burton, to Joseph Kinghorn, Norwich, 17 March 1791.
56 Joseph Kinghorn, Norwich, to David Kinghorn, Bishop Burton, 29 December 1794.
religious.” Because the established church maintained some form of Christian religion, without it “men would become more brutal.” From his position as a Dissenter, Kinghorn believed that faithful servants were present in every form of Christianity, including the Church of England.  

Overall, though, both Kinghorns denied both the validity and the usefulness of an established church, thereby showing that their religious identity differed from the national definition of Christianity. The Church of England corrupted its clergy. An established church led people to make false professions of belief with worldly gain as their motive. David Kinghorn provided an historical example: “until Christianity became the religion of the Roman Emperor Constantine, and of the state, unbelievers would not attempt to profess it, but for a good reason, there was no emoluments nor honours, to tempt them to profess what they did not believe, and every risk to run for their profession.” In addition, Christianity existed and even expanded before national churches, so an established church was not essential for Christianity’s continuance. Joseph Kinghorn argued that the Church of England’s ministers, because of their loyalty to the monarch, could not faithfully serve as Christian ministers:

A set of Clergy belonging to an establishment—a pack of Bishops in a Court are altogether (as a body) the most cruel, corrupt junto, that despotism ever had—they will say anything—do any thing—faithfully serve any King Queen or regent—whether good or whether a Tyrant.—To an established clergy tis all the same—any body but Jesus Christ. This is no libel it was awfully proved in the history of the Reformation.

57 David Kinghorn, Bishop Burton, to Joseph Kinghorn, Norwich, 9 January 1796.
58 David Kinghorn, Bishop Burton, to Joseph Kinghorn, Norwich, 10 January 1795.
59 Joseph Kinghorn, Norwich, to David Kinghorn, Bishop Burton, 12 March 1793.
60 David Kinghorn, Bishop Burton, to Joseph Kinghorn, Norwich, 9 January 1796.
61 Joseph Kinghorn, Norwich, to David Kinghorn, Bishop Burton, 14 October 1797.
To Kinghorn, the established church had a misguided focus. History had proven “that a national Church is the Kings Church & the national religion the kings pleasure.” Some ministers had so little religion that they “have helped forward a scene of desolation by adding their sanctions to the inclinations of Emperors.” They had moved away from the religion of Christ.62  Kinghorn had such a low opinion of the established church that he detested the convention of dressing like its clergy, though he felt obligated to follow it:

The debate about Garments in Queen Elizabeth’s days has quite put me out of Temper with the black coat. I wish all badges of office by which we see to claim kindred with the Kings Clergy were done away.—They are the proper Regimentals of the establishment but it is mere superstition that has hung them on our backs. The time I hope will come when the prejudices of the people will be so lowered as to admit laying them aside without producing any unpleasant effect.63

The younger Kinghorn could only condemn the established church: “the more I see & think on the subject the more I am persuaded an Establishment is not the Church of Jesus Christ.”64 Only one thing could save religion: “Christianity can never be established but on the ground of the pure principles of Dissent.”65 Kinghorn hoped that the war with France would provide both the example and the opportunity for dismantling England’s established church:

Priestly power will dreadfully suffer by the present war tho that is not its object. The roman Catholics in France are now quite on the plan of Dissenters with respect to their clergy—there has been some talk of secularizing the Bishoprics in Germany—and should any thing take place here either from the force of foreign power or from the people’s takin a general disgust with the present government—what would become of Church power here? Our Bishops and Dignitaries would soon descend and whenever Ecclesiastical power falls—every body seems disposed to say let it lie.—And really this is an event so singular & connected with so many & such vast consequences that when I see stroke after stroke aimed

62 Joseph Kinghorn, Norwich, to David Kinghorn, Bishop Burton, 2 December 1794.
63 Joseph Kinghorn, Norwich, to David Kinghorn, Bishop Burton, 14 October 1797.
64 Joseph Kinghorn, Norwich, to David Kinghorn, Bishop Burton, 22 August 1797.
65 Joseph Kinghorn, Norwich, to David Kinghorn, Bishop Burton, 2 December 1794.
at the Priesthood—I stand astonished and am ready to conclude the war will not be over till something of this kind be effected directly or indirectly.66

The downfall of the established church could only benefit the state of Christianity in Britain.

Though he sharply criticized the established church, Joseph Kinghorn also distanced himself from heterodox critics of the establishment. He described Unitarians as weak in their faith, in part, because they lacked proper instruction. Even so, he could accept them in the nation as long as they were peaceable. Yet he would not accept a Unitarian as a member of his church: “however much I might admire his temper, talents, and conduct, I should not be willing to be admitted into our society. For we must differ in the object of our worship, and in the matter of our worship, not being able either to pray or praise with one heart and voice.”67 In late 1795 Kinghorn planned to respond in print to Thomas Paine, author of The Rights of Man and The Age of Reason, for his attacks on the Bible. Without commenting on Paine’s political views, he saw an obligation to confront Paine’s irreligion: “Tis an odd ideas to be the Dog whipper of society & to be employed in chastising fools & rogues. But is almost looks as if that was to be my lot. The height of the impudence of Infidelity is truly astonishing.”68 His father laughed at the idea of his son publishing a response because so few people were concerned with a “scoundrel” like Paine in the first place.69 In the end, the younger

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66 Joseph Kinghorn, Norwich, to David Kinghorn, Bishop Burton, 11 April 1797.
67 Joseph Kinghorn, Norwich, to David Kinghorn, Bishop Burton, 30 May 1795.
68 Joseph Kinghorn, Norwich, to David Kinghorn, Bishop Burton, 29 December 1795.
69 David Kinghorn, Bishop Burton, to Joseph Kinghorn, Norwich, 9 January 1796.
Kinghorn enjoyed an anonymous published response to Paine so much that he saw no need to carry through on his own plans to respond.\textsuperscript{70}

On one issue the Kinghorns combined their views of the government, its role in religion, and the state of religion in Britain. They had heard a rumor that Parliament might pass a law to increase observance of the Sabbath, specifically by limiting activities on Sundays. Joseph Kinghorn argued that such a law would prove useless, and he doubted the effectiveness of legislating religious faith:

There has been some talk of a severe law for the Observance of the Lords day, it has occasioned some conversation here. It is worthy of being asked, how far do such laws benefit society? Are men more moral for them? In the present state of things can such Laws be carried into effect? These are questions of difficulty. How far legislation ought to interfere in enforcing religion, is to say the least a delicate question, because their interference in one thing is nearly allied to their interference in another, and they cannot go far without introducing persecution. . . . Ought men without divine authority to interfere? Is it proveable that a forced attention to the Lords day will produce a greater regard to religion?\textsuperscript{71}

His father agreed with that assessment, and he blamed the Church of England for the nation’s unfaithfulness that may have prompted the legislative effort:

I am fully perswaded that if the clergy were more diligent and faithfull in the discharge of their duty, there would be little need of penal Laws; either to oblige people to attend upon publick worship or to cause them to observe a decent behaviour on the Lords day. And all that can be expected of a nation as such is a decent behaviour, especially as irreligion is so prevalent among the great, and their ears are so delicate that they cannot bear to hear the sound of Hell and Damnation, tho many of them are in the high road to it. Smooth things must be spoken or the minister will be accounted madd, as people do not like to have their consciences disturbed. Not withstanding this is the case an effectual reformation of manners, will never be produced by any other means than faithfully declaring the Testimony of God, and setting an example before the people worthy of their immittance.\textsuperscript{72}

\textsuperscript{70} Joseph Kinghorn, Norwich, to David Kinghorn, Bishop Burton, 26 January 1796.
\textsuperscript{71} Joseph Kinghorn, Norwich, to David Kinghorn, Bishop Burton, 3 April 1798.
\textsuperscript{72} David Kinghorn, Bishop Burton, to Joseph Kinghorn, Norwich, 14 April 1798.
Thus, the elder Kinghorn portrayed a significant part of his nation as un-Christian. A Sabbath law would only enforce externally observable forms of religion, not spiritual renewal. He believed that, if passed, such a law would target Dissenters: “But while some of the clergy ride 20 miles every Sunday, to preach 3, or 4, different parishes, how can they for shame, prosecute people for travelling on Sunday. I fear that the contempt of the word of God will bring vengeance on the Land. Let our Great men make ever so much bustle to prevent it.” Again, Britain’s lack of faith warranted divine punishment. Furthermore, people would only observe a Sabbath law if it suited them, and Kinghorn could imagine at least one situation in which they would ignore it:

How far severe Laws respecting the observation of the Sabbath may be a benifitt to society, I cannot say, nor whether it would be any, or not. Whether in the present state of the nation they could be put in execution I think if the French were to attempt to land, no one or but few would observe the Law, if they perceived themselves in danger; some would travil to fight, others to flee.73

He pointed out that respect for the Sabbath had not affected the conduct of the war: “I have observed that many Great Battles have been fought on Sunday, both by sea and land. Whether this be not a greater prophanation of the day, than traviling about necessary or lawful Business, I leave others to Judge.” Sabbath observances had also failed to impede national celebrations: “It strikes my mind that when news of a great victory obtained arrives on a Sunday, Bels are rung, cannon fired, coulers displayed, and multitudes run to hear the news, and assemble at Taverns and Ale houses, for Joy they drink till they are drunk; all this would be overlooked!!” Trying to enforce a religious identity on Sundays would

73 David Kinghorn, Bishop Burton, to Joseph Kinghorn, Norwich, 14 April 1798.
mean a drastic change for the nation, and Kinghorn argued that the effects would be negative: “I have often been grieved to see so little attention paid to the Sabbath day: but where men have not the fear of God before their eyes, human Laws only increase the enmity of the heart against those that put the Laws in execution, and cause religion itself to be more hated.” Instead of supporting Christianity, a Sabbath law would prove detrimental. Even if it stimulated church attendance, the law would only promote an outward observance of religion: “Human authority may make men Hypocrites, but cannot change the Heart.”

The Kinghorns attacked the authority, the motives, and the effects of a Sabbath law. Their Christian identity meant that they denied the validity of the national government’s enforcement of religion.

Any criticism they had could not detract from their love of their country. In general, the Kinghorns expressed great affection for Britain and they thought of their nation as the best, even when compared to places of relative freedom such as the United States. The elder Kinghorn wrote that “England is almost infinitely preferable to america.” He argued that England had greater social stability: “America cannot possibly enjoy tranquility for any length of time, there are too many restless spirits, and jarring interests in it, to permitt them to live long in peace.”

His son agreed, contending that America could not maintain its peace and stability when George Washington died. The contention among states and the “litigious spirit in America” would end the tranquility. Moreover, he described America as savage, being far from centers of learning and society. America’s only advantage rested in the freedom to express a range of political

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74 David Kinghorn, Bishop Burton, to Joseph Kinghorn, Norwich, 14 April 1798.
75 David Kinghorn, Bishop Burton, to Joseph Kinghorn, Norwich, 18 October 1794.
views. Yet that was not enough to earn the younger Kinghorn’s endorsement: “I am however quite of your opinion the future prospect of America--not the most pleasing.”

Therefore, though they criticized their nation, the Kinghorns were glad to be Britons.

In 1799, following his retirement, David Kinghorn and his wife moved to Norwich, thus ending a decade of correspondence between father and son. Until his death in 1832, Joseph Kinghorn remained prominent in Baptist and Dissenting life. In 1804 he received an offer to become the president of the new Baptist academy in Bradford, Horton College. In 1810 he was invited to lead a college in Stepney founded by London Particular Baptists. He rejected both opportunities to remain a pastor in Norwich. When Lord Sidmouth introduced a bill in 1811 to restrict Dissenters' preaching licenses, Kinghorn presented a petition in London on behalf of all Norwich Dissenters. That year he also helped form the Norwich Auxiliary Bible Society, an example of Anglicans and Dissenters working together. During his pamphlet debate with Robert Hall concerning communion, he became the spokesman among Baptists for closed communion, the idea that a participant had to be baptized as a believer, not as an infant. In an 1829 publication he defended the faith of Dissenters, Baptists in particular.

As orthodox Dissenters, the Kinghorns do not fit within Colley’s notion of a Protestant consensus. At the same time, they fall outside Clark’s distinction between an Anglican hegemony and a heterodox elite. Trusting God held the foremost position in the Kinghorns’ identity. They viewed Britain as a special nation but it did not exert the strongest hold on their identity. Religious goals superseded national goals. They exhibited strong Baptist and British identities, but the Kinghorns’ greatest desires were

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76 Joseph Kinghorn, Norwich, to David Kinghorn, Bishop Burton, 7 October 1794.
77 Joseph Kinghorn, Norwich, to David Kinghorn, Bishop Burton, 4 November 1794.
peace and godliness. Instead of concerning themselves with rights and freedom as Winterbotham, Hall, and Wilks had done, the Kinghorns focused more on genuine Christian faith. They could not trust the national government or the established church. Therefore, their identity lay primarily with God. From their perspective, God punished insincere faith and Britain deserved punishment. They interpreted the French Revolution and Britain’s war with France in the context of fulfilling God’s plan. They expected God to advance his purposes and to protect his faithful followers. As Baptists they saw themselves as different from other Britons, and they believed they were right. Joseph Kinghorn, who was definitely not a radical, stated his belief that “the cause of the Baptists is the cause of God and I have no doubt that God will bless and protect those that from right motives attend to it & support it.”

Kinghorn celebrated the value of the Baptist tradition and expressed optimism concerning its effects: “that the Baptists fairly take the lead & are acknowledged by the folk of the people clearly to be followers of the Scriptures. What a revolution will it be if ever the day comes in England when Christian and Baptist shall be the same! Perhaps it may.”

Because of the failure of the established church and the Britons’ increasing lack of faith, Kinghorn hoped that Baptists could serve as examples for the nation. Though they distinguished between religious and national attachments, the Kinghorns wanted their nation to become genuinely Christian.

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79 Joseph Kinghorn, Norwich, to David Kinghorn, Bishop Burton, 9 May 1791.
80 Joseph Kinghorn, Norwich, to David Kinghorn, Bishop Burton, 12 February 1793.
CHAPTER 9

CONCLUSION

Particular Baptist ministers in England in the 1790s embraced separate Baptist and British identities. While exhibiting both, they distinguished between religious and national identities. To them, identity was not confined to either being a Briton, or a Christian. The two existed alongside each other. Furthermore, being British was not equal to being Christian. A Christian might be a Briton or a Briton might also be a Christian, but Britain had no monopoly on Christianity and Britishness did not imply genuine Christian faith.

Baptists consistently supported reform as orthodox Dissenters. Though they shared some political goals, they had no theological connection with Unitarians. Their evangelical individualism led them to adopt different priorities than the establishment. Baptists aspired to a godly nation where they could be full citizens. They emphasized both rights and happiness. They used the example of France, not to advocate revolution, but to push for reform before Britain was plunged into such chaos. Specifically, Baptists favored more frequent elections for Parliament and a broadening of the electorate. They questioned the morality of the government and the aristocracy. In addition, they doubted the Christianity of the Church of England and urged the disestablishment of that church.

The five ministers investigated in this study demonstrate Baptist deviation from the establishment’s identity, though a firm sense of the nation accompanied the Baptists’ strong religious identity. William Winterbotham, though he refrained from public expressions of his political opinions after his imprisonment, remained consistent in his view that the nation’s government needed reform. His trials clarified the contrast
between his beliefs and the government's approach. Winterbotham advocated both the
existence of natural rights and a particular interpretation of 1688, while the government
insisted that no natural rights existed and that ministers such as Winterbotham should
avoid political sermons. Robert Hall insisted on the loyalty of Dissenters, despite the
establishment’s claims that Dissenters threatened the nation’s stability. To him,
Christianity and liberty went hand in hand, with happiness as the object of both. Hall’s
goal of religious freedom represented a combination of his view of rights and his
profession of faith. The Test Act meant that Dissenters were not full citizens. Mark
Wilks was the most politically active of the five. He emphasized the notions of rights,
equality, and happiness, while he argued in favor of the godliness of political reform.
The Kinghorns provide a contrast to the other three ministers, in that they never became
outspoken politically. Even so, they criticized the moral state of their government and
their nation. Joseph Kinghorn sympathized with the reformist impulse, but David
Kinghorn represented the conservative position among Baptists, because he advocated
submission to the government. They illustrated the Baptists’ separation of religious and
national identities by focusing on faith issues.

Winterbotham, Hall, and Wilks expressed a desire for liberty, specifically
religious toleration and the freedom to express political opinions. Winterbotham believed
in natural rights, including his right as both a citizen and a minister to speak on political
issues. He believed that examining the principles of the nation’s constitution should not
be limited to only a few people. He praised the revolution of 1688 for its deliverance of
the nation from Catholicism and from an attempted subversion of the constitution and of
liberty. In Hall’s view, natural rights were separate from Christianity. Christianity did
not violate liberty, and people did not give up many of their rights when they joined society. Hall interpreted religious expression as a right. He also defended his right to think and speak on political issues. He advocated public discussion of government principles, and he believed a free press helped the people exercise their control over the government. Wilks focused on social equality, and the freedoms of expression and assembly. He, like Winterbotham, believed that his nation had wandered from the principles of 1688.

Baptists showed their disagreement with the establishment in their views of government. Winterbotham claimed that the people were the source of the government. Therefore, they could choose and replace governors, and even change the form of their government. He saw Parliament as the delegates of the people, who needed to watch over the members of Parliament to make sure they acted responsibly. Winterbotham believed it was government’s responsibility to protect liberty. He trusted Parliament, once it was reformed, but he advocated a shorter duration, a broader vote, and reduced aristocratic influence. Though Winterbotham praised the nation’s constitution, he rejected passive obedience. Like Winterbotham, Hall saw the nation’s people as the foundation of political power. Because he distinguished between political and religious identities, Hall argued that reason and experience, instead of faith, determined the best government. He advocated political reform to overcome government corruption by enlarging the voting base and limiting the duration of Parliament. He also believed that the government was failing in its responsibility to the people. Therefore, Dissenters were crucial in helping to preserve the constitution. Wilks believed the people had the right and the responsibility to oversee Parliament. He attacked the government for prosecuting
genuinely loyal individuals, which he believed illustrated the magistrates’ failure to protect citizens. Unlike the others, David Kinghorn supported the government. Joseph Kinghorn, however, did not trust national leaders and accused them of insincere faith. Both Kinghorns agreed that government had no responsibility to enforce religion. Despite their calls for reform, Baptists did not advocate an armed revolution. They justified reform efforts, in part, as a way to avoid the need for revolution.

In their positions as ministers, these Baptists also reflected on the role for Christians in the nation. Winterbotham acknowledged the duty of Christians to submit to the government. For example, they must pay taxes. Yet because of their obedience to God, Christians owed only limited obedience to the government. Hall stressed that Christians had interests outside of their faith. Therefore, they could become involved in government. In particular Hall believed that Christians, especially Dissenters, had a great responsibility in Britain to protect the rights of citizens. Although Christians were obligated to obey the government, because of the necessity of having a government, Hall, too, placed limits on their submission. Wilks took seriously the possibility that Christians could participate in political issues, and he helped organize Dissenters’ political activity in Norwich. David Kinghorn, though, believed that Christians should not be politically involved and he advocated a greater degree of submission. Both Kinghorns differed from the national definition of Christianity that included all citizens. Joseph Kinghorn also distanced himself from the religious beliefs of the Unitarians and Thomas Paine. The Kinghorns, in their desire for a true Christian nation, trusted God.

Baptist aspirations also became clear through their reactions to events of the 1790s. Hall initially expressed enthusiasm for the French Revolution, but he modified
his views after the revolution became so violent, and Britain’s war with France became so destructive. Wilks, however, consistently supported the revolution. He argued that it represented a lasting achievement in liberty, virtue, and reason. In addition, God had approved it. While Joseph Kinghorn expressed hope for the advancement of liberty at the beginning of the revolution, David Kinghorn never embraced the ideals of the revolution. He emphasized its bloody nature.

Baptists did not wholeheartedly support the British war effort against France. Hall desired peace and even preferred to emphasize genuine Christianity over political reform. David Kinghorn, though, supported the war. Yet while he wanted victory for Britain, he also hoped for religious revival stemming from the war. Joseph Kinghorn longed for peace, and he questioned the appropriateness of Christians becoming involved in war. In addition, he condemned the government’s use of fast days to generate support for the war. Both Kinghorns, in general, opposed war for gain, and they interpreted the war with France as punishment for the nation’s unfaithfulness.

Baptists clearly had a sense of national identity at the end of the eighteenth century, but that identity was distinct from the establishment. Linda Colley acknowledges that other identities persisted within her concept of a British identity. Yet she assumes an overall British identity meeting with success. Baptists, though, saw themselves as outsiders, in contrast to the established church. Furthermore, the Baptists demonstrated that Britishness was not so successfully superimposed through relations with the Other. Baptists expressed sincere doubts about the conflict with France. They did offer support for the defense of Britain, if that became necessary. Even so, for Baptists, there was no clear Other. While they could express opposition to Catholics and
France, Catholicism was not enough to view others as alien. In the first years of the French Revolution, several Baptists hoped that the French were securing freedom, and vocally supported that effort. At times, the Other seemed to Baptists to be their own government, whom they criticized as corrupt and ungodly. Therefore, Protestantism was not enough to create a firm national bond. Baptists doubted the sincerity of other Protestants, particularly in their national government and national church. Finally, it is unclear whether the Baptists thought of themselves as primarily British. They regularly used English and British to mean the same thing. Colley’s interpretation cannot be completely rejected, but national identity was not quite as integrative as she suggests. Baptists maintained a separate identity, though it may not have been as apparent as Scottish or Welsh identities within Britain. In that sense, ‘British’ was not only an umbrella for various national identities, but also for religious identities. It was possible to have strong Baptist and British identities simultaneously. Though they were outside the establishment, Baptists agreed with English distinctiveness as a people especially blessed by God. Baptists did see their nation as having a mission, but they would limit the scope of that mission. They had a missionary goal rather than aspiring to national greatness in terms of empire. Baptists were part of the developing national identity, but not to the exclusion or diminution of their Baptist identity.

Because they were outside the established church, Baptists do not necessarily contradict Clark’s notion of Anglican hegemony. Yet they sharply criticized the existing hierarchy, so Clark’s explanation of alternatives to the establishment needs to be expanded beyond heterodoxy. Though Clark tends to ignore orthodox Dissenters, such as the Baptists and other evangelicals, and despite their being a small minority, Baptists
raised doubts publicly and in print over the government and the established church. Baptists desired greater rights. They wanted the opportunity to participate in the political process. They agreed neither with the existing social order nor the establishment’s approach to solving the nation’s problems. Therefore, they stood clearly outside the widespread support that Clark suggests. They do not fit in Clark’s contrast of Anglican hegemony and heterodox Dissent, either, because they were clearly orthodox. To respect the reformist aspirations of orthodox Dissent, as separate from the heterodox elite, requires a broader view. Baptists, as orthodox evangelical Dissenters, supported reform and greater equality, and thereby illustrated a distinct identity.

Because Colley and Clark’s interpretations fail to account for groups such as the Baptists, Tony Claydon and Ian McBride’s approach seems to be appropriate. The Baptists fit within a framework of aspirations, because they disagreed with the government and the established church concerning what constituted the best Protestant nation. They were outside the established church and seen as dangerous. Although they were often quiet on political matters, they offered a disruptive alternative when they did speak out. Fast days allowed Baptists considerable freedom to preach and publish, and Baptists took advantage of those opportunities to express doubts about the nation and the war with France. Yet Baptists argued that they were good citizens even while disagreeing with the government. At no point did they advocate revolution. Even so, their evangelicalism led Baptists to doubt the sincerity of the nation’s faith. Therefore, Baptists tended to bypass the established church through itinerant preaching and missions efforts. The Baptists also advocated toleration. They did not see citizenship as a reward for loyalty; they expected rights already, including the removal of religious restrictions.
They did not focus primarily on social order or obedience, but on liberty, both political and religious. Any crisis the nation faced was moral and religious as well as ideological and political. Despite their criticisms, Baptists did feel pride in their nation and its prosperity, and they had high hopes for their nation. At the same time, though, they thought the nation was failing to respect the dignity of every individual, and thus was not living up to its potential. Faith was at the center of Baptist identity, but it did not lead to national unity. Baptists contested the terrain of Protestantism, and thus offered an alternative version of identity because of their aspirations. They were loyal Britons, but their sense of national identity did not override their Baptist identity.
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