

UNDERSTANDING

**SOUL
LIBERTY
or
LIBERTY OF
CONSCIENCE**

**A MISUNDERSTOOD
BAPTIST DISTINCTIVE**

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WHAT IS SOUL LIBERTY?

Soul Liberty, Liberty of Conscience and Belief of Tender Conscience are all in reference to the same thing.

Matthew 22:21 “...Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar’s; and unto God the things that are God’s.”

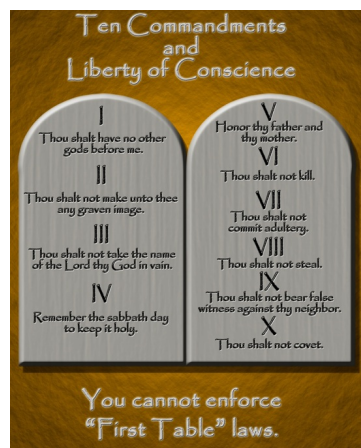
2 Corinthians 4:2 “But have renounced the hidden things of dishonesty, not walking in craftiness, nor handling the word of God deceitfully; but by manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man’s conscience in the sight of God.” **Soul Liberty is the freedom to worship according to one’s own conscience.**

Every man is a free moral agent before God and is accountable to Him personally.

We must all stand before God individually – no one will do it for us.

Individual Soul Liberty is, at its most basic level, a belief in the power of God to move in every man.

- **The liberty to worship God according to the dictates of conscience is the dearest of all human rights.** That it should ever have been denied is one of the strongest proofs of human fallibility. - **Jeremiah Jeter**
- Give me liberty to know, to utter and to argue freely according to my conscience above all other liberties. - **John Milton 1608-1674**



This is a proper display of the Ten Commandments.

The first four commandments are referred to as “First Table” laws. These laws deal with your relationship with God.

The last six commandments are referred to as the “Second Table” laws. These deal with your relationship with men.

You cannot force someone to believe something that their conscience will not allow them to believe.

You can legislate or enforce the Second Table laws, but you cannot legislate the First Table laws.

You can mandate a person’s **behavior**, but you cannot mandate their **heart** or **conscience**.

As Baptists, we can preach or persuade, but we do not persecute.

2 Corinthians 5:11 “Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, **we persuade men**; but we are made manifest unto God; and I trust also are made manifest in your consciences.”

Romans 14:5 “...Let every man be fully **persuaded in his own mind.**”

Romans 14:12 “So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God.”

Every individual, whether a believer or an unbeliever, will one day stand before God and give account for the decisions he has made in this life. Because of this, we believe in the liberty of the soul or conscience. No one should be forced, against his will, to assent to any belief or ritual. This liberty does not exempt one from responsibility to the Word of God or from accountability to God Himself. **Soul Liberty is the freedom to worship according to one’s own conscience.** Every man is a free moral agent before God and is accountable to Him personally. We must all stand before God individually – no one will do it for us.

Jeremiah Jeter wrote:

“According to Baptist views, no man can become a church member who does not voluntarily accept Christ as his Saviour, and who does not willingly receive baptism in attestation of his submission to his new Master. Moreover, having freely become a member, he cannot retain his place in the church, unless his life is in harmony with his profession. In short, faith and baptism are essential prerequisites to church membership, and a godly life is necessary to the continuance of the connection.

If these principles are maintained, neither birth, nor baptism, nor education, nor wealth, nor office, nor profession can secure a place in a Baptist church; nor can one retain his place in it without imbibing the spirit and imitating the example of the Redeemer. It is obvious that a church organized on these principles cannot be a persecuting body. For what purpose could it persecute? Not to force members to join it; for none can be admitted to its membership without qualifications which no persecution can secure. Not to keep members within it; for it can retain only such as love its members, doctrine, ordinances and discipline and force cannot produce these fruits. The conquests of such a church must be made, not by the sword of the executioner, but by “the sword of the Spirit.”

Other churches may employ carnal weapons and inflict pains and penalties to promote their prosperity; but Baptist churches, if they flourish, must succeed by moral suasion and the grace of God.”

One of the attacks on the doctrine of Soul Liberty is the shattering of the average believer’s confidence in his or her ability to study and understand the Bible for themselves.

1. Believers are led to believe that they can read the Bible devotionally but are incapable of understanding the “deep things of God” without Dr. So-and-so’s help.
2. Higher education is not necessary to properly understand and interpret the Word of God.

A crystal clear example of shattering the believers’ confidence to study the Bible for themselves is illustrated by Dr. John MacArthur:

The proper choice of an English translation on which to base a sermon is the subject of chapter 17 of this book, but whatever version is chosen, the preacher will have to correct or clarify the translation during the message. During a message he must be careful to limit these corrections perhaps to only two or three for fear of shaking the confidence of his listeners in the Bible they hold in their hands. After all, part of his goal is to cultivate a hunger among his people to study the Bible privately. Too many criticisms of that Bible will undermine their dependence on a given translation and fuel a “what’s the use?” attitude on their side. - John MacArthur “Rediscovering Expository Preaching” 1992

What unmitigated arrogance!

We have the Word of God and Spirit of God, therefore we may study to show ourselves approved unto God, we may rightly divide the Word of Truth, and we may be unashamed!

1 John 2:27 “But the anointing which ye have received of him abideth in you, and **ye need not that any man teach you**: but as the same anointing teacheth you of all things, and is truth, and is no lie, and even as it hath taught you, ye shall abide in him.”

A good pastor has a good understanding of Soul Liberty. The pastor, as overseer and shepherd of his flock, has the responsibility to warn and instruct, preach and teach in all areas where the Word of God speaks. A godly pastor will strive to teach his beloved flock to see this wicked world through "biblical glasses." He will teach them to love what God loves and hate what God hates. A godly pastor teaches his people to pray and discern and judge. He will explain the biblical requirements for leadership in the church he has been called to pastor. He will, with the counsel of the godly men of his church, exercise church discipline. The hyper-controlling pastor steps over the line of his responsibility when he assumes the responsibility of the Holy Spirit. Plainly stated, it is the pastor's job to preach, teach and administrate; it is the Holy Spirit's job to convict and sanctify.

Because the Baptist distinctive of separation of church and state go hand in hand with Soul Liberty, the doctrine of Soul Liberty is more easily seen and appreciated when the conscience is violated by persecution over doctrine or belief. Because the Great Whore and her Protestant offspring believe in Covenant Theology or Replacement Theology or Dominion Theology, which are all the same thing, they want the church to have the same executive power in the New Testament that Israel had in the Old Testament. They believe that the church is the replacement of Israel and that circumcision is to be replaced with infant-baptism. They don't believe in dispensations or that God dealt with man differently in the Old Testament than He did in the New Testament. They believe that the Old and New Testament are the same dispensationally. They want the church to have the power of the army to force the nations into submission to their beliefs so they have world dominion. When a Christian's theology is not dispensational then they look at Soul Liberty or Liberty of Conscience as anarchy, lawlessness and chaos. Let's look at the last 2,000 years of world history with spiritual eyes and we can more easily understand "Soul Liberty" or "Liberty of Conscience."

UNDERSTANDING THE TIMES

WHEREAS JAPHETH'S INITIAL separation from his two younger brothers was followed by a "continental divide" over the *Textus Receptus*, which in turn was followed by Britain's rise to "greatness" over the A.V. 1611, America would experience the final, western extension over the doctrine of "Soul Liberty."

Though the Reformers (or protestants who wanted to **reform** the Great Whore instead of **reject** it like we are told to do in Titus 3:10) were able to break the Vatican's power, enabling England to unleash the "Monarch of Books," little would change with regard to freedom of conscience. The *Protestant* version of Rome's church-state relationship proved an equally opposing barrier to local, New Testament assemblies.

As a number of converted Catholics deserted their "holy mother church" under the ministries of Luther, Calvin, Zwingli and others, we are not surprised that the root word for the name *Sardis* just happens to be *remnant*. Unfortunately, much of this defection was inspired by a perceived "golden" opportunity to recapture lands and estates previously pillaged by Rome. (The same is true of Rush Limbaugh's amoral, white-collar entrepreneurs who care more about private enterprise than personal righteousness.) Although the movement was assured of "a name" in history (the Protestant Reformation), its spiritual progress would be retarded by compromise---"*...thou livest, and art dead*" (Revelation 3:1b).

The main error committed by the Protestant leadership was given in our Lord's indictment: "*For I have not found thy works perfect before God*" (Revelation 3:2b). God says their work was not perfect so we can assume that the Reformers must have stopped short of a complete housecleaning. (Judges 1) Once again, the historical confirmation is striking. The rejuvenated doctrines of justification, Biblical authority and priesthood of the believer represented tremendous strides when compared to the blasphemous tenets of Romanism. However, due to political pressure from many of their superstitious constituents (especially those barons and noblemen providing muscle and financing), the Reformers "fudged" on *sole scriptura* (Scripture alone) by retaining the heresy of infant sprinkling.

They could not have made a greater mistake, as believer's baptism (by immersion) constitutes *the* Scriptural deterrent for an unregenerate church membership. (Acts 8:37) Although the first generation of any revival can ignore such a safeguard and get by with it (II Kings 20:19), the *sprinkled* "little darlings" will later develop into voting tares who eventually take over the barn. (Matthew 18:26) Only requiring a public profession of faith upon conversion can a local assembly experience the divine perpetuity promised in Matthew 16:18. Thus, one can readily discern the Baptists are not Protestants for they trace their spiritual ancestry to the Lord Jesus Christ and not to the pope. Representing a remnant within a remnant, the faithful Anabaptists of the Sardis period were commended for having preserved their apostolic heritage. "*Thou hast a few names even in Sardis which have not defiled their garments; and they shall walk with me in white: for they are worthy*" (Revelation 3:4).

As a daughter will generally favor her mother, the Protestant denominations incorporated many other Romanist trappings such as altars, candles, sacraments, incense pots, holy days,

auricular confession, and a robed priesthood. Unfortunately, when the child came of age, she also opted for her mother's unseemly profession. The student of history will note that the Roman Catholic Church, the religious system that sits on "*seven mountains*" (Revelation 17:9), is not only called "*the great whore*" (Revelation 17:1), but also *the Mother of Harlots*" (Revelation 17:5). The Holy Ghost declared that one day the Roman prostitute would give birth to several church-state mutants like herself. And so, in the process of time, the whore of Lutheranism would replace the whore of Catholicism as the new state religion for Germany. Calvin's Presbyterianism would become the state-church of Scotland. Anglicanism would do the same in England and the Reformed whore the same in Switzerland and much of Scandinavia.

What this meant for suffering Baptists was a new wave of religious tormentors. The decree at the "Protestant" Diet of Speyer in 1529 proclaimed: "All Anabaptists and rebaptized persons, male or female, of mature age, shall be judged and brought from natural life to death, by fire, or sword otherwise, as may befit the persons."

Thus, the record confirms that any professed Christian denomination that sprinkled babies would eventually murder the "brethren" that did not, namely, the Baptists (Known in Europe as Anabaptists).

For the ruthless slaughter of fellow Christians, the Protestant lands would have to be judged by the same God who pulverized Catholic Europe during the Dark Ages. The church in Sardis was given fair warning: "*...strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die...*" (Revelation 3:2a). The historical fulfillment of the prophecy was the Thirty Years' War (1618-1648). The devastation experienced by the Catholic House of Hapsburg and the Protestant powers of Germany, Sweden, Denmark, France and England was incalculable. The combined population of Germany and Austria was reduced by two-thirds. Bohemia's entire Protestant population 1,600,000 souls was wiped off the earth. Not only were cities and towns destroyed but fields, livestock, and farming implements as well. Desolation was everywhere. (Galatians 6:7)

PILGRIMS AND PURITANS

With “Christian” Europe embroiled in this imbroglia of genocide, few noticed the departure of a creaky little vessel crowded with “religious fanatics.” By year two of the Thirty Years’ War, the Pilgrim Fathers had safely arrived at Plymouth Rock, over three thousand miles away. The final phase of Japheth’s enlargement had begun. (Genesis 9:27)

The privation of the first winter at Plymouth Rock is legendary. The price tag for God’s vindication would be high. Of the many tales of suffering, the most poignant has rarely been told. In grade school we were informed that a dozen of the original Pilgrim wives did not live to see “May flowers.” What we haven’t heard is why. Having spent seventy days at sea, those godly women decided that their first priority in America was to wash the cloths of their beloved husbands and children. The fact that it was November and three-quarters of a mile lay between their anchored ship and the shoreline along Cape Cod did not appear to matter. For their families’ sake, they would gladly wade through the icy, waist-high water. They had not yet heard that a “woman’s place is in the mall.” As William Brewster had previously assured the Virginia Company that his petitioning parishioners were “not as other men,” their spirited wives would likewise prove to be “not as other women.” Sadly, they had not anticipated that the chilly winter temperature would prevent them from adequately drying their own drenched garments. Resigned to their fate, referring to their death shrouds as “coats of iron,” most contracted pneumonia and expired before springtime. Thus, in the providence of God, a few devoted housewives became the sacred foundation deposits for the mightiest nation in history. (II Samuel 24:24) Selah!

Now although the Pilgrims were “technically” Protestants, their early exit from the Church of England and extended sojourn in Holland, coupled with the exposure of their first pastor, John Robinson, to a community of four thousand Dutch Anabaptists under exile in Norwich, brought them closer to the New Testament standard than most. They were certainly light-years removed from their Puritan cousins who established the larger Massachusetts Bay Colony in 1629. While the Pilgrims were labeled “separates” for having broken ties with their religious taskmasters, the deluded Puritans believed that they could “purify” the system from within. Not only did they fail to stem the Anglican Apostasy (William Laud, etc.), but the imported consequences of their well-intentioned (Proverbs 14:12) yet hopelessly unscriptural approach (II Corinthians 6:17) threatened to corrupt “New” England as well. By the time the Puritans attempted to “give it up,” they had unknowingly assimilated many of the intolerant philosophies held by their despised antagonists.

Elisha Paine visited Canterbury, Massachusetts and was imprisoned in Windham for illegal preaching. In November of 1752 he wrote: “I cannot but marvel to see how soon the children will forget the sword that drove their fathers into this land, and take hold of it as a jewel, and kill their grand-children therewith. O that men could see how far this is from Christ’s rule!” Paine spent only a gracious five days in prison, but he was not able to return to Long Island to finish the home he had attempted to build. It was a long winter for his family. Like the vermin that carried their plague-spreading fleas to Europe, the tainted leadership at Massachusetts Bay quickly established a rigid Old Testament theocracy that came to be known as

Congregationalism. Henceforth, the personal spiritual convictions of individual citizens would be subject to the religious opinions of the ruling majority.

THE BAPTISTS ARRIVE IN AMERICA

Fortunately, the Lord had no intention of allowing such nonsense to interfere with His plans for America. He was not the least bit impressed with the touted “City on a Hill” in Massachusetts, as it represented *the* major ideological impediment to the eventual reinstatement of *Jerusalem on Mount Zion*. A small but determined number of Baptist pioneers began to appear in New England. Although John Christian writes, “The exact date of the arrival of the first Baptists in America, and their names are uncertain,” the fact of their early appearance and influence was noted even by several Puritan authorities. Governor Winslow wrote of the Baptists in 1646, “We have some living among us, nay, some of our churches, of that judgement.” Cotton Mather adds that “many of the first settlers of Massachusetts were Baptists, and they were as holy and watchful and faithful and heavenly people as any, perhaps in the world.” In a discourse delivered at the dedication of The Baptist Church and Society in Warren, Rhode Island, Baptist historian J.P. Tustin declared, “Multitudes of Baptist ministers and members came from Europe, and settled in different parts of this continent, each becoming the center of an independent circle wherever they planted themselves.” Tustin points to Wales as one of the leading exporters of Baptist doctrine to America.

It is a fact generally known, that many of the Baptist churches in this country derived their origin from the Baptist churches in Wales, a country which has always been a nursery for their peculiar principles. In the earlier settlements of this country, multitudes of Welsh emigrants, who left their fatherland, brought with them the seeds of Baptist principles, and their ministers and members laid the foundation of many Baptist churches in New England, and especially in the middle states.

The first Baptist church in the state of Massachusetts was formed in 1663 at the town of Swansea (Plymouth Colony) by Reverend John Myles of Wales. Other intelligent approximations for the first Baptist churches in the remaining twelve colonies are given by David Benedict as follows: Providence, Rhode Island, 1639 (though disputed by many; see next section); New York, New York, prior to 1669; Summerton, South Carolina, 1683; Cold spring, Pennsylvania, 1684; Middletown, New Jersey, 1688; New Castle, Delaware, 1703; Groton, Connecticut, 1705; Burly, Virginia, 1715; Perquimans, North Carolina, 1727; Chestnut Hill, Maryland, 1747; Newton, New Hampshire, 1775; Kioka Creek, Georgia, 1772. (The student will notice that, in most cases, the presence of Baptist people themselves preceded by several years the above-given dates for their first churches.)

However, the same Protestant theologian who revered our Baptist ancestors as “heavenly people” referred to their doctrines as “the briars of Anabaptisme.” In Mather’s “Holy Commonwealth,” the battle lines were soon drawn over infant sprinkling. The Baptists would have none of it, referring to unscriptural practice as “the Badge of the Whore.” Not only did Baptist parents refuse to have their own infants sprinkled, but they rebelled at being forced to witness the heretical ceremony, period! While some would “turn their back at the ordinance,” others would literally storm out of the meeting house only to be tackled by incensed magistrates and dragged back inside. Christopher Goodwin of Charlestown was sentenced to pay a fine of ten pounds or be given ten stripes for *having thrown the baptismal basin on the floor!* Another exasperated brother by the name of William Witter was hauled into court for having declared, “They who stayed while a childe was baptized doe worship the dyvill.”

Known Baptists could rarely vote or hold public office and were frequently subject to fines,

whippings and/or imprisonment. On November 13, 1644, the General Court of Massachusetts passed a law for the suppression of Baptists, accusing them of being “incendiaries of the commonwealths, and the infectors of persons in main matters of religion, and the troublers of all churches in all places where they have been.” Any of the sect who would “oppose the baptizing of infants, or go about secretly to seduce others from the approbation or use thereof, or shall purposely depart the congregation at the ministration of the ordinance... shall be sentenced to banishment.” Given the unprecedented Baptist contributions to this nation, perhaps the most inane declaration of all was the prophecy uttered by a delegation of Puritan divines to the legislature in 1668. Denouncing the Baptists as “un-American subversives,” they went on record as warning, “If once that party becomes numerous and prevailing, this country is undone, the work of reformation ended.”

ROGER WILLIAMS

The premise of this chapter is that *the Lord used local New Testament churches to procure America's unparalleled religious liberty, thereby providing a haven for Israel*. The genesis of this divine arrangement was the diminutive colony of Rhode Island. (*"For who hath despised the day of small things?"* Zechariah 4:10a.) It should come as no surprise, therefore, that Satan has obscured the true history of this period behind a veil of fabricated tradition.

Visitors of the prestigious First Baptist Church in Providence, Rhode Island, are informed that the church was planted by Roger Williams in 1638, making it the oldest Baptist church in America. The same account is also perpetuated in the majority of Baptist schools today. However, as the available evidence will show, the official version is flawed while the true story has rarely been told.

To begin with, the so-called "official" founding date is 1638 as currently displayed on the structure's cornerstone- is itself a blatant falsehood. Dr. J. R. Graves, the renowned Baptist historian whose academic credentials, literary contributions and ministerial accomplishments occupy three pages in *Cathcart's Baptist Encyclopedia*, made a personal visit to the First Baptist Church of Providence toward the close of the nineteenth century. Upon entering, the audience room he observed a commemorative tablet on the wall suggested a different date altogether. In his book, *The First Baptist Church in America*, Dr. Graves rendered the following inscription:

This Church was founded in **1639**, by
Roger Williams, its first pastor, and
The first Asserter of Liberty of Conscience.
It was the First Church in Rhode Island and
The First Baptist Church in America.

This ruse of the devil was orchestrated for a specific purpose indeed. With the Providence congregation designated the "first Baptist church in America," pedobaptists have been able to maintain a self-deluded justification to challenge the legitimacy of all subsequent Baptist growth, given the invalid polity initially employed by Williams, followed by his own abrupt resignation and life-long repudiation of organized religion in general.

Three years after Williams arrived in Providence (occasioned by his banishment from Massachusetts), the frustrated Congregationalist attempted to constitute a Baptist church in March 1639, by immersing eleven other excluded pedobaptists, having been immersed himself by one of the same (Ezekiel Holliman).

Note how Dr. Henry S. Burrage corroborates the earlier date of 1639, writing in *A History of the Baptists in New England* (published 1894):

The religious opinions of Williams and his associates were evidently in a transition state. The tendency of the former had been toward Baptist views for some time. Before leaving England he had been acquainted with Baptists, and was familiar with their articles of belief ... The first sign of organization was at some time prior to **March 16, 1639**, when Mr. Williams was baptized by Ezekiel Holliman and he in turn baptized Holliman and "some ten more."

However, the authority to administer baptism was conferred solely upon the local church. (Baptisms performed by individuals without church authority have been historically rejected as

“alien baptisms.”)

Williams also failed to produce a standard doctrinal statement. Dr. E. Brown, pastor of the First Baptist Church in Providence, acknowledged in his sermon on the church’s 250th anniversary, April 28, 1889 (yet another witness to the founding date of 1639), “Our Fathers founded, and the centuries have handed down to us, a church without a written creed.” Dr. Graves writes:

Dr. Benedict, the venerable historian of American Baptists, confesses That in making Roger Williams the founder and first pastor of the First Baptist Church in Providence, he did not go behind the church records, but accepted Them as reliable; but his testimony, before he died, was **The more I study On this subject**, (i.e., the date of the Providence church and the statements That Roger Williams was its first pastor and it being The First Baptist Church In Rhode Island and America,) **the more I am unsettled and confused.**

The candid Benedict was one of several otherwise astute Baptist historians who were beguiled on the Providence issue the same way spiritual scholars like Dr. R. A. Torrey were initially deceived by the corrupt Revised Version of 1881.

Following only four months at the helm, the unstable Williams shocked his parishioners by resigning and permanently renouncing any affiliation with the Baptist movement. Thomas Lechford, an Episcopalian, visited Providence in the years 1640-41 and recorded:

At Providence, which is twenty miles from Newport, lives Master Williams and his company of divers opinions; most are Anabaptists; They hold there is no true visible church in the Bay, nor in the World, nor any true Ministry.

This conviction of spiritual anarchy was so strong that Williams never wavered from it during his remaining forty-three years on earth. *Thus we see that the so-called “founder of the Baptist denomination in America” was never a true Baptist for even one hour of his life!* Dr. Samuel Adlam, Rhode Island’s premier historian, concludes:

It is greatly to be regretted that it ever entered into the mind of anyone to make him (a Baptist or) the founder of our denomination in Rhode Island or America. In no sense was he so ... a man only four months a Baptist (and only attempting to become one at that), and then renouncing his baptism forever, to be lauded and magnified as the founder of the Baptist denomination in the New World! (Is simply absurd!) **For all he did as a statesman to aid our brethren in the, or advocacy of the, separation of church and state, I respect him; but as a Baptist I owe him nothing.**

Another problem with the ecclesiastical preeminence afforded the First Baptist Church in Providence is the history of the church itself. The common claim that the existing work can be traced back to William’s abandoned flock is a myth exposed by three historical realities.

First, the “church” that Williams jumpstarted and then abruptly deserted, went out of existence after a short while. According to the contemporary testimony of Cotton Mather, as cited by Crosby:

At length the magistrates passed the sentence of banishment upon him [Williams], upon which he removed with a few of his own sect and settled at a place called Providence. “There they proceeded,” says Mr. Mather, **“not only unto the gathering of a thing like a church, but unto the renouncing of their infant baptism.” After this, he says, he turned Seeker and Familist, and the church came to nothing.**

Dr. Adlam notes:

Mather had the means of knowing whether that “thing like a church,” as he called it, continued or not; and it can not be assumed that he would have written and published to the world, in almost the next town (Boston) and in the face of the church, that it was dissolved upon Williams’s leaving it, if the church was then in existence, to deny the charge! Can the fact be found anywhere that any member of Williams society, or any Baptist living in the days of Mather, ever denied this statement? Such a denial never was heard of, that I can learn.

Around the year 1650 a “real” Baptist church was organized in Providence by Mr. Thomas Olney. The work was soon described as a “flourishing church.” However, a serious split occurred shortly thereafter over the rite of laying on of hands. John Challender states, as cited by Dr. Adlam:

About the year 1653 or '54, there was a division in the Baptist church at Providence, about the rite of laying on of hands, which some pleaded for as essentially necessary to church communion, and the others leave indifferent. Hereupon they walked in two churches, one under C. Brown, Wickenden, etc., the other under Thomas Olney.

Historians such as Isaac Backus confirm the all-important identities of both groups: Thomas Olney ... continued to his death, over that part of the church who are called five-principle Baptists, in distinction from those who parted from their brethren, about the year 1653, under the leading of elder Wickenden, holding to the laying on of hands upon every church member.

Finally, after more than sixty years of coexistence, the mother church pastured by Olney dissolved. Writing in 1738, Challender states, “This last continued till about twenty years [ago], when, becoming destitute of an elder, the members were united with other churches.” Morgan Edwards says that the church under Olney continued till 1715.

Dr. Adlam then leaves us with the obvious inference: “From this it follows that the existing church in Providence was not founded in 1639, but in 1652; **it was not the first in the State, for it came out from an older church.**”

Dr. John Clarke

The Scripture says, “Render therefore to all their dues ... honour to whom honour” (Romans 13:7) and “Let another man praise thee, and not thine own mouth” (Proverbs 27:2a). It is regrettable that the name of Roger Williams has been used to deprive another from receiving the recognition he deserves for having been the premier human vessel in God’s plan for America’s spiritual destiny. As to a lesser degree, it is likewise unfortunate that in the rectifying of this injustice, the legitimate *ideological* contributions of Williams can be unintentionally trashed in the process. In his opening paragraph on the life of Roger Williams, Graves writes,

He seems providentially raised up as “a herald,” “a voice,” to proclaim in this, then wilderness, the eternal divorcement of Church and State, and the absolute freedom of man to worship God according to his understanding of His Word, and thus to prepare the way for the coming of His Kingdom into New England and America.

The following transition by Dr. Adlam provides a worthy introduction of our noble subject:

Williams, indeed, touched the Baptist standard, but ere he raised it his hands trembled, and it fell. It was seized by a steadier hand; at Newport it was raised, and far and near they came to it; it was carried into the heart of Massachusetts, and a work was commenced that which till the last setting of the sun shall never cease; and this before we have any evidence that a church in Providence had begun to be ...

There is another name, long, too long, concealed by William being placed before him, who will in after times be regarded with unmingled affection and respect, as the true founder of the Baptist cause in this country. That orb of purest luster will yet shine forth, and Baptists, whether they regard his spotless character, his talents, his learning, the services he rendered, the urbanity and the modesty that distinguished him, will mention *John Clarke* as the real founder of our denomination in America.

And when Baptist history is better understood than it is at present, every one, pointing to the venerable church which, on one of earth’s loveliest spots, he established, will say: “*This is the mother of us all.*”

According to the best authorities, Dr. John Clarke was born in Suffolk, England, on October 3, 1609. His parents, Thomas and Rose, were devout Puritans. John received a quality education and later became a medical doctor. He was acclaimed by his contemporaries as scholar bred, “a man bred to learning,” and “a learned physician.”

It is believed that his predilection for religious liberty led him to join the first church of “Particular Baptists” in London, formed in September, 1633, by Mr. John Spilisbury. Professor J. C. C. Clarke, of Shurtleff College (descended from Dr. Clarke’s brother, Joseph), said of his ancestor, “Dr. Clarke’s connection with these Baptists is quite evident from his first day in Boston to the day of his death.”

When Dr. Clarke, accompanied by his wife, Elizabeth, arrived in Boston in November 1637, the intolerant city was beset by theological controversy. His biographer, Dr. Wilbur Nelson, states, “Like other suspected persons, he was disarmed.” In his own narrative, Clarke writes:

I was no sooner on shore, but there appeared to me differences among them touching the covenants ... I thought it strange that they were not able so to bear each with others in their different understandings and consciences as to live peaceably together.

The following March (after an inhospitable sojourn in New Hampshire), Dr. Clarke agreed to lead an expedition of three hundred spiritual pioneers to seek out a new colony where liberty of conscience would prevail. Boston was then only seven years old and about to suffer a population reduction of thirty percent. Prior to their departure, the group drew up and signed the following compact:

The seventh day of the first month, 1638.

We whose names are underwritten do hereby solemnly in the presence of Jehovah incorporate ourselves into a Bodie Politick and, as He shall help, submit our persons, lives and estates unto our Lord Jesus Christ, the King of Kings, and Lord of Lords, and to all those perfect and most absolute laws of His given in His Holy Word of Truth, to be guided and judged thereby.

Exodus 24:3 and 4

I Chronicles 11:3

II Kings 11:17

William Coddington William Dyre

John Clarke William Freeborn

William Hutchinson, Jr. Philip Shearman

John Coggeshall John Walker

William Aspinwall Richard Carder

Samuel Wilbore William Baulston

John Sanford Edward Hutchinson, Sr.

Edward Hutchinson, Jr., Esq. Henry Bull

Thomas Savage Randall Holden

It is believed that the compact was composed by Dr. Clarke, while William Coddington, whose name appears first, was chosen president and judge of that body.

After deciding against Long Island, the group migrated to an island paradise in the Narragansett Bay, known by the Indians as *Aquidneck* (meaning “Isle of Peace”). The tranquil enclave, measuring fifteen miles long by three miles wide, was subsequently purchased from the natives for the asking price of forty fathoms of white beads (less than \$100), ten coats and twenty hoes; the deed bearing the date of 24 March 1638. Thus, beginning with the Mayflower’s arrival in 1620 (as opposed to the debacle of esurience at Jamestown), Japheth was continuing to fulfill his part of the Noahic prophecy to “ *dwell in the tents of Shem*” (Genesis 9:27).

The initial settlement was established at the north end of the island in what is now the city of Portsmouth. The words and signatures of the aforementioned compact, subsequently known as the “Portsmouth Compact,” may be viewed on a bronze tablet affixed to a large pudding stone situated aside a stream that empties into a pond off Boyd’s Lane, about a mile east of Mt. Hope Bridge in Portsmouth. (The tranquil site of this “Portsmouth Rock,” unveiled in 1937 *and far more important to America than “Plymouth Rock,”* was appropriately called “Founders Brook,” but recently renamed “Ann Hutchinson Park” by revisionists.)

In April 1639, Clarke, Coddington and several families organized a new community at Newport. The two towns united the following year on March 12 to form the colony of “Rhode Island.” Dr. Nelson writes in *The Life of Dr. John Clarke*:

William Coddington was elected governor. Suitable legislation was enacted, and in March of the following year, at the General Court of Elections, a statute was adopted that declared the government to be a “democracy,” the laws of which it was in the power of the freemen, by majority vote, to determine for themselves: “**That none be accounted a delinquent for doctrine**”; and that the official seal should be the figure of a sheaf of arrows bound together and marked with the motto “*Amor Vincent Omnia*” [“Love will conquer all things”].

Dr. Conrad Glover comments:

As far as I am able to learn, the above document was the first legislative action for personal, political and religious liberty on the American Continent. It may be true that Roger Williams wrote more on the subject of liberty of conscience and freedom of man than did John Clarke, but Clarke did more about it by translating his views into the statutes of government and into

minds and hearts of men.

The modern city fathers of Portsmouth must obviously concur with this view. A prominent historical marker plainly reads, **“Portsmouth, Rhode Island—Birthplace of American Democracy.”**

Although constantly busy with the affairs of state (not to mention his acclaimed medical practice), Dr. Clarke was faithful to perfect his *highest* calling. Dr. Cathcart writes in the *Baptist Encyclopedia*:

He is spoken of by early writers as the religious teacher of the people, and as such from the beginning. **A church was gathered in 1638, probably earlier in the year, of which Mr. Clarke became pastor or teaching elder.** He is mentioned (in 1638) as “preacher to those of the island,” as “their minister,” as “elder of the church there.” Mr. Lechford writes in 1640, after having made a tour through New England, that “at the island ... there is a church where one Master Clarke is pastor.”

The first thirteen lines on Dr. Clarke’s gravestone read as follows:

To the memory of
Doctor John Clarke,
One of the original purchasers and proprietors of
this island and one of the founders of the
First Baptist Church of Newport,
its first pastor and munificent benefactor;
he was a native of Bedfordshire, England,
and a practitioner of physic in London.
He, with his associates, came to this island from Mass.,
In March, 1638, O.S., and on the 24th
of the same month obtained a deed thereof from
the Indians. He shortly after gathered
the church aforesaid and became its pastor.

Prior to visiting the First Baptist Church of Providence, Dr. Graves made a pilgrimage to the Clarke family burial plot and read the above lines, especially that insightful date of 1638. He writes:

“I sat for hours before this silent witness, sending busy recollections- of recorded events-back over the fancied scenes and transactions of the two centuries past, when those sturdy witnesses of Christ, fleeing from the persecutions of the Old World, found, in their wanderings, this haven, and cleared away the dense wilderness, and let in, for the first time, God’s glorious sunlight upon this beautiful island, by the ‘loud resounding sea’ and thanked their God for it, as their peaceful home that seemed to them but a recovered part of Paradise itself.

It occurred to me that the testimony of monuments erected at, or very near, the time of the

events commemorated, and by those personally conversant or *best* conversant with them, are the most reliable witnesses of the events recorded . . .

This monument was doubtless erected by the very hands that laid the loved and honored dead to rest in this lovely spot.

Dr. Clarke left no child or relative to contribute this then costly mark of affection. The worn appearance of the stone testifies to its extreme age, and the language and style of the epitaph witness that it has come down to us from ‘former generations’---the centuries past.

I unhesitatingly accepted this mural witness as unimpeachable, and studied it, examining and cross-examining it for the utmost syllable of its testimony.

From it I learned [among six things listed in his full statement] . . . That this church has had a continuous existence from ‘1638’ until the present.”

Dr. Graves goes on to relate the stupefaction he felt while staring at the tablet in the Providence church:

I read again: “*This Church Was founded in 1639.*”

A new light broke in upon my mind, making me wonder I had not seen it before----founded in 1639!! Granting the dates of constitution claimed by each contesting church to be correct, then it is undeniably true that *the Newport church is the elder by one full year.*

This fact forever settles the question as to which of these churches is the First Baptist Church in Rhode Island and the First Baptist Church in America.

Although Dr. Clarke’s own conversion to Baptist doctrine predated his arrival in the “New World” (there being no indication of any such change occurring afterwards), his initial congregation, the first of *any* “denomination” on Aquidneck, would have necessitated a mixed multitude ripe for instruction (Acts 18:26). Any ecclesiastical gnat-strainers should also realize that Dr. Clarke was not going to a *town* to start a *church*; he was going to a *wilderness* to start a *town*. Dr. Nelson writes:

It is evident to those to whom he ministered formed a church as early as the year 1638.

Winthrop’s Journal, under date of May 11, 1639, states that “they gathered a church in a very disordered way; for they took some excommunicated persons, and others who were members of of the church of Boston, and not dismissed.” This item refers to this church as though it had been gathered some time before, doubtless in the year 1638.

There were certainly Baptists in the congregation, and Baptist sentiments were growing

in the community. In another item, Winthrop states that there were “professed Anabaptists on the island.” Early in 1641 he writes of troubles on the island growing out of dissension among the leaders and says that “divers of them turned professed Anabaptists.” As a matter of fact, it appears that Baptist doctrines were receiving a great deal of attention in every New England colony at that time. H. M. King, in his book, *The Baptism of Roger Williams*, says, “The thoughts of the New World were all alive on Baptist questions, and its literature was saturated with their discussion. The whole atmosphere was filled with Baptist ozone. Baptist sentiments were imported with almost every ship from England.” That some of these Baptists should have been among the earliest settlers or should later have joined the first settlers on the Island of Aquidneck, where the historic Baptist principle of soul liberty held full sway, was inevitable.

The doctrinal dissension to which Governor Winthrop referred took place in 1641 and resulted in a number of “deeper-lifers” quitting Clarke to form the Island’s first Quaker assembly. Dr. Nelson offers the following explanation:

Just when this church became **known** as a Baptist church is uncertain . . .

None of these early historians expresses a definitive opinion. What seems a reasonable explanation is that a church that was independent in character and included Baptists in its congregation was gathered in 1638, under the ministry of Dr. John Clarke.

But, in view of the fact that there were people of differing religious views in the community, and only one church, this church did not assume a denominational character until after those who differed withdrew and formed a church of their own. After that, the original church **became a name** a Baptist church. It continued its existence under the ministry of Dr. John Clarke, has had an unbroken history ever since, and is now known as the United Baptist John Clarke Memorial Church of Newport.

Keep in mind that this rather nebulous theory is the *worst-case* scenario. Dr. Clarke was the undisputed leader of the Newport church and was *always known* as a Baptist. The key is to differentiate between the *congregation* and the *membership*. While anyone professing a desire for truth is welcome in the *pews* of a Baptist church, the *voting* body is quite another matter, being restricted to *Baptists* in good standing.

Nelson gives the estimated population of Aquidneck in 1640 as 1,000 inhabitants. Yet he also notes that in 1648, the membership role of the Newport church contained only fifteen names, and four of those were “Clarkes” (an obvious “flop” by today’s mega-church standards).

Thanks to Dr. Clarke, Rhode Island absorbed a wide range of religious practitioners who were welcome nowhere else. So, why should the good man’s legacy be shortened simply because he happened to have had the only church in town at one time?

Thus we may confidently conclude that the *first church at Newport* and *not* the first church at Providence, is the *true* first Baptist church in America, and that *Dr. Clarke*, and *not Roger Williams*, was the founder and pastor of the *first Baptist church in Rhode Island and America!*

OBADIAH HOLMES

The church at Newport was destined to be honored with a second distinction as well. Obadiah Holmes was born in Preston, Lancashire, England, in 1606. He was thoroughly grounded in religion and educated at Oxford University. Yet, he chose to forsake the “faith of his fathers” for a “worldly good time.”

In 1639, Holmes brought his wife and son to Salem, Massachusetts, where he established the first glass factory in America. However, when his Quaker business partner was prosecuted for a doctrinal matter, the “wayward” Holmes challenged the religious hierarchy, suffering excommunication and banishment in 1646 as a result.

He then moved to the more liberal Plymouth Colony where he had a providential encounter with Dr. Clarke around 1649. Holmes and eight fellow dissenters were subsequently baptized by Clarke. When plans for a new church were proscribed by local officials, Holmes relocated to Newport and united with Dr. Clarke’s work.

In the summer of 1651 Holmes accompanied Dr. Clarke and Deacon John Crandall to Swampscott, near Lynn, Massachusetts, for the purpose of visiting Mr. William Witter, an infirm member of the Newport Church. They arrived at Mr. Witter’s residence on a Saturday afternoon in July and the following day held a service there.

While Dr. Clarke was preaching from Revelation 3:10, two constables entered the private home, broke up the meeting and executed warrants for their arrest on the grounds that they were “erroneous persons, being strangers.” When Dr. Clarke remonstrated in a calm manner, his antagonist replied, “Come, **shut up your book**, and go with us; we have come to apprehend you.” As the three “prisoners” left the house, Pastor Clarke encouraged his tearful host by making a timely application to his text (taken from the epistle to the church at Philadelphia no less), *“The hour of temptation and trial has come, but let us keep the word of His patience, and He will sustain us in the time of trouble.”*

As there was no jail in Lynn, the “erroneous persons” were taken to the local *ale house*. After processing and a meal, the unthinkable occurred. Because it was still the “Puritan Sabbath” (with an average service lasting for hours), the “busted Baptists” were promptly hauled from the tavern to the Congregational meeting house. Dr. D. C. Barrow writes, “The three men, whose own worship had been broken up, were now taken, without their own consent, to the meeting of the standing order.”

To protest their disgraceful predicament, the “visitors” refused to take off their hats, whereupon the constable removed them, “but not in the most amiable manner.” When Dr. Clarke tried to voice a respectful objection, he was curtly reminded that he and his companions were a “captive audience.”

On Monday, the men were transferred to the jail in Boston. Among a slate of charges, the most ludicrous read: “For being taken by a constable at a private meeting on the Lord’s Day” (i.e., punishing the Baptist minister because his unscrupulous arrest occurred on a Sunday). The heart of their complaint was as follows:

For such things as shall be alleged against them concerning their seducing and drawing aside of others after their erroneous judgments and practices; and for suspicion of having their hands in the re-baptizing of one or more among us . . .

Ten days after their imprisonment, the three Baptists were found guilty and fined accordingly: Clarke, twenty pounds; Holmes, thirty pounds; and, Crandall, five pounds. The men were also curtly informed that if they could not come up with the cash (a considerable sum at that time) they were to be *well whipped*, “in Jesus’ name,” of course. When Holmes replied, I bless God I am counted worthy to suffer for the name of Jesus,” the “Reverend” John Wilson lost it and struck the defendant saying, “The curse of God go with thee.”

Dr. Clarke relates:

None were able to turn to the law of God or man by which we were condemned. At length the Governor stepped up, and told us we had denied infant’s baptism, and, being somewhat transported, told me I had **deserved death**, and said he would not have such **trash** brought into their jurisdiction.

But then the haughty Endicott slipped up by saying to Clarke:

You go up and down, and secretly insinuate into those that are weak, but you cannot maintain it before our ministers. You may try and dispute with them!

The next morning Dr. Clarke sent shockwaves throughout the colony by accepting the challenge to debate. While the “distinguished” theologians objected to the proposal, the kangaroo court had committed itself. Clarke was thus informed that the disputation was granted and scheduled for the next week. With a loathsome jail cell for his “study” the man of God prepared four propositions which he intended to defend.

The testimony of John Clarke, a prisoner of Jesus Christ, at Boston, In the behalf of my Lord, and of his people, is as followeth:

First—I testify that Jesus of Nazareth, whom God hath raised from The dead, is made both Lord and Christ. This Jesus I say is the Christ, in English, the *Anointed One*, (and) hath a name above every name. He is The *Anointed Priest*; none to, or with Him in point of atonement. The *Anointed Prophet*; none to Him in point of instruction; the Anointed King, who Is gone to His Father for His glorious kingdom, and shall ere long return again; and that this Jesus Christ; is also The Lord; none to or with Him by way of commanding and ordering (with respect to the worship of God) the household of faith, which being purchased with His blood as Priest, instructed and nourished by His Spirit as Prophet, do wait in His appointment as He is the Lord, in hope of that glorious kingdom which shall ere long appear.

Second—I testify that Baptism, or dipping into water, is one of the commandments of this Lord Jesus Christ, and that a visible believer, or disciple of Christ (that is, one that manifesteth repentance towards God, and faith in Jesus Christ), is the only person that is to be baptized or dipped with that visible baptism, or dipping of Jesus Christ in water; and also that visible person that is to walk in the visible order of His house; and so to wait for His coming the second time in the form of a Lord and King, with His glorious kingdom according to promise; and for His sending down (in time of His absence) the Holy Ghost, or Holy Spirit of Promise; and all this according to the last will and testament of that living Lord, whose will is not to be added to or taken from.

Third—I testify, or witness, that every such believer in Christ Jesus, that waiteth for His appearing, may in point of liberty, yea, ought in point of duty, to improve that talent his Lord hath given unto him, and in the congregation may either ask for information to himself, or, if he can, may speak by way of prophecy for the edification, exhortation, and comfort of the whole; and out of the congregation at all times, upon all occasions, and in all places as far as the jurisdiction of his Lord extends, may, yea, ought to walk as a child of light, justifying wisdom with his ways, and reproving folly with the unfruitful works thereof, provided all this be shown out of a good conversation, as James speaks, with meekness of wisdom.

Fourth—I testify that no such believer or servant of Jesus Christ hath any Liberty, much less authority, from his Lord, to smite his fellow-servant, nor yet with Outward force, or arm of flesh, to constrain or restrain his conscience, nor yet his outward man for conscience’s sake, or worship of his God, where injury is not offered to a person, name, or estate of others; every man being such as he shall appear before the judgment seat of Christ, and must give account of himself to God; and therefore ought to be full persuaded in his own mind for what he undertakes, because he that doubteth is damned if he eat, and so also if he act, because he doth not eat or act, in faith; and what is not of faith is sin.

You might say that these Bible-based tenets represented the “Old Time Religion” of our

Baptist ancestors in the Philadelphia Church Age.

Our fathers, chained in prisons dark,

Were still in heart and conscience free:

How sweet would be their children's fate,

If they, like them, could die for thee!

Faith of our fathers! Holy faith!

We will be true to thee till death!

At any rate, as Dr. Clark's reputation had preceded him, the Puritan divines "chickened out" and the debate was "indefinitely" postponed.

Clark was then surprised to learn that he was suddenly free to go. What he didn't know is that some friends had paid the fine, securing his discharge (though this was contrary to his personal convictions). Deacon Crandall was also released upon his pledge to appear at a later session of the Court; however, his case was never called.

In the sovereign plan of God, Obadiah Holmes, Clark's future successor at Newport (1676-1682), was ordained to become the esteemed *protomartyr* of American Baptists (the word *martyr* being understood by its ancient definition of "a witness for Christ"). *Bro. Holmes would shed the first blood on this soil for the lovely Lord Jesus!*

When Holmes learned that the brethren had also raised the money for his fine, he graciously declined their generosity, though publically declaring, in the spirit of the Apostle Paul at Philippi (Acts 16:37), "*Having committed no crime, I will not permit my friends to pay a single farthing for me.*"

Likewise, on the day of his ordeal (September 5, 1651), he followed his Saviour's example (Matthew 27:34) by refusing a cup of Madeira wine, stating, "*No; let me so suffer that, if I am sustained, God shall have the glory.*" With his New Testament in hand, he calmly approached the dreaded whipping post located behind the old State House. His recalcitrance surfaced yet again while being disrobed:

"Unbutton here," said the executioner, as he gave his jacket a jerk. "No," said Holmes, "I make as much conscience of unbuttoning one button as I do of paying the sentence of thirty pounds. I will do nothing towards executing such an unjust law."

Faithful to his word, he would not voluntarily assist the executioner in the least in removing his garments from his back. He was as helpless as if he were asleep, and the executioner had to handle him as though he were a statue.

Having drawn a crowd (I Corinthians 4:9), the Baptist minister gave out a quick sermon:

"The Lord," said he, "having manifested His love towards me, in giving me repentance towards God and faith in Christ, and so to be baptized in water by a messenger of Jesus, in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, wherein I have fellowship with Him in His death, burial and resurrection, I am now come to be baptized in afflictions by your hands, that so I may have further fellowship with my Lord, and am not ashamed of His sufferings, for by His stripes I am healed."

The executioner removed enough of his garments and having fastened him to the post, seized a three-corded whip and proceeded to apply the blows in an unmerciful manner. The victim

later testified:

As the strokes fell upon me, I had such a spiritual manifestation of God's presence, as the like thereof I never had nor felt, nor can with fleshly tongue express, and the outward pain was so removed from me, that indeed I am not able to declare it to you, it was so easy to me, that I could well bear it, yea, and in a manner, felt it not, although it was grievous, as the spectators said, the man striking with all his strength (yea, spitting in his hands three times, as many affirmed) with a three-corded whip, giving me therewith thirty strokes. When he had loosed me from the post, having joyfulness in my heart and cheerfulness in my countenance, as the spectators observed, I **told the magistrates, you have struck me as with roses.**

Although the Lord enabled Holmes to endure the initial blows in the presence of his enemies, he later suffered extreme discomfort. (He could take no rest for weeks except as he lay upon his knees and elbows, not being able to allow any part of his body to touch the bed.) And for having embraced the bloody minister, John Hazel and John Spur were also arrested and sentenced to pay forty shillings or be whipped. Both refused to pay the fine but were released after others bailed them out.

For what it's worth, present-day Lynn happens to be one of the most wicked cities in the state of Massachusetts. A popular motorcycle patch reads, "Lynn, Lynn, City of Sin."

THE CHARTER OF 1663

By now it should be obvious that Rhode Island's "Christian" neighbors were "a few bricks shy of a load." Between 1647 and 1692, at least twenty-three females would be executed throughout New England as witches or seditious heretics (the death of Mary Dyer being the definitive case). Consequently, the religious toleration exhibited in Rhode Island was a continual source of "irritation" (conviction) to the self-righteous Puritans of Massachusetts Bay. Every imaginable invective was heaped upon the tiny Baptist outpost from "Rogue's Island" to "The Sewer of New England."

However, although conditions appeared threatening on the home front, Dr. Clarke was wise enough to discern that the greater danger was back in England. Nelson writes:

Massachusetts and Connecticut also had their agents in England, and pressed some of their claims with a view to disintegrating the Colony of the Providence Plantations [Rhode Island]. They proposed to make a tripartite division of her territory: that the Narragansett country should be absorbed by Connecticut and that Massachusetts should appropriate Providence and Warwick, while to Plymouth should fall the Island towns.

While Roger Williams had obtained the colony's original charter from Charles I in 1644, the king's execution five years later rendered the agreement tenuous at best. The citizens of Portsmouth and Newport subsequently petitioned Dr. Clarke to go to England to monitor their affairs. He readily consented and sailed in November 1651, leaving a recovering Holmes in charge of his flock.

Although Williams also went along, being appointed by the smaller Providence colony, he returned in 1654, while Clarke continued his lobby on behalf of Rhode Island for another decade.

In his book *Fighters for Freedom*, A. K. de Blois calls Dr. Clarke "the foremost American diplomat of his age." These skills were put to the test when Charles II restored the monarchy in 1660. The charter which had been granted Williams by the Earl of Warwick was promptly cancelled. The new autocrat was prejudiced against the liberal colony. Arnold writes:

To obtain a renewal of privileges so remarkable, to secure the regard of a sovereign whose arbitrary will was an inheritance, to obtain his sanction to a system which, initiated as an experiment by a republican parliament, had come to be no longer a philosophical problem but an established fact, and which, if extended, must inevitably in time overthrow the fabric of monarchical power – these were the difficult and perhaps dangerous duties that now devolved on the agent of Rhode Island.

Though confronted with insurmountable obstacles, Clarke did have two things going for him; Jehovah's plan for Israel's recovery and the promises of Holy Scripture: "*The king's heart is in the hand of the LORD, as the rivers of water: he turneth it whithersoever he will*" (Proverbs 21:1).

On July 8, 1663, Dr. Clarke obtained the signature and seal of the king on a charter so democratic, both in letter and spirit, that doubts were voiced in England as to whether the king even had a right to grant it! "The charter of Rhode Island of 1663," says Thomas Bicknell, "has been universally recognized as the most liberal state paper ever issued by the English Crown."

With regard to how Charles received the Baptist preacher's bold request, John Christian

writes, “The king replied benignantly, saying that he would permit the colonists to continue in the enjoyment of their liberty, and that he would not allow them to be compelled to submit themselves to the Church of England.”

A portion of the remarkable document reads as follows:

That our royall will and pleasure is that noe person within the sayd colonye at any tyme hereafter shall bee in any way molested, punished or called in question for any differences in opinione in matters of religion, and doe not actually disturb the civill peace of our sayd colony; but that all and everye person or persons may from tyme to tyme and at all tymes hereafter freely and fullye have and enjoye his and their owne judgements and consciences in matters of religions concernment.

“Christian” revisionists have done their part in the satanic conspiracy to obliterate the memory of America’s Baptists founders. The much lauded *America’s God and Country Encyclopedia of Quotations* (1994) by William J. Federer claims to be a “comprehensive 864-page reference tool [which] includes over 2,100 quotations from nearly 700 sources highlighting America’s noble heritage.” Predictably, the name of Dr. John Clarke is nowhere to be found. However, Associate Justice of the United States Supreme Court Tom Campbell Clark (1899-1977) *did* make the grade for supposedly stating, “The Founding Fathers believed devoutly that there was a God and that the unalienable rights of man were rooted not in the state, nor the legislature, nor in any other human power but in God alone.” Yet, in the historic *School District of Abington Township v. Schempp*, 374 U.S. 203 (1963) the second of the two cases challenging prayer in the public schools *Clark authored the majority opinion, which specifically outlawed Bible readings in public schools*. In fact, the first nineteen words in the above quote (constituting more than half) were used by Clark in his landmark opinion. Thus, while Federer failed to list the Baptist preacher whose myriad of religious and civic accomplishments include what some authorities believe to have been the nation’s first public school (a vote being taken on August 20, 1640, “to keep a publick school for the learning youth”), the Protestant justice who ultimately voted to expel God’s Word from America’s classrooms *was* duly honored.

Although *America’s God and Country Encyclopedia of Quotations* also “missed” the names of *practically every Baptist preacher listed in this chapter*, Federer *did* recognize the following “spiritual giants” (in alphabetical order): P.T. Barnum, Napoleon Bonaparte, George Herbert Walker Bush, Agatha Christie, Chuck Colson, Hernando Cortez, Charles Darwin, Albert Einstein, Harry Emerson Folsdick, Anne Frank, Billy Graham, Julia Ward Howe, Queen Isabella, John F. Kenedy, Martin Luther King, Rush Limbaugh, Michelangelo, Reinhold Niebur, Richard Nixon, Edgar Allen Poe, Alexander Solzhenitsyn, Harriet Beecher Stowe, Mother Teresa and Oscar Wilde.

Also included in this widely distributed “Christian” resource are five “His Holiness” John Paul I, John Paul II, Leo XIII, Pius XII and the following inane entry (appearing on page 612):

Constitution of the United Soviet Socialist Republic (1922-1991), stated: Article 124: In order to ensure to citizens freedom of conscience, the church in the U.S.S.R. is separated from the State, and the school from the church.

Thus we should not be surprised to “discover” (on page 532) that the landmark “Charter of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations July 8, 1663, **was granted by King Charles II to Roger Williams.**” However, the original document, kept in a fireproof safe in the office of the Secretary of State in the Rhode Island State House, tells a different story altogether. The opening lines of

the charter reads as follows:

Charles the Second, by the grace of God, King of England, Scotland, etc... to all to whom these presents shall come, greeting:
Whereas, we have been informed by the humble petition of **our trusty and well beloved subject John Clarke**, on behalf of...
[twenty-three names follow, with Roger Williams being the tenth].

An excerpt from the charter (originally a part of Clarke's judicious petition to Charles II), has been permanently enshrined above the main (south) entrance of the magnificent Rhode Island State House (one of the most beautiful state capitols in America, sporting one of only four marble domes in the world):

TO HOLD FORTH A LIVELY EXPERIMENT
THAT A MOST FLOURASHING CIVIL STATE MAY STAND
AND BEST BE MAINTAINED WITH FULL LIBERTY
IN RELIGIOUS CONCERNMENTS

While James I, though remembered for the A.V. 1611, is also credited with shedding the *last* Baptist blood in *England*, it was apropos that his *grandson*, Charles II, acquiesced to the pastor of the one who shed the *first* Baptist blood in *America!*

CONGREGATION YESHUAT ISRAEL

Dr. Clark went to Heaven on April 20, 1676. Though the average “braindead” Baptist of today is unaware of Clarke’s significance, an array of earlier posthumous acclaim bears witness to his lifetime achievements. Cathcart called him, “One of the most eminent men of his time.”

Bancroft says, “Never did a young commonwealth possess a more faithful friend.” T.W. Bicknell, “Had Dr. Clarke of Newport no other claim to the first place among the founders of the American Colonies, the Royal Charter of 1663 would confer that honor.” John Challenger declared that “his memory is deserving of lasting honor for his efforts towards establishing the first government in the world which gave to all equal civil and religious liberty.”

S.G. Arnold said,

His life was devoted to the good of others. He was a patriot, a scholar, and a Christian. The purity of his character is conspicuous in many trying scenes, and his blameless, self-sacrificing life disarmed detraction and left him without an enemy.

C.E. Barrows,

From his inception, Mr. Clarke was a leading spirit in the new colony. His life is interwoven with his history that to have a correct knowledge of the one necessitates a knowledge of the other. He was almost always employed for the public good. His disciplined mind brought constant and invaluable aid to the infant colony. To no one, perhaps, was the colony under greater obligations than to him. Yet so quietly and unobtrusively did he do his work that his great merits have not been duly appreciated. But the careful student of this early period discovers in him the colony’s guiding genius. The better his history is known, the more commanding is the position assigned him.

The Hon. John R. Bartlett, former secretary of state of Rhode Island said, “Rhode Island owes to John Clarke a monument of granite and a statue of bronze.” On May 6, 2003, the Baptist History Preservation society of Rockwell, North Carolina, placed a 5,000-pound, polished, black granite monument, measuring 7’ x 4’ x 10’ in the Clarke burial plot on West Broadway (near the corner of Callender Avenue in Newport). The forty-ninth of fifty-three gold-lettered lines reads, “CLARKE IS KNOWN AS ‘THE FATHER OF AMERICAN BAPTISTS.’” (A similar memorial honoring Obadiah Holmes was erected on the Calvary Baptist Church grounds in Middletown, Rhode Island, approximately fifty miles from where he lies buried on private property.)

Other testimonials add to Dr. Clarke’s remarkable legacy: the trust he established on the day of his death “for the relief of the poor or the bringing up of children unto learning from time to time forever” (still functioning in the twenty-first century); the tablet at the Newport Historical Society erected in Dr. Clarke’s memory by the prestigious Newport Medical Society, etc.

However, *one* tribute remains in a class by itself. The eminent Baptist historian, Isaac Backus said of Clarke, “He was a principle procurer of Rhode Island for sufferers and exiles.” In the spring of 1658, while Dr. Clarke was busy in England, a creaky boat-load of fifteen Jewish families arrived in Newport from the Island of Barbados. (Other less substantiated theories suggest Holland or Brazil as their point of embarkation.) A contingent of twenty-three *Sephardic* Jews from Brazil had earlier emigrated to New Amsterdam (New York) in 1654, constituting the first Jewish community in the American colonies. With the capture of Brazil by the Dutch in 1631, thousands of Jews who had suffered torture and death in the Catholic nations of Mexico, Peru, Central America and the West Indies found a welcome respite in the city of Recife. When Brazil was later subjugated by Catholic Portugal in 1654, the majority of Recife’s Jewish

population fled to Holland.

The handful of refugees that descended on New Amsterdam in 1654 quickly learned that they were not welcome in Peter Stuyvesant's Protestant colony. Describing them as "very repugnant" and a "deceitful race," the local magistrates issued a decree ordering "that the Jews who came last year from the West Indies and now from the Fatherland must prepare to depart forthwith." Although the Dutch West India Company would later grudgingly allow the Jews to remain in New Amsterdam, word was already circulating about an unprecedented climate of religious tolerance emanating from Newport, Rhode Island.

The first Jews who came to Newport in 1658 found a small village of little more than two-hundred families. The houses were crude dwelling places situated on four-acre lots near the river. Having spent the majority of their tenuous existence in the shadows of dungeons and gallows, the new arrivals must have been amazed to find that the local jail was all of twelve feet by ten feet. Reverend Morris A. Gutstein (the ninth rabbi of Congregation Jeshuat, Newport) wrote in his work, *The Story of the Jews of Newport*:

Time was passed not with cards, but by reading the Bible and chatting about happenings in the colonies, and about politics abroad.

In those days people took their religion seriously and they were much happier. The meetings of the Baptists and the Quakers were well attended. No special attraction in preaching or preacher was required to have young and old devote a large part of one day a week for public worship and prayer. The services were not short, neither was the preaching. The theme of the preaching was regularly theological and doctrinal, never sensational. Freedom and liberty existed for all to do as they pleased in matters of religion. Yet, going to the meeting place for worship, whether it was in a private home as in the very early days, or, later, in the church-building, was a holiday.

Among these peaceful and religious inhabitants of Newport, with their prevailing spirit of liberty and tolerance, augmented by legislation which assured to all the right to "walk as their consciences persuade them", these fifteen Jewish families that arrived in 1658, must have found a hospitable and comfortable abode. Meeting no opposition, it is said they immediately set out to organize their public worship.

Rabbi Gustein described Dr. Clarke as "a familiar figure in Newport."

It is noteworthy that the first documentary evidence of the Jewish settlement is a deed dated February, 1678, which records that Nathaniel Dickens of Newport "sold... unto Mordecai Campanall and Moses Pacheckos, Jews, and to their nation, society, or friends of a piece of land for a burial place." Thus, within two years of Dr. Clark's death, a Jewish cemetery was established in Newport.

Around 1693, a second wave of roughly ninety Jews arrived, this time from the West Indies island of Curacao. Though coming from various destinations, the vanguard of American Jewery shared a common shameful experience in their recent past. To avoid the scaffold, many Jews in Spain and Portugal had made a false profession of "Christianity." Known as "Marranos" (swine), they were kept under constant surveillance by their Catholic oppressors. It is recorded that:

In the city of Seville an Inquisitor said to the regent: "My lord, if you wish to know how the Marranos keep the Sabbath, let us ascend the tower!" When they had reached the top, the former said to the latter: "Lift up your eyes and look. That house is the home of a Marrano; there is one which belongs to another; and there are many more. You will not see smoke rising from any of them, in spite of the severe cold; for they have no fire because it is the Sabbath."

Gustein notes how such Old World paranoia followed the Jews to America:

However, so deep was the impression of the necessity of secrecy in the observance of the Jewish religion that out of habit, some of the Jewish women who came here from the inquisition to freedom, as they walked the streets of Newport would tell their

rosaries while they repeated their Hebrew prayers. This habit had been acquired in Spain and Portugal, "for the purpose of lending the appearance of Catholic form should they be surprised at their devotion."

When the Jewish community in Newport, properly, *Congregation Yeshuat Israel* ("Salvation of Israel"), constructed their synagogue in 1763, a trapdoor under the bimah was included "just in case." Although the Marranos felt comfortable enough in Newport to reclaim their cultural identities (exchanging Catholic names for Jewish ones, remarrying in the synagogue, even belated circumcision), they could never be sure just how long their measure of freedom would last.

While the Baptists had been able to plant the banner of religious liberty in Rhode Island, Parliament continued to restrict matters of citizenship, suffrage and commerce. Under a seven-fold system, Jews in Newport received the fourth classification of "Resident Aliens," which simply gave them permission to live in the settlement. Full citizenship and economic parity would have to await the Bill of Rights (another Baptist production).

We should not be surprised, therefore, to learn that many European Jews (including the Marranos) sought a measure of perceived security within the ranks of Freemasonry, *the avowed enemy of their Catholic oppressors*. Their association with the craft would continue in the New World.

However, the tiny village of Newport would have nothing to fear from the Jews. To the contrary, their Gentile benefactors were literally guaranteed a windfall return on their humanitarian investment. (Genesis 12:3) Rabbi Gustein writes:

The blessing, which God gave Abraham, "And in thee shall be blessed all the families of the earth", may be applied to America in general and to Newport of the eighteenth century in particular. The eighteenth century ushered in to Newport cultural advancement, social progress, intellectual and religious growth, and more especially economic prosperity. The seventeenth century planted the seed; the eighteenth reaped the harvest. **The success of the harvest was in no small degree due to the descendants of Abraham.**

The Jews were only too glad to show their appreciation for the land void of the papal *auto-da-fé*.

The growth of the Jewish community was characteristic of the growth of the city in general. As the city shared the profits of the enterprising Jew, so did the Jew share the profit of the progressive city. Newport was not only a beneficiary but also a benefactor in this case.

After initiating an array of retail activity (dry goods, clothing shops, glassware, etc,) Jewish businessmen also made significant strides in the manufacturing end of the city's economy. In the 1740s, the Riveras established the first spermaceti candle factory in Rhode Island. The General Assembly issued a license to Moses Lopez in 1753 for the production of potash. The manufacture of Castile soap was introduced to America in 1761 by James Lucena, a Jewish merchant in Newport. Gustein writes:

The community prospered in commerce and manufacture. It was aided to a great extent by the enterprises of the energetic Jewish "inhabitants." Between 1734 and 1768, one chronicler records that there were established in the colony of Rhode Island ten forges for making iron ore, two furnaces for turning the ore into pig iron and hollow ware, six spermaceti factories, twelve potash works, three rope-walks, and one paper mill. Besides these, other industries of lesser importance flourished.

In their business dealings, Jewish merchants and manufacturers were honest and punctilious. Jewish shops were closed not only on the Sabbath, but on the Christian day of worship as well. A contemporary observer remarked:

The Jews and Christians who lived here side by side cultivated the most friendly relations, and prospered and grew rich together....It is to the honor of our country that a zealous and conscientious Jew, and an equally conscientious Christian should

retain for each other a boundless confidence and mutual respect.

When Dean Berkely visited Newport in 1729, he is quoted as having exclaimed, **“The town of Newport is the most thriving place in all America for bigness.”** Yet, a full decade later the entire community could boast only twenty-five streets and about a half-dozen lanes and wharfs. There were seven churches in town at that time: Three Baptist, two Congregational, one Church of England and one Friends house of worship- besides the groups that had no regular meeting place.

While the Gentile population of Newport experienced a measure of reciprocal blessings as their Jewish neighbors worshipped in private homes, the meter went off the scale when *Congregation Jeshuat Israel* got to move into their own synagogue in 1763. Rabbi Gutstein relates:

After the synagogue was built and dedicated, a period of great economic prosperity set in for Newport. This period has often been described as the, “Golden Era of Newport”. A contemporary has left us the following description of the city at this time: “Newport is a rich and pleasing sea and manufacturing city; it is large in circuit and the number of its houses runs close to two thousand. It has a beautiful and very long main street from which roofs one can see well the ships passing on the sea. It is a principle inlet to America since one can come to it on the sea as well as from all neighborhoods. **One reckons Newport also among the richest cities in America**”. The Jews contributed to a great extent and shared in this economic prosperity.

Of the city’s 150 vessels engaged in foreign trade, thirty were owned by the Jewish shipping magnate Aaron Lopez. Among the 445 letters, sailing orders, invoices, bills of lading and other trading agreements pertaining to Rhode Island commerce between 1726 and 1774 (published by the Massachusetts Historical Society), 225 are directly related to Mr. Lopez. The customary shipping form of the day contained such expressions as “Shipped by the Grace of GOD,” “riding at anchor in the harbour of Newport and by GOD’S grace bound for...” and “GOD send the good (sloop) to her desired Port in Safety Amen.” Gutstein writes:

That Newport was the commercial rival of New York and Boston and other ports is attested by the statement: “he was thought a bold prophet who said then, that New York might one day equal Newport.” **It may sound curious today, but from this time we have a letter addressed to “New York near Newport, Rhode Island.”**

While the Jewish exporters in Newport had contact with numerous international ports of call, one foreign land garnered the attention of the entire Jewish community. In 1763, certain Jews residing in Palestine dispatched a letter of appeal to the Hebrew congregation in Newport. The letter, signed by four people in Hebron, recounted the suffering of the Jews in the Holy Land and the severe taxation to which they were subjected. It also stated that in order to meet the heavy tax of “25,000 Pieces of Eight” which was put on them, they had “sent forth two Brethren to collect it by Contributions.” An entry in the extant ledger of Daniel Gomez, dated October 3, 1770, records that twenty-five pounds and twelve shillings were received from “Rhode” Island for “the Holley Congregation of Hebron.”

Though the British occupation of Newport during the War of Independence dealt the tiny Jewish community a blow from which it was never able to recover, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob had provided ample demonstration of what the entire nation could subsequently enjoy *if* she would only heed the promise of Genesis 12:3.

SUPPRESSION OF THE SOUTH

Severe as the New England persecution became under Congregationalism, the abuse endured by our Baptist forefathers in the southern colonies, particularly in Virginia, remains a story of its own. Here the tenacious foe of religious freedom was none other than the Church of England herself. History confirms that this ecclesiastical tyrant wielded a broad ax of intolerance. As early as 1661, the Virginia assembly provided that a fine of two thousand pounds of tobacco be levied on parents who refused to have their children sprinkled. The extent to which her venom had permeated the South as a whole can be gleaned from Vedder's observation that all but seven of the forty-seven Baptist churches active in America by 1734 were *north* of the Mason-Dixon line. As stated earlier, the first Baptist church in Virginia was not constituted until 1715, over a century after the founding of Jamestown.

The scope of this persecution was certain to limit God's blessings on America. Applying the truth, *When a man's ways please the LORD, he maketh even his enemies to be at peace with him.*" (Proverbs 16:7), we are not surprised that the early settlers experienced a tenuous existence at best. Because the Lord is no respecter of persons, the New World was equipped with a Black Forest of its own. The question of whether or not He would clear it for Japheth's descendents rested entirely with them. A contemporary account of this threatening woodland was given as follows:

The "American colonies" were still nothing but the sparsest fringe of seacoast settlements separated by swamps, desolation, empty beaches, and primeval forests of terrifying silence stretched out in a thin line for a thousand miles from Maine to Georgia. The innermost penetrations were rarely more than one hundred miles from where the Atlantic surf seethed upon the sand. Deeper than one hundred miles was a forested land of silence in which only stealthy shadows moved; a region as remote as the moon, as terrifying as the blackest nightmare. It was called simply, the Wilderness. The awareness of the Wilderness colored every strand of American life. The immensity of the Wilderness was an ever-present nightmare reducing human beings to insignificance."

Whenever the Gospel was suppressed, the settlers would receive commensurate visits from beyond the timberline. "Drums along the Mohawk" spread terror near and far. The God who tore forty-two children to smithereens for mocking a preacher's bald head (II Kings 2:24) had plenty of bruises in reserve for a land that would afflict His servants similarly. In one of the more amazing accounts of divine retribution, a rogue who had tried to use a bomb to kill Reverend James Ireland of Culpeper, Virginia was sleeping by a campfire between two other men when a mad wolf suddenly appeared and singled him out with a mortal bite to the nose.

Added to these every day hardships were the "Whore's" numerous Jesuit inroads as far west as Minnesota by 1660. Authors Peter Marshall and David Manuel should be marked (Romans 16:17) as deceitful compromisers for eulogizing these Vatican hit men as "Christian soldiers... strong in faith..." in their ecumenical fairy tale *The Light and the Glory*. (I Timothy 4:1-6)

The most telltale sign of forfeited blessing was the calamitous disunity that prevailed among the colonists themselves. (Psalm 133:1) Thirteen little nations at constant odds with one another could hardly repel a major foreign invasion. And the Devil had two on the calendar. The time had come for providential intervention!

GEORGE WHITEFIELD

On a balmy spring evening in 1738, a twenty-three-year-old English missionary stepped foot on American soil at Savannah, Georgia. It was fitting that the date, May 7, just happened to fall on a Sunday. The young man's name was George Whitefield. Although George Washington would be hailed as the "Father of Our Country," it would be George Whitefield's mission to ensure that a country was secured in the first place. His diary entry for May 8 states:

I find there are many divisions amongst the inhabitants; but God, I hope, will make me an instrument of composing them. Grant this, O Lord, for Thy dear Son's sake!

Whitefield's strategy for attaining this unity was to "draw them by the cords of love." He would do this through the preaching of a King James Bible. Perhaps more than any person of his day, Whitefield became God's man of the hour. His initial labor in Britain had been interrupted by General Oglethorpe's Macedonian call for an orphanage in Georgia. (James 1:22) However, the evangelist quickly discerned that his ultimate purpose in America would far surpass his beloved Bethesda House. As the despised Baptists lacked the political wherewithal to extricate themselves from their numerically superior oppressors, the Lord got the last laugh by infiltrating Satan's lines with a Spirit-filled renegade Anglican. (Psalm 2:4)

Whitefield's philosophy of ministry was short and to the point- "Speaking for God to an alien world." And because he strove to be "first a saint, and then a scholar," the power of God was manifested accordingly. A structure capable of accommodating his supernatural crowds could not be found on either side of the Atlantic. Whitefield, like his Master before him, was forced to preach in the open air. He said, "I thought it might be doing the service of my creator who had a mountain for his pulpit and the heavens for his sounding board, and who, when his gospel was refused by the Jews, sent his servants into the highways and hedges."

His numbers in great Britain were staggering: 20,000 in the Moorfields; 50,000 at Kennington Common; 80,000 near Hyde Park. In 1742, Whitefield's throngs in Cambuslang, Scotland, approached 100,000! And all of this was being accomplished without the use of a microphone. The figures he attained in the lesser- populated American colonies were not too shabby either: 6,000 in Germantown; 8,000 in New York City; 10,000 in White Clay Creek; 15,000 in Roxbury; 20,000 in Boston.

His ministerial methods were often called into question by the Orthodox. Once, at the request of a condemned horse thief in New York, Whitefield accompanied him to the gallows, mounted his coffin, and promptly preached to several thousand stunned spectators. When a wimpy Boston minister met him with the words, "I'm sorry to see you here, George," the man of God replied, "So is the Devil," and proceeded to address a throng of 20,000 on Boston Common!

Mr. Whitefield sailed into Newport, Rhode Island, on Sunday evening, September 14, 1740, for a three-day visit. Intending to preach the Gospel, he asked Reverend James Honeyman, the minister of the Church of England, for permission to use his pulpit. Whitefield penned in his journal:

At first he seemed a little unwilling, and wished to know "what extraordinary call I had to preach on week-days," which he said, "was disorderly?" I answered, "St. Paul exhorted Timothy to be instant in season and out of season..." As to an extraordinary call, I

claimed none otherwise than the Apostle's injunction, "as we have opportunity let us do good unto all men."

The pastor reluctantly agreed, whereupon Mr. Whitefield sent him into shock by packing out his three thousand-seat auditorium. "God assisted me much." He wrote. "I observed numbers affected, and had great reason to believe the Word of God had been sharper than a two-edged sword in some of the hearer's souls." By Tuesday evening there was so much Holy Ghost conviction on the town that a thousand souls besieged the private home where Whitefield was being entertained. "I therefore stood upon the threshold, and spake for near an hour on these words, 'Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled.'" He observed, "It was a very solemn meeting. Glory be to God's great Name!" While Mr. Whitefield would later conclude, "Rhode Island seems to be a place where much good may be done," the "hireling" Honeyman murmured in a letter to an acquaintance, "Last Sunday arrived here from South Carolina, the noisie Mr. Whitefield... I shall endeavor to correct his mistakes and evince a just distinction betwixt Christianity and enthusiasm," (i.e., put his members back to sleep).

Referring to Pennsylvania as the "Garden of America," Whitefield chose Philadelphia as his Capernaum. Whereas Clarke and Williams labeled Rhode Island an "*Efficacious* Experiment," William Penn described his colony as a "*Holy* Experiment," Whitefield's crowds in Philadelphia often surpassed the city's entire population of 12,000 (the largest American city at the time) owing to the fact that so many would travel from neighboring communities. On Sunday, May 11, 1740, the evangelist spoke to 15,000 in the morning and 20,000 in the evening. After measuring the area reached by his voice in one particular service, a befuddled Benjamin Franklin confirmed, "I computed that he might well be heard by more than thirty thousand." Others testified that he could preach on the courthouse steps of Philadelphia and be heard on the Jersey shore, a mile away! Should we be surprised that the city of Philadelphia became Whitefield's headquarters for America's Great Awakening? After all, wasn't John's letter to the church at Sardis followed by his letter to *Philadelphia*? Whitefield cited himself the holy significance in his journal entry for November 28, 1739:

Blessed be God, for the great work begun in these parts. Oh, that what God says of the Church of Philadelphia in the *Revelation*, may be now fulfilled in the city called after her name! "*I know thy works. Behold I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it. Behold I will make them of the synagogue of Satan to come and worship before thy feet, and to know that I have loved thee.*"

As an added note of contrast between these ecclesiastical dispensations, Whitefield chided the typical Bostonian for possessing a mere "external observance of the Sabbath," while referring to the spiritual minority with the Congregationalist stronghold as "*a few names left in Sardis, which have not defiled their garments.*"

A statue of George Whitefield may be seen on the campus of the University of Pennsylvania as a memorial to the multitudes that came through the "Philadelphia Door." Needless to say, the average pothead student wouldn't know that Whitefield was the inspirer and original trustee for the Charity School, which later became the University of Pennsylvania. (The same could be said of Whitefield's co-laborer, William Tennent, whose log College later developed into Princeton University.)

Although Philadelphia was noted for its Quaker-inspired religious diversity, Whitefield pointed

to a Baptist preacher as the city's true spiritual leader. The Anglican evangelist acknowledged:

I went and heard Mr. Jones, the Baptist minister, who preached the truth as it is in Jesus. **He is the only preacher that I know of in Philadelphia, who speaks feelingly and with authority.** The poor people are much refreshed by him, and I trust the Lord will bless him more and more.

The esteemed pastor in question, Jenkin Jones simultaneously pastored the Baptist church at Pennypack (*sometimes spelled Pennepeck*) Creek (Township of Dublin, County of Philadelphia) and its branch congregation in Philadelphia from 1726-1746, continuing at the latter (following its formal constitution) until his death on July 16, 1760.

BIRTH OF THE BIBLE BELT

Although the Awakening was off to a good start with respect to uniting the colonies for their coming war of independence, the South remained a spiritual wasteland. Whitefield's "crowds" in Virginia and the Carolinas were negligible to non-existent. Yet the mighty prophet was privileged, in the Spirit, to see America's "Bible Belt" before it came to pass. Note his amazing Holy Ghost perception while traveling through Virginia, the future battleground for the nation's religious liberty:

I could not but think, that God intended, in His own time, to work a good work in these southern parts of America. At present they seem more dead to God, but far less prejudiced than in the northern parts... I gave the printer leave to print my *Journals and Sermons*, and I trust that God who loves to work by the meanest instruments, will be pleased to bless them to the conviction and edification of these, His people. **Visit them, O Lord, with Thy salvation.**

When Whitefield passed through North Carolina, he was burdened even more, declaring, "There is scarcely so much as the form of religion," and noting, "There are several dancing-masters, but scarcely one regular settled minister." His diary for Sunday, December 23, 1739, reads, "Preached about noon to nearly a hundred people." The site of this small service was in Bath, North Carolina, the oldest town in the state. A number of years ago, the author was at the tourist center in Bath and asked the attendant if she had ever heard of George Whitefield. In animated fashion, she pointed to a nearby bridge over the scenic Pamlico River and told me an amazing story. As the Devil never gives up ground without a fight, the reason Whitefield couldn't draw files in Bath was because the town's previous generation had grown enamored with Black Beard the Pirate, harboring the fugitive until his beheading in 1718.

The woman related how Whitefield had placed a curse on his detractors as he crossed over the bridge while making his exodus. Shaking the dust off his feet, the man of God prophesied, "This town will never grow!" She then acknowledged with all candor, "And you know what? It never has!" At the turn of the twenty-first century, the oldest incorporated town in the state had a population of only 270 people! The story of Whitefield's curse is also recounted in the center's fourteen minute video presentation. As I exited the "packed" theater of three, the host concluded her informal tour in the spirit of Bath's academic ancestors. With an array of boarded up buildings and "For Sale" signs on the outside and shelves of Black Beard the Pirate paraphernalia on the inside, she proudly announced, "We like our town just the way it is!"

The author then drove about thirty minutes eastward and arrived at the thriving community of New Bern (Newborn Town in *George Whitefield's Journals*). Unlike Bath (except for its proximity to the beautiful Pamlico), New Bern sported large motels, a convention center and spacious shopping areas. What is the explanation, you ask? It was here on Christmas Day, 1739, two days after the meager turnout in Bath, that Whitefield was anointed with "fresh oil" while preaching to a hungry crowd in the local courthouse. (Psalm 92:10) His diary entry reads:

I cried mightily to the Lord in my secret devotions, and in the afternoon when I read prayers and preached, He was pleased to shew that He had heard me, for I scarcely know when we have had more visible manifestation of the Divine Presence since our coming into America. The people were uncommonly attentive, and most were melted into tears.

Whitefield was stirred to believe that the South would be won for God, declaring in his journal:

I looked upon it as an earnest of future and more plentiful effusions of God's Spirit in these parts. I believe, wherever the Gospel is preached in these parts with power, it will be remarkably blessed.

The following day Whitefield uttered a remarkable prayer that would alter America's spiritual destiny. Standing in the pine thickets of North Carolina, between Newborn Town and Trent River, he cried:

Oh, that the Lord would send forth some who, like John the Baptist, might preach and baptize in the wilderness! I believe they would flock to him from all the country round about.

The extent to which his burden was honored can be gauged by the fact that there are more Baptist churches in the Tar Heel State today than in any other state in the Union!

What remains to be seen is the remarkable way in which the Lord brought Whitefield's "baptizing preacher" into the wilderness of North Carolina. Although he didn't know it at the time, the specific answer to his petition would be tied to yet another prayer he uttered for the spiritual welfare of his growing number of converts:

What I mostly fear is, now there is such a general awakening, the people will not know where to go for proper food, and thereby fall into different sects and parties. Lord Jesus, look upon them, and let not Satan divide them again; but raise them up pastors after Thy own heart. Amen and amen.

Whitefield was hardly prepared for the manner in which his prayer would be answered. As Samson's parents "*knew not that is was of the LORD, that he sought an occasion against the Philistines*" (Judges 14:4a), Whitefield was likewise oblivious to God's deeper purpose for his ministry in America. When his many Protestant converts began reading their Bibles, it didn't take them long to discover that infant sprinkling was nowhere to be found. The Holy Spirit was then able to move these "New Lights" (as they were called) to either join existing Baptist churches or to start new ones altogether. Benedict, writes:

This work began generally among the Pedobaptists, and where they opposed it, separation ensued... They took the Bible alone for their guide, and of course, Baptist principles soon prevailed amongst them.

Apparently, for the sake of pulling off this Anglican-induced revival of Baptists, the evangelist with the ministerial credentials was not permitted to grasp what his own converts could see, encountering a "spiritual brownout" not unlike this experienced by the twelve: "*And they understood none of these things: and this saying was hid from them, neither knew they the things which were spoken*" (Luke 18:34). An incredulous Whitefield could only exclaim, "**All my chickens have turned into ducks!**"

Six years after the anointed prayer meeting in North Carolina, a Congregationalist from Tolland, Connecticut, by the name of Shubal Sterns was converted under a Whitefield sermon in Boston. After six years of preaching as a New Light, Sterns was immersed by a Reverend Wait Palmer, on May 20, 1751, at the Baptist church in Stonington, Connecticut, and ordained a Baptist minister. Four years later, following a brief ministry in Opekon, Virginia (corresponding today to the northeast corner of West Virginia), Whitefield's "John the Baptist" arrived in the wilderness of North Carolina. He was two months shy of his fiftieth birthday. On November 22, 1755, seven devoted couples, including Shubal's brother-in-law, Reverend Daniel Marshal (another of Whitefield's ducks), joined Pastor and Mrs. Stearns in establishing the Sandy Creek Baptist Church in Guilford County, North Carolina. (At the time, Sandy Creek lay in the heavily wooded region between Deep River and Haw River in Guilford County; now Randolph County.)

Their first meeting house was a “multi-million-dollar auditorium,” measuring 26’ x 30’. As to Whitefield’s prayer vision that the multitudes “would flock to him from round about,” we have this amazing account from Tidence Lane, a former enemy who was converted and called to preach under Stearn’s ministry (as introduced by another contemporary, Morgan Edwards):

Mr. Stearns was but a little man, but a man of good natural parts and sound judgment. Of learning he had but a small share, yet was pretty well acquainted with books. His voice was musical and strong, which he managed in such a manner as, one while, to make soft impressions on the heart, and fetch tears in the eyes in a mechanical way; and anon to shake the very nerves and throw the animal system into tumults and perturbations.

All the separate ministers copy after him in tones of voice and actions of body; and some few exceed him. His character was indisputably good, both as a man, a Christian and a preacher. In his eyes was something very penetrating, seemed to have a meaning in every glance, of which I will give one example; and the rather because it was given me by a man of good sense, I mean Tiden Lane.

“When the fame of Mr. Stearns’s preaching (said he) had reached the Atkin (Yadkin), where I lived, I felt a curiosity to go and hear him. Upon my arrival, I saw a venerable old man sitting under a peach-tree, with a book in his hand and the people gathering about him. He fixed his eyes upon me immediately, which made me feel in such a manner as I never had felt before. I turned to quit the place, but could not proceed far. I walked about, sometimes catching his eyes as I walked. My uneasiness increased and became intolerable. I went up to him, thinking that a salutation and shaking of hands would relieve me; but it happened otherwise. I began to think that he had an evil eye and ought to be shunned; but shunning him I could no more effect than a bird can shun the rattlesnake when it fixes its eyes upon it. **When he began to preach my perturbations increased, so that nature could no longer support them and I sank to the ground.**”

The Sandy Creek Baptist Church experienced a veritable explosion of Holy Ghost power, *growing to over six hundred members in the first two years alone.* Dr. Howell, as cited by Armitage, wrote:

The fields were white to harvest. God poured out his Holy Spirit. One universal impulse pervaded, apparently, the minds of the whole people. Evidently hungering for the bread of life, they came together in vast multitudes. Everywhere the ministry of these men was attended with the most extraordinary success. Very large numbers were baptized. Churches sprang up by scores. Among the converts were many able men, who at once entered the ministry, and swelled continually the ranks of the messengers of salvation.

At a time when only seven Baptist churches existed south of the Mason-Dixon line, Vedder gives the number of local assemblies directly started by Sandy Creek at forty-two and adds that one hundred and twenty-five ministers were sent out over a five-hundred-mile area. This statistic would appear to represent about 99 percent of the male membership! (Perhaps this is the way the congregation numbered only sixteen at Stearns’s death in 1771.) The central monument at Sandy Creek, not far from the founder’s grave, reads as follows:

ORIGINAL SITE SANDY CREEK CHURCH

On this site, in November-December 1755, Reverend Shubal Stearns, his wife, and those who came with him, seven other families, sixteen souls in all, built their first meeting house, where they administered the Lord’s Supper. “It is a mother church, Nay, a grandmother, and a great grandmother. All the separate Baptists spring hence: not only eastward toward the sea, but westward toward the great river Mississippi, but northward to Virginia, and southward to South Carolina and Georgia. The word went forth from this Sion, and great was the company of them who published it, in so much that her converts were as drops of morning dew.”

A secondary marker affirms that by 1829, over 1,000 churches traced their origin to Sandy Creek Baptist Church! The first Baptist church in the state of Georgia, the Kiokee Baptist Church, was started in the community of Appling by Stearns’s brother-in-law, Daniel Marshal. The first church in any denomination in Tennessee, the Buffalo Ridge Baptist Church in Gray, was founded by Tidence Lane out of Sandy Creek. The first Separate Baptist churches in Virginia and South Carolina were also begun by **lay preachers** from Sandy Creek.

At this point it is critical to observe what the “Old-Time Religion” was all about. Regarding the aforementioned satanic conspiracy to obliterate Baptist history, the main reasons why students in our Baptist “colleges” are more familiar with *Protestantism* is because historic Baptist methodology is anathema to “purpose driven kingdom building.” *Our Baptist forefathers believed in multiplication through division, not addition.* (Acts 2:41-42) Let the record read loud and clear- America’s Bible Belt began with bona-fide Holy Ghost *conviction* and *conversion*. (Acts 20:21) Concerning the Gospel that was preached at Sandy Creek, David Benedict writes:

Stearns and his party, of course, brought strange things to their ears. To be born again, appeared to them as absurd as it did to the Jewish doctor, when he asked, if he must enter the second time into his mother’s womb and be born. Having always supposed that religion consisted in nothing more than the practice of its outward duties, they could not comprehend how it should be necessary to feel conviction and conversion; and to be able to ascertain the time and place of one’s conversion was, in their estimation, wonderful indeed... Many mocked, but the power of God attending them, many also trembled. In process of time, some of the inhabitants became converts, and bowed obedience to the Redeemer’s scepter.

For an interesting postscript to this story, the student of history will note that today the Sandy Creek Baptist Church just happens to be situated in *Liberty*, North Carolina. After all, what’s in a name?

PERSECUTION IN VIRGINIA

With many of these new Baptist works being planted in the fertile fields of Virginia, the inevitable backlash of Satan was swift and severe. The preachers of this period bore an enormous persecution so that you and I could one day live in a free America. Because of our nation's modern history books revere the likes of Susan B. Anthony, Martin Luther King, Jr., and others, practically no one is aware of Old Dominion's "Gulag of Gaols." The "gaol" was a loathsome jail into which many a Baptist minister was committed for the "crime" of preaching the Gospel of Jesus Christ without a license from the state. Of course, it was the message itself that was so hated, Joseph Nordenhaug declaring:

The Baptists say, and have always said, that the mercy of God and the grace of Jesus Christ are free and open to any man. They have been imprisoned for saying it, publicly whipped for saying it, driven into the wilderness, killed for saying it, and they have gone right on saying it, and they say it now: The mercy of God and the grace of Jesus Christ are free to any man. Knock and it shall be opened. God is always there Himself, waiting for each man to come in. The way is clear. You have access.

To keep the way clear for others, dozens of Baptist preachers would have to hear the doors to their own cells clang somberly behind them. But then, to everyone's surprise a most unusual phenomenon occurred. The deprived congregations started going out to the gaols to hear their Sunday sermons! As the jailed pastor would attempt to deliver his message through the prison window's iron gates, the incensed (and embarrassed) magistrates would do every imaginable thing to distract his humble flock. While some beat on drums, others would hurl snakes and hornet nests at the crowd. Still others tried to disperse the faithful by sending drunks on horseback into their midst.

The amazing story of Pastor John Weatherford of Chesterfield County represents a classic illustration of the church-state intolerance prevailing at that time. Weatherford, a father of fifteen, spent six months in the county gaol for "preaching without a license." However, his oppressors soon discovered that they had more on their hands than they had bargained for. So many locals started getting converted below the grates of Weatherford's cell that the magistrate ordered *a twelve-foot wall be erected directly in front of the preacher's window*. However, they quickly learned, to their chagrin, that out of sight was not out of range! When Weatherford's faithful congregation assembled for "church," a handkerchief on a pole would be raised as a signal that they were ready for the Sunday sermon. The man of God then proceeded to throw his voice *through* the grates, *over* the twelve foot impediment. Such an unorthodox "worship service" was known back then as "denying the prison bounds."

Pastor Weatherford was eventually released after a lawyer by the name of *Patrick Henry* paid his fine. Today, a giant memorial bearing witness to the preacher's ordeal can be viewed less than twenty feet from the present county court house and roughly fifty feet from the site of the incarceration itself. His final resting place is not so easy to find, however. A small, worn headstone bearing the sole inscription, "J.W." stands by itself in an obscure clump of trees in the middle of a field about a mile from the road behind the Shockoe Baptist Church in Java, Virginia.

Noting her abusive similarities to "Mother Rome," someone has said that "an Episcopalian is nothing more than a Catholic who flunked Latin." One need only compare the spiritual climate

at Plymouth Colony to the gold-digging debauchery at Jamestown to get the proper focus. However, “the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church.” Because these men of God were willing to rot in prison, the number of Baptist churches in Virginia experienced unprecedented growth.

RENEWED PERSECUTION IN MASSACHUSETTS

Meanwhile, back in New England, persecutions was renewed along economic lines. Having granted certain dissenters toleration from obligatory church affiliation, the magistrates felt increasingly pressured to extend a similar exemption from the despised religious taxes that bankrolled the Congregational state church. Beginning in 1727, any Anglican, Quaker or Baptist who filed an annual certificate duly signed by his pastor and a committee of respectable laymen attesting to his conscientious convictions would be excluded from the roll by the parish assessors. However, when Whitefield's chickens began turning into ducks, the feathers really started to fly. Over one hundred and twenty-five new Baptist churches hit the Congregational coffers hard. Suddenly the publicans started balking at approving applications. New Light baptismal candidates were accused of "washing away their taxes." The social reproach of being a "certificate man" only added to the dissenters' standard abuse.

Fortunately, many of the Baptists began having second thoughts about the whole mess. The Holy Ghost had enlightened them to see that the certificate was a tactic acknowledgment that Caesar still controlled the conscience. (Exodus 8:28; 10:24) Consequently, they refused both the certificate and the subsequent tax. McLoughlin catalogs the resultant fallout:

Upon refusing to pay the tax (for the same conscientious reason) these individuals were either put in prison or the constable took some item of their property and sold it at a public auction to pay the tax. Many a Baptist saw his horse or cow taken from his barn by a tax collector; one man had his horse taken out from under him on the highway; another, his saddle; another, his winter's supply of beef. Carpenters had their tools taken, and women saw their pewter plates and spinning wheels sold for a few shillings' tax. There is a record of one woman in Raynham, Massachusetts, who spent thirteen months in prison for refusing to pay a tax of eight pence. And these families were fortunate compared to the ones whose breadwinner was taken off to jail for an indefinite stay while the family was left to fend for itself. Sometimes the tax collectors even sold a man's land.

“THE BRITISH ARE COMING”

As time went on, authorities in both sections of the country started seeing political egg on their faces. A Baptist in Massachusetts declared sardonically, “These Sons of Liberty ought rather to be called Sons of violence” In Virginia, layers with household names such as Thomas Jefferson, Patrick Henry and James Madison began successfully representing various Baptist preachers in court. William Cathcart relates that, on one occasion, Henry “rode fifty miles to Fredericksburg to be present at the trial of John Walker, Lewis Craig and James Childs, who were indicted for the crime of ‘preaching the Gospel contrary to the law,’ whose acquittal he speedily secured.” With reference to six jailed Baptists in Culpeper, Virginia, Madison wrote to a friend, “That diabolical, hell-conceived principle of persecution rages among some.”

Then, on March 5, 1770, the Lord got everyone’s attention when five American citizens were killed by British muskets in the infamous Boston Massacre. The wake-up call occurred near the corner of Devonshire and State Streets. *Was it just another spiritual coincidence that their blood was shed only a few yards from the very spot where Obadiah Holmes was “whipped unmercifully” with thirty lashes?*

According to what we learned in school, the next most significant event in America’s quest for liberty was the Boston Tea Party on December 16, 1773. However, the affair pales in comparison to a rarely told incident provoked by a band of patriotic Baptists eighteen months earlier. John Brown of Rhode Island (a brother of Nicholas Brown, after whom Brown University was named), was a devoted member of the First Baptist Church in Providence. He was also a successful merchant and owner of twenty vessels. Dr. Cathcart writes:

John Brown might be said to have begun the Revolution himself. In 1772, a British armed schooner called the “Gaspee” came into Narragansett Bay to carry out orders from the British Commissioners of customs in Boston, with a view to prevent violations of the revenue laws. The “Gaspee” was a continual annoyance to the mariners and ship-owners, with whose business she interfered.

On the 9th of June, 1772, she ran aground at Namquit, below Pawtuxet. Mr. Brown heard of it, and he immediately ordered eight boats to be placed in charge of Captain Abraham Whipple, one of his best ship-masters, and he put sixty-four armed men in them. At about 2 A.M., Mr. Brown and his boats reached the “Gaspee;” two shots were exchanged, one of which wounded Lieutenant Duddingston. **“This was the first British blood shed in the war Independence.”**

The crew and officers left the “Gaspee” very speedily, and Whipple blew her up. Mr. Brown was the last man on board.

Thus, we concluded that while some Boston Protestants, disguised as Indians, went down in history for throwing a few crates of tea overboard, a band of freedom-loving Baptists from Rhode Island boldly blew up and sank the ship they had boarded!

EVENTS LEADING TO THE INDEPENDENCE OF THE AMERICAN REPUBLIC, RELIGIOUS LIBERTY AND THE BILL OF RIGHTS

1760 ENFORCEMENT OF NAVIGATION LAWS BY COMMISSIONING OFFICERS TO ENTER ANY HOUSE AT ANY TIME TO SEARCH FOR SMUGGLED GOODS.

1764 MAY, THE STAMP ACT “CONGRESS” PASSED BY PARLIAMENT.

1765 OCTOBER, THE STAMP ACT “CONGRESS” MET IN NEW YORK. THE TERM “AMERICAN” BEGAN TO BE USED INSTEAD OF “COLONIST.”

1770 MARCH 5, BOSTON MASSACRE

1771 MAY 16, THE BATTLE OF ALAMANCE, N. CAROLINA

1772 JUNE 9, THE BURNING OF THE BRITISH GASPEE

1773 DECEMBER 16, BOSTON TEA PARTY

1774 DECEMBER 5, RHODE ISLAND GENERAL ASSEMBLY ORDERS ALL CANNON AND AMMUNITION REMOVED FROM FORT GEORGE FOR USE IN THE REVOLUTION
1774 DECEMBER 14, N. HAMPSHIRE CAPTURES FT. WM. AND MARY
1775 APRIL 19, BATTLES OF LEXINGTON AND CONCORD
1775 MAY, AMERICAN VICTORY AT FORT TICONDEROGA
1775 JUNE 17, BATTLE OF BUNKER (BREEDS) HILL
1775 DECEMBER, AMERICANS DEFEAT AT QUEBEC
1776 MAY 4, RHODE ISLAND SEVERS TIES WITH ENGLAND
1776 JUNE 12, VIRGINIA SEVERS TIES WITH ENGLAND
1776 JULY 4, DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE SIGNED
1776 JULY 4, TICONDEROGA FALLS TO THE BRITISH
1776 OCTOBER, TEN THOUSAND NAME PETITION, VA.
1776 AUGUST 27, BATTLE OF LONG ISLAND
1776 SEPTEMBER 15, AMERICAN VICTORY AT WHITE PLAINS, N. Y.
1776 DECEMBER 25, WASHINGTON CROSSES THE DELAWARE
1776 DECEMBER 26, AMERICAN VICTORY AT TRENTON, N. J.
1777 OCTOBER 17, THE SURRENDER OF BURGOYNE
1777 WINTER AT VALLEY FORGE
1778 DECEMBER, THE FALL OF SAVANNA AND AUGUSTA, GA.
1779 AMERICAN ATTACK REPULSED AT SAVANNA
1779 THE VIRGINIA ACT FOR RELIGIOUS LIBERTY WAS WRITTEN AND INTRODUCED INTO THE VIRGINIA LEGISLATURE BY THOMAS JEFFERSON BUT NOT PASSED.
1780 BRITISH GENERAL CLINTON ARRIVES IN CHARLESTON, SOUTH CAROLINA
1780 AUGUST 15, AMERICAN DEFEATED AT CAMDEN, SOUTH CAROLINA
1780 OCTOBER 7, BATTLE OF KINGS MOUNTAIN, NORTH CAROLINA
1781 JANUARY 17, BATTLE OF COWPENS, SOUTH CAROLINA
1781 MARCH, BRITISH VICTORY AT EUTAW SPRINGS, NORTH CAROLINA
1781 OCTOBER 19, THE SURRENDER OF CORNWALLIS AT YOURKTOWN, VIRGINIA
1784 THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND DISESTABLISHED, THE PROTESTANT EPISCOPALIAN HAS A BRIEF "INCORPORATION"
1785 THE GREAT VIRGINIA REVIVAL
1785 JAMES MADISON'S MEMORIAL AND REMONSTRANCE, A TREATISE AGAINST THE GENERAL ASSESSMENT BILL PUBLISHED
1786 JANUARY 19, THE VIRGINIA STATUTE FOR RELIGIOUS LIBERTY, WRITTEN BY THOMAS JEFFERSON, BECAME LAW IN VIRGINIA
1786 "INCORPORATION" OF THE PROTESTANT EPISCOPAL CHURCH IN VIRGINIA REPEALED ALL RELIGIOUS PROPERTIES

The ensuing war with Great Britain gave the Baptists a golden opportunity to display their true heroics and patriotism. Within weeks of the aggression at Lexington and Concord, the Rhode Island Legislature voted to send 1,500 men to the conflict. The Baptist colony was also the first to sever formal ties with England, doing so on May 4, 1776, a full month before Virginia. Baptist troops consistently distinguished themselves on the field of battle, dying side by side with their Protestant oppressors. Christian writes, "Not a man of them proved a traitor." Even the enemy understood the Baptists' contribution, British general William Howe confirming, "The Baptists were among the most strenuous supporters of liberty." And to add insult to injury, Dr. John Rippon of London, in a letter written in 1784 to Dr. James Manning, president of Rhode Island College (later Brown University), declared, "I believe all our Baptist ministers in town, except two, and most of our brethren in the country were on the side of the American's in the late dispuatr."

Much of the credit of the army's overall performance was due to the strong spiritual leadership provided by the Baptist chaplains. Though nearly twenty different religious denominations existed in eighteenth-century colonial America, Baptist preachers filled a third

of the one hundred and two chaplain positions in the Continental Army. Because of their reputation for being able to pray *and* shoot (“Bless ‘em, Jesus,”-*blam*, etc.), the soldiers received a steady stream of manly, spiritual inspiration. Dr. Cathcart gives a whole new meaning to the clerical cliché “*men of the cloth*”:

Elder M’Clanahan, a Baptist minister, raised a company of soldiers in Culpeper County for the Continental service, chiefly from his own denomination, to whom he ministered as a chaplain and whom he commanded as their captain...

The Rev. David Barrow, a brother of spotless character, and of extensive usefulness, held in universal esteem, not only commanded patriotism to others, but when danger pressed he shouldered his musket and performed good service against the common foe, and he obtained the same reputation in the camp and in the field which he enjoyed in the happy scenes of ministerial toils elsewhere.

David Jones was another “reverend” who could shoot about as well as he could pray. In April of 1775, Jones became pastor of the Baptist church in the Great Valley, near Valley Forge. Within the year he enlisted in the army as a Baptist chaplain, serving under Colonel St. Clair, General Horatio Gates and General Anthony Wayne. He was highly respected by George Washington and preached to the suffering troops at Valley Forge. Jones’s courage under fire is legendary, his defining moment occurring when he charged alone, pistol in hand, into the face of a British attack at the Battle of Brandywine. Cathcart writes:

He was never away from scenes of danger; nor from the rude couch of the sick or the wounded soldier when words of comfort were needed. He followed Gates through two campaigns, and served as a brigade chaplain under Wayne. He was in the battle of Brandywine, the slaughter of Paoli, where he escaped only by the special case of Providence, and in all the deadly conflicts in which his brigade was engaged, until the surrender of Yorktown. General Howe, learning that he was a pillar to the Revolution in and out of the army, offered a reward for his capture, and a plot was unsuccessfully laid to secure his person. Full of wit, eloquence, patriotism, and fearless courage, he was a model chaplain and a tower of strength to the cause of freedom.

With reference to Richard Furman, a Baptist pastor from South Carolina (for whom Furman University was named), Lord Cornwallis was said to have remarked that he “feared the prayers of the godly youth more than the armies of Sumter and Marion.” Such “rebel parsons,” as they were called (along with a number of spiritual Congregational chaplains), served with the understanding that, if captured, they would be killed on sight. General Washington was well aware of the priceless contribution of these men, declaring, “Baptist chaplains were among the most prominent and useful in the army.”

JOHN GANO

John Gano is generally recognized as the most influential chaplain of the entire war. Cathcart summarizes his outstanding testimony:

The Rev. John Gano was born in Hopewell, New Jersey, and possessed in a large degree the patriotic spirit of the Baptists of that place, which had so many representatives engaged in the Revolution; he had great mental powers, and as a “minister he shewn like a star of the first magnitude in the American churches.”

His power as a minister of eminence was widely felt, and his labors extensive and successful. From the pastorship of the First Baptist Church, of New York, he entered the army as a chaplain, and performed services which rendered him invaluable to the officers and men with whom he was associated. His love for his country’s cause made the humblest soldier a brother; his genial manners and fearless daring made him the special friend of officers of all ranks: while the spirit of the Saviour so completely controlled his entire conduct that his influence over his military charge was unbounded.

Headley says: “In the fierce conflict on Chatterton’s Hill he was continually under fire, and his cool and quiet courage in thus fearlessly exposing himself was afterwards commented on in the most glowing terms by the officers who stood near him.” He himself in speaking of it said: **“My station in time of action I knew to be among the surgeons, but in this battle I somehow got in front of the regiment; yet I durst not quit my place for fear of dampening the spirits of the soldiers, or of bringing on myself an imputation of cowardice.”**

He preserved his moral dignity as a Christian minister under the most trying circumstances, and by his example, spirit, and instructions, he assisted the brave patriots to endure hardships, to struggle successfully against despair, and to fight with the courage of men who were sure that God was with them, and their ultimate triumph was certain.

Gano’s greatest contribution to the war was the significant manner in which he impacted the venerable commander-in-chief. Washington’s esteem for his favorite chaplain was evidenced on April 19, 1783, when he called on Gano to lead in prayer at the special Thanksgiving service in New Windsor, New York, marking a formal end to hostilities.

It was around this time and locale that the Protestant general and the Baptist minister shared a pair of spiritual experiences too holy for the History Channel to handle. The adumbrative events would cap an intimate seven-year relationship which began at the early Battle of White Plains. While the preacher’s “baptism of fire” had occurred in this engagement- the general, having watched Gano advance into the shattered and desperate firing line from his observation post on a neighboring hill – an even more compelling scene had captured Washington’s soul only months before.

Upon moving his military headquarters to New York City in the spring of 1776, Washington continued his practice of frequenting the Sunday services of his denomination (the Church of England). Dr. Lemuel Call Barnes writes:

The general requested the authorities of Trinity Church and its chapel, St. Paul’s, to discontinue the customary prayers for the government of England, whose battleships were then gathering in the harbor to crush the “rebellion”. The rector refused to do it. But the noble general frequented his pew at St. Paul’s, silently praying for this country, while the priest in the high pulpit prayed for the success of the enemies of the country.

In plain sight on “Gold Hill”, only two or three squares away, stood the ever-crowded meeting-house where Pastor John Gano, with his eloquent voice and heart, was preaching and praying in behalf of the colonial government and its chosen commander. Like a good soldier, Washington stood by his own church, but watched with keen interest and overflowing gratitude every sanely patriotic current in the town.

Other historians cite from additional sources, indicating that Washington may have listened occasionally to portions of Gano’s discourses from beneath the church window, a plausible conjecture indeed. Gano had pastored the First Baptist Church of New York City since it was constituted in June, 1762. The embarrassing contrast between Washington’s “cleric” and the

“fighting chaplain” nurtured a growing spirit of silent nonconformity in the Protestant commander. While the humble Christian knew how to kneel in the snow at Valley Forge, he refused to do so in the Episcopal services. Rev. William White, the first bishop of the Protestant Episcopal Church in America, a rector of Christ Church where Washington was a regular attendee during his residence in Philadelphia, said of the matter, “His behavior was always serious and attentive; but... on the point of kneeling during service I owe it to truth to declare that I **never saw him in said attitude.**”

When the first Congress assembled in Carpenters Hall, Philadelphia, September 7, 1774, White’s predecessor at Christ Church, Dr. Jacob Dusche, had the honor of opening the August meeting in prayer. While a “pious” Dusche may be seen on his knees in T.H. Matheson’s famous painting “The First Prayer in Congress,” Washington was not impressed. He got stuck having to employ “damage control” after the salaried Congressional chaplain later defected, wrote him an insolent letter advising that he also abandon the American cause, and then hightailed it back to religious headquarters in England.

Another manifestation of Washington’s silent nonconformity was his consistent refusal to participate in the Episcopal “sacrament” of holy communion. Once again, Dr. White acknowledged, “Truth requires me to say that **General Washington never received the communion** in the Church of which I am parochial minister.”

The seven intense years between White Plains and New Windsor afforded Washington ample opportunity for reflection and long, quiet talks with his spiritual chaplain. There was simply no escaping reality; while his own church was overwhelmingly “Tory,” the liberty-loving group to which Gano belonged was almost to the man with the colonial cause.

Washington’s admiration for the Baptists was also enhanced by his firsthand knowledge of their suffering. The Lord had sown the seed of “soul liberty” in Washington’s heart years earlier in his native state of Virginia. Do you recall the well-known story about the cherry tree? One of Washington’s farms was known as Ferry Farm, because it included a ferry across the Rappahannock River into the village of Fredericksburg, county seat of Spotsylvania County. A tablet there reads, “Washington’s Boyhood Home.” Young George spent most of his time at this place between 1739 and 1747 (ages 7 to 15). It was here, according to tradition, that he cut down the famous cherry tree. His mother lived at Ferry Farm until 1771.

Well, it “just so happened” that the docile village of Washington’s Boyhood Home” became the *first place in Virginia where Baptist ministers were imprisoned over matters of conscience*. Dr. Semple writes:

On the 4th of June, 1768 Benjamin Waller, Lewis Craig, James Childs and others were seized by the sheriff.... As they were moving on from court to the prison through the streets of Fredericksburg they sang the hymn “Broad is the road that leads to death.” ... While in prison they constantly preached through the open grated windows.... Many heard upon whom the word was in power and demonstration.

It was forty-three days before they were all released. According to Washington’s diary, the thirty-two-year-old planter was in Fredericksburg from June 28 to June 30. He was no doubt of the “many” who “heard” Eventually, his personal sympathies became more pronounced. In a later correspondence to “The United Baptist Churches of Virginia,” he could say: “You doubtless

remember, I have often expressed my sentiments that any man ought to be protected in worshipping the Deity according to the dictates of his own conscience.”

Meanwhile – back at the battlefield – following his ignominious retreat from New York, Washington made his legendary crossing of the Delaware to attack the Hessian guard at Trenton. Allow the spiritual Imagery to unfold. The time of the crossing is Christmas night (1776). Gano and his prayers will accompany General Washington on his desperate maneuver. The British are so confident that the war is over, General Cornwallis has already placed his baggage on a ship bound for England. However, in the ninety-minute battle that ensued the following morning, Washington’s men killed twenty-three of the enemy and captured over one thousand hung-over prisoners while suffering only four wounded! It was the first significant American victory of the conflict. *And it began with Washington and the Baptist chaplain crossing over a body of deep water.*

In 1778, the General wrote to a Virginia friend, Thomas Nelson:

The hand of Providence has been so conspicuous in all this (the course of the war) that he must be worse than an infidel that lacks faith, and more wicked that has not gratitude to acknowledge his obligations; but it will be time enough for me to turn Preacher when my present appointment ceases.

By war’s end, Washington was finally able to see the “big picture.” Had his army not prevailed at Yorktown, America would have remained a church state indefinitely. In a “church state” (Catholic or Protestant) one cannot become a citizen unless he has been sprinkled into the church. The unconscious infant is also “born again” in the process. According to *The book of common prayer* used by Washington’s denomination:

Holy Baptism is full initiation in water and the Holy Spirit into Christ’s Body the Church. **The bond which God establishes in Baptism is indissoluble.**

The celebrant’s prayer during the “Thanksgiving over the Water” portion of the service is just as heretical:

We thank you, Almighty God, for the gift of water ... We thank you, Father, for the water of Baptism. In it we are buried with Christ in his death. By it we share in his resurrection. **Through it we are reborn by the spirit.**

Obadiah Holmes was given thirty lashes on his bare back for rejecting such blasphemous nonsense! Now you know why a *Baptist* pastor, Dr. Robert Lowry, penned the words:

What can wash away my sin?
Nothing but the blood of Jesus;
O precious is the flow
That makes me white as snow;
No other fount I know,
Nothing but the blood of Jesus.

From all indications, Washington’s victory should have broken the Protestant curse on America. Isaac Backus explains the dilemma faced by Church of England clergy in the colonies:

There were many others in England, that held to a lineal succession of office, who wanted to have power in America; but ... no bishop could be ordained in England, without swearing to the king’s supremacy.

James Beller elaborates:

The victory of the Revolution militarily and spiritually, forged America into a Baptist nation. This was accomplished not by establishment, but by dis-establishment. In breaking off our ties with our mother country, we broke the succession of their state-church bishopric.

As the problem concerned *water*, the noble Christian General who had already delivered his nation *militarily* would now venture upon a bold and symbolic gesture in the *spiritual* realm. On July 11, 1889, the *Boston Watchman* published a letter written by General Richard M. Gano, the great-grandson of John Gano, in which he testified:

General Washington on one occasion said to Chaplain Gano, **“I am convinced that immersion is the baptism taught in the Scriptures, and I demand baptism at your hands.”**

Citing *The Baptism of George Washington*, as recorded in the archives of the First Baptist Church of New York, Dr. E. Wayne Thompson writes;

Daniel Gano, one of Gano’s sons and a captain of the artillery, was present and said that he, with about forty officers and men, accompanied the chaplain down to the Hudson River where the Reverend John Gano baptized George Washington.

Dr. James Norwood, a former associate pastor of Dr. J. Frank Norris, cites from *A History of the First Baptist Church in the City of New York* by I. M. Haldemann:

While in camp at Newburgh, General Washington requested Pastor Gano to baptize him according to the Scriptures. He did so immersing him in believer’s baptism, in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Ghost.

With the onset of the Washington Bicentennial, a number of secular historians began to question the well-established tradition, citing an absence of “official” documentation. In an attempt to “convince the gainsayers,” Dr. Lemuel Call Barnes, a respected Baptist historian, devoted *thirty-five years* to the question, “Was General George Washing baptized by Chaplain John Gano?” He notes:

Washington said that many things about his life could be known only by tradition. He took costly pains for the preservation of his personal writings, leaving us “over 400” manuscript volumes Yet he said to a correspondent: “Notwithstanding that most of the papers, which perhaps may be deemed official, are preserved; **yet the knowledge of innumerable things of a more delicate and secret nature is confined to the perishable remembrance of some few of the present generation.**”

Dr. Barnes writes (with regard to what I believe to be the crowning achievement of his unpublished, 180-page manuscript), “At my request, grandchildren of the chaplain put the certainty of their childhood reaching into affidavits.” After contacting several Gano descendents, I discovered that the priceless documents had been lost to the family for decades. My own investigation turned up nothing. Then, in May of 2002, Pastor James Beller had found the missing affidavits in the archives of the Samuel Colgate Historical Library, Rochester, New York! Two months later, the author had the privilege of personally reviewing these amazing handwritten papers. Two of the notarized testimonies read as follows:

Georgetown, KY

Aug. 16, 1889

I am the grandson of Rev. John Gano, now in my eighty-third year, and the brother of Mrs. Margaret Ewing. I was raised from my fifth year to manhood by Mrs. Margaret Hubbell (nee Gano). I have heard her say that her father baptized (immersed) General Washington.

S.F. Gano M.D.

Subscribed and sworn to in my presence this 16th day of August, 1889.

Stephen Gano Long

Notary Public

State of Kentucky

To whom it may concern: I, Margaret Ewing (nee Gano) aged 90 years last May, being of sound mind and memory, make this statement: I have often heard my aunt Margaret Hubbell (nee Gano), the eldest daughter of Rev. John Gano, say that her father told her that he baptized General George Washington, at Valley Forge, to the best of my recollection. She, Mrs. Hubbell, also said that General Washington, for prudent reasons did not desire that his baptism should not be made public. Rev. John Gano was a Chaplain in the Revolutionary War and an intimate personal friend of General Washington.

Margaret Ewing

Subscribed and sworn to in my presence this 16th day of August, 1889.

Steven G. Long

Notary Public

State of Kentucky

That a ninety-year-old Christian widow would employ the innocent qualifier “to the best of my recollection” when suggesting *Valley Forge* as the baptismal site (as opposed to Newburg) is refreshingly disarming of suspicion.

In 1908, Rev. E.T. Sanford of Manhattan’s North Church commissioned a painting of Gano baptizing Washington. The historical masterpiece was originally placed in the Baptist church at Asbury, New Jersey, where it hung until Mrs. Elizabeth Johnston, John Gano’s great-granddaughter, presented it to William Jewell College, Liberty, Missouri, in 1926. (*Time* magazine named the former Baptist school as its choice for Liberal Arts College of the year in 2001.)

Dr. Barnes concludes:

During the lifetime of George Washington he was a man of such obvious open mind and at the same time exacting conscience that honest, intelligent men, who knew him at closer range than we do, could easily think of him as walking down into an emblematic grave and being raised out of it, in order to follow with precision the example and word of the Commander-in-Chief of Christian men.

This analogy of Washington submitting to his “Heavenly Commander” was reinforced many years after Dr. Barnes’s death by another treasure that found its way to William Jewell College. Whereas Europeans were generally shocked to learn that “His Excellency” had yielded his authority back to Congress following the British surrender, a far more significant display of submission had already occurred.

In the lobby of the John Gano Chapel (underneath the painting of Washington’s baptism), an encased sword is prominently featured. A commemorative plaque reads:

The Sword

In 1996, Margaret Gano Redpath, the great, great, great, granddaughter of John Gano offered William Jewell College the family sword. George Washington had received it from the Marquis de Lafayette; in turn, he bestowed it on John Gano, the first chaplain of the Continental Army. History records George Washington gave the sword to John Gano after he baptized Washington in the Potomac.

Pastor Beller renders the following profound observation in his book, *America in Crimson Red*:

George Washington presented the battle sword, given to him by Lafayette to his Baptist chaplain, John Gano. Let us not take this gesture of kindness too lightly, for a commanding officer knows exactly the ramifications of surrendering his sword The author will leave the reader to ponder the full thrust of its meaning. However, “*a word fitly spoken*” is in order at this juncture of our narrative.

It is the contention of this author that Washington knew the symbols he was leaving to posterity: *He was breaking the baptism of the established church-state monstrosity* by submitting to believer's baptism. He further demonstrated, to the best of his ability, his *deferment to the victor of the second stage of the war*, the spiritual stage. This deferment was not to John Gano personally, but to the Bible and the belief system he so profoundly represented. He placed *the symbol of victory and the final break with England, and in essence, Rome*, in the hands of a Bible believing *baptized* preacher of the Gospel.

To the baptized believers, looking back through the leaves of history, the meaning of the baptism and the sword ought to be clear – America is not under the baptism of England, or Europe or Rome. America's baptism has no earthly headquarters.

In other words – *“He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches”* (Revelation 2:7a; 3:6, 13, 22).

POSTWAR PERSECUTION

With the war of Independence behind them, many a disillusioned Baptist patriot was rewarded with even less freedom than he had known prior to Lexington and Concord. Thirteen orphans from a single Baptist family represented the epitome of this grievous injustice. Their father, "Honest John" Hart of Hopewell, New Jersey, a *signer of the Declaration of Independence*, had suffered the common fate of his fellow signatories. Following the Hessian incursion, John was separated from the bedside of his dying wife and loving children. He would never see any of them again in his life. His farm was ravaged, his timber destroyed and his livestock confiscated. His desperate children took their ailing mother to the mountains where she later died from stress. Having learned of her death while enduring his own concealment in thickets, caves and swamps, the sixty-five-year-old widower succumbed to a broken heart and joined her on May 11, 1779.

The Hart children became part of that postwar generation of Baptist refugees who were forced to continue to struggle for true independence. (John 8:36) Once again, it was the Baptists' steady growth in numbers, owing to many wartime revivals that translated into accelerated opposition from magistrates and populace alike. Because "*not many noble are called*" (1 Corinthians 1:26), America's New Testament churches continued to draw from the lower echelons of society. Most New England Congregationalists believed that the arrival of Baptists lowered their real estate value and gave the community a bad reputation. In May of 1782, a mob in Hingham, Massachusetts, broke into the house where a certain Reverend Lee was preaching to several brethren. The intruders

Seized Mr. Lee by his left arm and his collar and twitched him away with great violence, and others, taking hold of him, hauled Mr. Lee along clear out of town, cursing and swearing most terribly ... And one of them cast soft cow dung in Mr. Lee's face. Then one captain Theophilus Wilder took a long club over Mr. Lee's head and swore that if he ever came into that town again he would take him and tie him up and whip him thirty stripes. To which Lee replied in good pietistic style, "That is not so much as they whipt Paul."

In the southern stronghold of Virginia, legislative reforms which had begun as early as 1777 had slowed considerably in the postwar years. Now that the redcoats were gone, America's first citizens fell under the delusion that they were going to enjoy their new home while continuing to antagonize their Heavenly landlord. Bad move! When the Declaration of Independence was read by Colonel John North in the courtyard of Philadelphia's State House on July 8, 1776, Samuel Adams observed, "The people seem to recognize this resolution as though it were a decree promulgated from Heaven." Having spoiled the Founding Fathers with this glorious document, the Lord of Glory decided to withhold any further political enlightenment until such time as they would come to grips with Luke 12:48b – *For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required.*"

Over the next six years, America floundered under the "wisdom" of the infamous Articles of Confederation. Fortunately, however, the nation's key patriarchs were beginning to appreciate the unique destiny of their persecuted Baptist neighbors. Patrick Henry, a devout Presbyterian, frequently went to court in their defense. Semple wrote, "The Baptists found in Patrick Henry, an unwavering friend." Thomas Jefferson was another champion of religious liberty. Armitage relates how Jefferson was molded by Baptist polity:

Many historical writers have told us that he was in the habit of attending the business and other meetings of a Baptist Church near his residence; that he closely scrutinized its internal democratic policy and its democratic relations to its sister churches; that he borrowed his conceptions of a free government, state and federal, from the simplicity of Baptist Church independency and fraternity; and that, frequently, in conversation with his friends, ministers and neighbors, he confessed his indebtedness to their radical principles for his fixed convictions on the true methods of civil and religious liberty. If this popular tradition were entirely unsupported by contemporary testimony, his earnest and public co-operation with the Baptists in Virginia politics, and the close identity between our form of government, which he did so much to frame, and that of the Baptist Churches, must ever contribute to keep it alive; the strength of the coincidence being sufficient in itself to create such a tradition even if it did not already exist.

Lemuel Barnes adds,

As a boy, Thomas Jefferson, frequently visiting in the home of his mother's sister, Mrs. Woodson, went with his aunt and uncle to their church, a "soul liberty" church. As a man, he was a close observer of such churches in his own neighborhood. As a pre-eminent citizen, he wrote: "To the Members of the Baptist church of Buck Mountain: I thank you, my friends and neighbors ... We have acted together from the origin to the end of a memorable revolution." **Tradition insists that he said that he acquired his clearest perceptions of democratic government from closely observing Baptist churches. It is rather more than tradition, for Mrs. James Madison said that she had a "distinct" recollection of conversations with him about it and that he was "always declaring that it was a Baptist church from where these views were gathered."** General Madison, a brother of James Madison, was a member of a church of that kind.

JEFFERSON EXONERATES BAPTISTS ON C-SPAN

On July 4, 2000, C-Span featured a live call-in program with Mr. Bill Barker, one of the nation's foremost authorities on Thomas Jefferson. Barker, who even resembles his subject, has portrayed Mr. Jefferson in character for years at the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation. When the author just "happened" to catch the show in progress, he immediately felt led to call and ask "Mr. Jefferson" to share his recollection of the Baptists and their contribution to religious liberty. The exchange, before millions of Americans, went as follows:

Host: Knoxville, Tennessee, go ahead . . .

The Author: Yes, a question for Mr. Jefferson . . . Could you comment particularly on the role that the Baptists played in this period of persecution? I understand many of their pastors were put in the gaols (jails) and that Mr. Madison, Patrick Henry and even yourself specifically defended these pastors in courts of law, winning many of the cases, and that they were firm defenders of liberty as a sect in themselves, more so than anyone else as far as the persecution they suffered.

Thomas Jefferson: Well, you are correct, sir. You are absolutely correct that the Baptists, of course, were amongst the first dissenters from the Church of England. They refused to purchase a license in order to preach the Gospel as they saw fit. They refused to pay their tithing to the Church of England. And, therefore, they were indeed incarcerated. And you are correct that Mr. Henry and myself stood to defend them. Ah, I have always considered that, in the support of the Baptists, we supported the freedom of religious opinion. And, Mr. Henry, who stood firm on the grounds, was wont to defend, ah, I forget the name of the Baptist preacher, but in a very famous case when the preacher was brought to trial for failure to purchase a license, Mr. Henry began the defense by saying, "Imagine, if you will, being thrown into jail for preaching the Gospel." He held but a moment and then continued, "Thrown into jail for preaching the Gospel." And he stated the comment over and over and over until the judge finally brought his gavel down and acquitted the Baptist preacher.

Therefore, sir, we should never deny that a freedom, or religious freedom, means precisely that: that we are free, not only to worship as we choose, but to preach the Gospel, or indeed, any other religious dictate or dogma or conviction as we so choose. We are free to be heard in that preaching. And, that those who desire to neglect it or not attend to it are free to do so as well. But you are absolutely correct in reference to the Baptists in their dissent from the Church of England and Mr. Henry and my support of many others, in their interest to worship as they choose.

In the process of time, Jefferson teamed up with James Madison, another champion of religious liberty, to gender legislation favorable to the Baptists. On December 17, 1785, Congress passed the Virginia Statue of Religious Liberty, disestablishing the Episcopalian harlot in the process. The landmark document read:

Be it enacted by the General Assembly, That no man shall be compelled to frequent or support any religious worship, place or ministry whatsoever; nor shall be enforced, restrained, molested or burthened in his body or goods, nor shall otherwise suffer on account of his religious opinions or beliefs; but, that all men shall be free to profess and by argument to maintain their opinions in matters of religion, and that the same shall in no wise diminish, enlarge or affect the civil capacities.

It didn't take long for the Lord to show His approval. Within a few months, Madison was inspired to pen another significant document. On May 25, 1787, the historical Constitutional Convention was convened in Philadelphia's Independence Hall. Apparently, some new and improved ideas were in the air. Yet, only God could blend them aright. After a month of haggling, the weary delegates were on the verge of throwing in the towel. Suddenly an eighty-one-year-old printer took the podium and pointed his intellectual peers to the Lord God Almighty. Forgetting that he was supposed to be an avowed deist, Benjamin Franklin implored:

In this situation of this assembly, groping as it were, in the dark to find political truth, and scarce able to distinguish it when presented to us, how has it happened, Sir, that we have not hitherto once thought of humbly applying to the Father of Lights to

illuminate our understandings? In the beginning of the contest with Britain, when we were sensible of danger, we had daily prayers in this room for the divine protection. Our prayers, Sir, were heard – and they were graciously answered . . . I have lived, Sir, a long time; and the longer I live, the more convicting proofs I see of this truth, that *God governs in the affairs of men*. And if a sparrow cannot fall to the ground without His notice, is it probable than an empire can rise without his aid? We have been assured, Sir, in the sacred writings that, without his concurring aid, we shall succeed in this political building no better than the builders of Babel . . . [not bad for a deist].

I therefore beg leave to move that, henceforth, prayers imploring the assistance of heaven and its blessings on our deliberations be held in this assembly every morning before we proceed to business, and that one or more of the clergy of this city be requested to officiate in that service.

On September 17, 1787, forty distinguished Americans attached their signatures to another parchment of providence. The “Father of Lights” was pleased. For his role of paving the way for religious liberty in Virginia, James Madison would come to be known as the “Father of the Constitution.”

JOHN LELAND

The Constitution required ratification by nine state conventions. In a truly remarkable occurrence, the Lord decreed that *a single Baptist pastor would be in the right place at the right time to literally decide the fate of Madison's venerable achievement*. Of the thirteen voting states, Virginia was by far the noblest, wealthiest and most influential. As her boundaries took in the Ohio territory, she was also the most populated, claiming one in every four Americans. Old Dominion's approval would be absolutely essential.

Patrick Henry, George Mason, and Richard Henry Lee led the opposition party (the anti-Federalists) objecting that a bill of rights had not been included, the president had too much independence and the senate was aristocratic. Henry was particularly troubled about the absence of any statutes regarding religious liberty. Agreeing that various amendments were indeed justified, Federalists Madison and Washington recommended ratifying the Constitution first and adding a bill of rights afterward. It was their conviction that a failure to approve the Constitution as initially proposed would doom the entire project.

As each country had elect delegates to the state convention, the "Father of the Constitution" naturally *assumed* that he would be a "shoo-in" candidate in his own county of Orange. This proved to be anything *but* the case. While tarrying in Philadelphia to complete *The Federalist Papers*, Madison was unaware that opposition was forming back in Orange. After enduring decades of persecution, Baptists in all states were appalled at the lack of specific religious guarantees in the proposed Constitution. As "fate" would have it, a significant number of voters in Madison's home county "quacked." And the same ratio prevailed statewide; Thomas Jefferson stating in his *Notes on Virginia* that two-thirds of the population had become religious dissenters (Baptists, Presbyterians, or Quakers) by the eve of the Constitution's ratification. While missionary outreach at Sandy Creek had helped to establish eighteen Baptist churches in Virginia by 1770, the resultant persecution quadrupled that figure within four years! Frances L. Hawk, an Episcopalian historian, acknowledged the obvious ramifications:

The Baptists were not slow in discovering the advantageous position in which the political troubles of the country had placed them. Their numerical strength was such as to make it important to both sides to secure their influence. They knew this. Persecution had taught them not to love the establishment, and now they saw before them a reasonable prospect of overturning it entirely. In their Association they had calmly discussed the matter and they resolved on their course; in this course they were consistent to the end.

The Virginia Baptist General Committee met and agreed unanimously that the Constitution, as proposed, did not "make sufficient provision for the secure enjoyment of religious liberty." And, as they would ultimately decide who went to Richmond, you might call them the *original* "Mighty Ducks." A letter was subsequently dispatched to Madison warning him of the precarious situation. The paranoid candidate promptly battled his way back to Orange through a severe storm, arriving only days before the March 25th county election. Other notable personages such as Samuel Adams and John Jay had failed to be appointed delegates from their states. Would Madison be the most embarrassed casualty of the Convention? If he, of all statesmen was not present, who could possibly oppose the eloquent Patrick Henry, of whom Jefferson remarked, "He appeared to me to speak as Homer wrote."

The man destined to be the nation's fourth chief executive had only one option. While traveling on the road from Fredericksburg to Montpelier, Madison went out of his way to call on the influential Baptist pastor, John Leland. In his acclaimed *History of Virginia* (as cited by Armitage), Robert Semple recognized the former Massachusetts native as "probably the most popular preacher who ever resided in Virginia." Leland was so powerful that he pastored two thriving churches at the same time, one in Black Walnut, Orange County, and the other in Goldvine, Louisa County. Historian L. H. Butterfield pointed to Leland's "simple but graphic language, his avoidance of doctrinal refinements, his humor and his sincerity" as character traits that endeared him to his listeners. His anecdotes were legendary in the back country. From the American Antiquarian Society (citing Holland's *History of Western Massachusetts*), we read:

A characteristic one tells how he [Leland] outdid an Episcopal clergyman in Virginia who argued in favor of state support for ministers because they have to spend so much time preparing sermons. Leland answered that he could expound the Scriptures without special preparation, and the Episcopalian challenged him to preach on a text to be provided just before beginning his sermon. Leland went into the pulpit and was handed a text which proved to be Numbers 22:21, "And Balaam saddled his ass." Mr. Leland first commented on the account from which the text was taken, and then said he should divide his subject into three parts: 1st, Balaam, as a false prophet, represents a hireling clergy; 2nd, the saddle represents their enormous salaries, and 3rd, the dumb ass represents the people who will bare such a load.

Was it just another coincidence that Leland was born in 1754, the very year that Shubal Stearns left Tolland, Connecticut, for Virginia, conducting revivals in Berkeley and Hampshire Counties on his way to Sandy Creek? Of the seven hundred souls that Leland baptized throughout his fourteen-year sojourn in Virginia (1777-1791), over three hundred of them were converted in a powerful revival in the all-important year of 1788. Who, but the Lord, could set a stage like that? Some have maintained, former Massachusetts governor, the Honorable G. N. Briggs among them, that the popular preacher himself was one of the two declared anti-Constitution candidates to be nominated; Colonel Thomas Barbour being the other. The *Dictionary of American Biography* states of Leland, "He was nominated by the Baptists of Orange County as a delegate to the Virginia Convention of 1788, to oppose the Constitution." In any case, an extant copy of *Elder John Leland's Objections to the Federal Constitution* (as found in the Madison Papers housed in the Library of Congress) gives evidence of Leland's initial public commitment to the anti-Federalist platform. This policy statement was supplied to Mr. Barbour for use in his campaign. The author was privileged to review a transcript of this document in the Archives Department of the University of Tennessee. Copies of Leland's objections were circulated throughout the state. Thus, we understand that Leland's support of the anti-Federalist platform was etched in stone on the very eve of the local election in Orange.

Despite the Leland-Madison political alliances of the past and their warm personal friendship, Mr. Madison would have his lobbying work cut out for him. Ironically, Madison was already the most outstanding proponent of religious liberty active in the political arena. (See: *Memorial and Remonstrance*; "tolerance" clause in the Virginia Declaration of Rights; etc.). According to an article in the *Annual Report of the American Historical Association* for 1901, as a teenage lad, Madison had stood alongside his father outside the Orange County jail and listened in astonishment as several Baptists preached from their cell windows.

The specifics of what was said during that rendezvous with destiny will never be known this side of eternity. Obviously Madison would have given his pledge of honor to do all within his power to secure a Bill of Rights *after* the Constitution was safely in place. But the man of God would have to pray down the Spirit's leading to trust his neighbors commitment enough to change his own well-known conviction.

Within a few days of their meeting, a throng of freedom-loving "good ol' boys" assembled near the Orange County Courthouse to literally decide the future of America. James Madison was introduced as the first speaker. After ascending a hogshead of tobacco, the 5'6" statesman promoted the Constitution for nearly two hours in a voice barely above a whisper. When he concluded his remarks, Pastor Leland took the stump and spoke for less than ten minutes. He promptly shocked the crowd by reversing his position to endorse Mr. Madison's candidacy. The preacher explained that his decision was predicted on Madison's pledge to provide a Bill of Rights after the Constitution was secure. The "brethren" took it from there! The actual tallies gave Madison 202 votes and his Federalist running mate, James Gordon, 187, while Thomas Barbour and Charles Porter received 56 and 34 votes, respectively.

With his eleventh-hour reprieve, Madison was cleared to travel on to Richmond while Barbour unpacked his suitcase in a stupor. The ensuing debate between Madison and Henry raged for two-and-a-half months. John Christian writes,

When the Convention assembled, Patrick Henry spoke against the Constitution with a vehemence never surpassed by himself on any occasion in his whole life, and with a power that sometimes was overwhelming. Once, while this matchless orator was addressing the Convention, a wild storm broke over Richmond; the heavens were ablaze with lightning, the thunder roared, and the rain came down in torrents; at this moment Henry seemed to see the anger of heaven threatening the State, if it should consummate the guilty act of adopting the Constitution, and he invoked celestial witnesses to view and compassionate his distracted country in the grand crisis of its history. And such was the effect of his speech on the occasion, that the Convention immediately dispersed.

During this time, news of Leland's defection had spread like wildfire. Consequently, a number of Henry's supporters grew more tolerant of Madison's proposal. When the final count was taken, eighty-nine delegates voted for ratification while seventy-nine voted against. The significance of Leland's paramount endorsement is evidenced by the slim margin of victory *despite Mr. Madison's weighty presence*. A mere *ten* votes had enabled Madison to prevail over Patrick "Give Me Liberty or Give Me Death" Henry, a living legend who would be reelected to five terms as Virginia's governor. *What do you suppose the final outcome would have been had the very author of the Constitution been barred from the proceedings?*

The rest is history. Madison remained true to his word. The Bill of Rights became a reality on December 15th, 1791. Armitage writes,

Thus, the contemned, spurned and hated old Baptist doctrine of soul-liberty, for which blood had been shed for centuries, was not only engrafted into the organic law of the United States, but in the first time in the formation of a great nation it was made its chief corner-stone. For the first time on that subject the quiet, pungent old truth asserted its right to immortality as expressed by Scripture: "The stone which the builders rejected is become the head-stone of the corner."

THE WITNESS OF HISTORY

It was the author's opportunity to relate this dramatic story over a call-in program on Boston's WBZ radio station during the Southern Baptist boycott of Disney Studios (concerning Disney's decision to make the parks accessible to sodomite delegations). Nearly forty-five minutes of "Baptist bashing" had prompted the author to action. After hearing what he had to say, the program host, Lovell Dyett, could only retort, "We've had Jeffersonian authors on this program many times, and we have never heard of this Leland Fellow." To which the author replied, "If I were you, I wouldn't laugh until I visited the Leland-Madison Memorial Park located on highway 20 (Route of the Constitution), four miles east of Orange, and read the plaque erected by The Sons of the American Revolution commemorating the site of the historic meeting." That "fact" ended both the call and the evening's topic of discussion. By the time he returned to his vehicle from the pay phone the new call-in subject was "Villains in the *Batman* Series." For some strange reason, no one wanted to talk about the Baptists anymore. Apparently, the "joker" was one of them.

The words on Leland's impressive marker cannot be dismissed as easily.

1754-1841

ELDER JOHN LELAND

COURAGEOUS LEADER OF

THE BAPTIST DOCTRINE

ARDENT ADVOCATE OF THE PRINCIPLES

OF DEMOCRACY

VINDICATOR OF SEPARATION

OF CHURCH AND STATE

NEAR THIS SPOT IN 1788, JOHN LELAND AND
JAMES MADISON, THE FATHER OF THE AMERICAN
CONSTITUTION, HELD A SIGNIFICANT INTERVIEW
WHICH RESULTED IN THE ADOPTION OF THE
CONSTITUTION BY VIRGINIA. THEN MADISON
A MEMBER OF CONGRESS FROM ORANGE PRESENTED
THE FIRST AMMENDMENT TO THE CONSTITUTION
GUARANTEEING RELIGIOUS LIBERTY, FREE SPEECH AND
A FREE PRESS. THIS SATISFIED LELAND AND HIS BAPTIST

FOLLOWERS.

PRESENTED BY EUGENE BUCKLIN BOWEN PRESIDENT BERKSHIRE COUNTY, MASSACHUSETTS CHAPTER SONS OF THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION

The humanist thinks he can discard this important Baptist footnote in history because neither Leland nor Madison referred to the meeting in their personal papers. However, the sensitive nature of their discussion would have warranted such reticence (the same being true with Washington's immersion – John 3:32). What would either man have gained from a disclosure? The truth of the matter is that God's people will never get their reward down here. As the songwriter asked, "Is this vile world a friend to grace to help on to God?" Leland's gravestone marker reads simply: "Here lies the body of John Leland who labored to promote piety and to vindicate the civil and religious rights of all men." However, in the spirit of defending a man of God's reputation, I have referenced the following secular corroboration for the Leland-Madison encounter. In his definitive three-volume set, *James Madison: A biography* (available at Montpelier), Ralph Ketcham states:

On his way from Fredericksburg to Orange, with the election but a few days away, Madison stopped to see the influential Baptist preacher John Leland, who had drawn a vigorous memorial protesting, among other things, the failure of the new Constitution to guarantee religious freedom.... In return for Leland's promise to withdraw his objections, Madison reaffirmed what he and other Federalists had increasingly agreed to: they would support a bill of rights, including a firm article on religious freedom, as amendments to the Constitution *after* its ratification.... At the traditional court day election, the fourth Tuesday of the month (March 25th), planters and tradesmen, despite a "very cold wind," gathered early, and "Colonial" Madison, Francis Taylor noted, "...addressed himself in a speech to the people in defense of the new Constitution, and there appeared much satisfaction."

William Lee Miller, in his acclaimed *The Business of May Next* (also offered at Montpelier), picks up Madison's itinerary after leaving Mount Vernon. (Madison had visited Washington for some advice on the matter.)

Then on the way on to Orange he had a meeting with the noted Baptist preacher John Leland. Leland and many Baptists had objected to the Constitution's failure to include a protection for religious liberty, but Madison, as an old comrade-in-arms from the great Virginia struggle on that issue, was able to persuade him that the failure to ratify the Constitution would not serve religious liberty or any other good purpose ... Madison made a speech defending the Constitution, and was an easy winner over his anti-federalist neighbor ...

From the prestigious American Antiquarian Society, we have the following comments given by L.H. Butterfield in *Elder John Leland, Jeffersonian Itinerant*:

Elder John Leland is not often mentioned in histories of the United States, even the comprehensive ones. When he is, it is invariably in connection with the gift of an enormous cheese to President Jefferson on New Year's Day in 1802 ... But if John Leland is best known for an exploit typical of our engaging and probably harmless desire to break records, he deserves to be remembered for a better reason. **He played a substantial part in molding another American tradition that is full of meaning to all of us today – the separation of church and state in the United States.** The success of the Baptist revivalist was phenomenal in the years before the Revolution ... On January 30, James Madison, Sr., wrote his son that sentiment against ratification was decidedly rising in Orange County. "The Baptists are now generally opposed to it ..." There followed a meeting between Madison and Leland that has been celebrated in local history and in Baptist annals.

With reference to the Leland-Madison Park on highway 20, Butterfield adds, "There can be no question that the monument memorializes an actual occurrence." In his address at the Bicentennial in Orange County, delivered on September 26th, 1934, in the grove at Gum Spring (site of the monument), Samuel Chiles Mitchell made reference to a pair of earlier testimonies

to the Leland-Madison summit. The first of these was a eulogy for James Madison that was delivered at Culpeper Courthouse on July 18, 1836, by John S. Barbour, a long-time friend and associate of Mr. Madison. Mitchell affirms that the address was published in the *National Intelligencer* of Washington, D.C., on August 2, 1836, “at the request of a committee of those who heard it, as deserving record.”

Concerning Madison’s role in securing religious liberty, he stated:

In the accomplishment of this great object, the sect denominated Baptists took the foremost part ... But for James Madison, we should have no constitution: I call history to be witness. He above all others, created it. He above all others, gave to it the ratification of Virginia. Without Virginia, the Union was disjointed, and was no Union, had every other state accepted, adopted and ratified the Constitution. His election to the Convention itself, in Virginia, was brought about by his sudden return to his country on the eve of the election. His soft and assuasive and lucid elocution changed two ministers of the Gospel of the Baptist church on the day preceding the election and that conversation carried him into Virginia. The celebrated John Leland was one of them. (It is thought by some that Reverend Aaron Bledsoe of Pamunkey was the other.) His mind was thrown open to the lights of reason and the power of argument. Consistency had neither pride nor trammel for his strong good sense; and I speak but the voice of faithful tradition in saying that these changes were decisive in the election.”

Miller’s other point of evidence was a letter by the honorable George N. Briggs, Governor of Massachusetts (1844-1851), dated, Pittsfield, Massachusetts, April 15th 1857, as found in William Sprague’s nine-volume tome *Annals of the American Pulpit*. The letter’s content relates to a special visit Governor and Mrs. Briggs made to the Leland’s three or four years before the preacher’s death when “Elder” Leland was in his early eighties. A portion of the correspondence reads:

In the course of the afternoon, I told him that I had recently seen in the public prints an extract from an Eulogy delivered by J.S. Barbour, of Virginia, upon the character of James Madison; that Barbour, had said that the credit of adopting the Constitution of the United States properly belonged to a Baptist clergyman, formerly of Virginia, by the name of Leland ... He replied that Barbour had given him too much credit; but he supposed he knew to what he referred. He then gave this history of the matter.

After giving Leland’s historical-political background of the time, Briggs went on to relate the preacher’s account:

On his way home from Philadelphia, Mr. Madison went some distance out of his direct road to call upon him. After the ordinary salutations, Mr. Madison began to apologize for troubling with a call at that time; but he assured Mr. M. that no apology was necessary – “I know your errand here,” said he, “it is to talk to me about the Constitution. I am glad to see you, and to have an opportunity of learning your views on the subject.” Mr. Madison spent half a day with him, and fully and unreservedly communicated to him his opinions upon the great matters which were then agitating the people of the State and the Confederacy.

They then separated to meet again very soon, as opposing candidates before the electors, on the stump. The day came, and they met, and with them nearly all the voters in the County of Orange, to hear their candidates respectively discuss the important questions upon which the people of Virginia were so soon to act. “Mr. Madison,” said the venerable man, first took the stump,” which was a hogshead of tobacco, standing on one end. For two hours, he addressed his fellow-citizens in a calm, candid and statesman-like manner, arguing his side of the case, and fairly meeting and replying to the arguments, which had been put forth by his opponents, in the general canvass of the State. Though Mr. Madison was not particularly a pleasing or eloquent speaker, the people listened with respectful attention. He left the hogshead, and my friends called for me. I took it – and went in for Mr. Madison; and he was elected without difficulty. “This,” said he, “is, I suppose, what Mr. Barbour alluded to.”

The Governor’s remarks concluded:

A noble Christian patriot! That single act, with the motives which prompted it, and the consequences which followed it, entitle him to the respect of mankind.

Finally, 1,757 long years after God’s first preachers were confronted by local authorities who “laid hands on them, and put them in hold unto the next day” (Acts 4:3a), the dawn of a new era had definitely arrived! Collectively ratified on December 15, 1791, the First Amendment to the Bill of Rights reads:

Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press, or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.

So there you have it – the *éclat* of Western civilization! No doubt “Brother Whitefield” smiled in the glory world as the door he foresaw to the Philadelphia Church Age was opened wide in the “city of Brotherly Love” by the Baptist-sponsored Bill of Rights. With the “Bloody Whore” three thousand miles away and her harlot Protestant offspring checked by the powerful First Amendment, the Baptists were liberated at long last to bring about the vindication of their holy and jealous Creator (Isaiah 42:8). Thanks to the words “freedom of speech,” no American minister would be burned at the stake for street preaching. And, owing to the “free press” clause, no one would be burned for printing the Holy Bible, either. With these two safeguards in place, an army of Baptist soul winners rushed through their Philadelphia door to obey the Scriptural charge atop the Liberty Bell (also displayed in Philadelphia): *“Proclaim liberty throughout all the land unto all the inhabitants thereof”* (Leviticus 25:10).

Over the next two hundred years, the United States of America would rise to a level of prominence and prosperity unparalleled in the annals of mankind. As the Roman Empire had *“limited the Holy One of Israel”* (Psalm 78:41b), the Baptists in America had inspired a form of government that would unleash the mighty power of God. Promises such as, *“Blessed is the nation whose God is the LORD”* (Psalm 32:12a) and *“Righteousness exalteth a nation”* (Proverbs 14:34a), could now be appropriated. Whitefield’s “ducks” had come a long way. The Baptist minister Samuel Smith would go on to write, “My Country, ‘Tis of Thee,” while another Baptist, Francis Bellamy, would author the nation’s Pledge of Allegiance.

A TRIBUTE OF GRATITUDE

In September of 2000, the Lord enabled the Baptist History Preservation Society of Rockwell, North Carolina, to provide a fitting tribute of gratitude on behalf of Mr. Whitefield's labor in America. The "Grand Itinerate" had succumbed to asthma on Sunday, September 30, 1770, in the parsonage of Old South Presbyterian Church of Newburyport, Massachusetts. (A number of years ago, I was privileged to visit this very room.) As Whitefield was breathing his last, he asked that his body be interred under the pulpit where he had been scheduled to preach that morning. His dying plea was subsequently honored. Over two centuries later, another personal desire was granted. In the heat of the battle, Whitefield had shared an informal preference for a future tombstone inscription, the context dealing with his unwillingness to defend himself against slander. (See Volume II, *The Works of George Whitfield*, page 248). Somehow, his Protestant admirers inadvertently overlooked this.

Through the grace of God, The Baptist History Preservation Society received special permission from Old South Preservation Church to not only procure a memorial tablet enshrining the preacher's request, but to renovate the hallowed crypt as well. The glorious project was appropriately concluded on the 230th anniversary of Mr. Whitefield's death. The beautiful bronze plaque, which adorns the brick wall to the left of the tomb, reads:

GEORGE WHITEFIELD

1714-1770

I AM CONTENT TO WAIT UNTIL THE DAY OF JUDGEMENT

FOR THE CLEARING UP OF MY CHARACTER: AND AFTER

I AM DEAD I DESIRE

NO OTHER EPITAPH THAN THIS, 'HERE LIES G.W. WHAT

SORT OF A MAN HE WAS

THE GREAT DAY WILL DISCOVER.'

MAZEL TOV

Thanks to Mr. Whitefield and an array of spiritual giants like Clarke, Holmes, Whitman, Stearns, Marshall, Weatherford, Brown, Hart, Jones, Gano and Leland – America was well on her way to fulfilling the ultimate purpose for her existence. Within months of becoming the nation's first chief-executive, Washington embarked upon a tour of the colonies to promote the ratification of the Bill of Rights. He was accompanied by his secretary of state, Thomas Jefferson. In August, 1790, Washington and his entourage paid a visit to Newport, Rhode Island.

Although the new president was expected to call upon the principal cities of the fledging republic, receiving their delegations and letters of adulation, Newport would enjoy a *special* unspoken relationship akin to his sacred baptism at the hands of John Gano. Not only was Newport the site of the first Baptist church in America, but also the home of what had formerly been the largest and most prosperous Jewish community in the nation (the other five being in New York, Philadelphia, Richmond, Savannah and Charleston).

The two had made for an explosive combination. The conviction for religious liberty was so strong in Rhode Island that two months before the Declaration of Independence was proclaimed by the General Congress in Philadelphia, the General assembly of the colony of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations gathered in the Old State house in Providence on May 4, 1776, had passed their own Declaration of Independence from the British Crown! Washington understood what the modern educated fool does not – in the words of Charles Carroll, as quoted in volume one of his work *Three centuries of Democracy* – “Rhode Island, from that moment, became, and is at this day, the oldest sovereign and independent state in the western world.”

On the morning of August 17 (in concert with the cities other religious leaders), President George Washington had a formal audience with a man by the name of “Moses” (Moses Seixas, that is, warden of Congregation Yeshuat Israel). The two men were well aware of the disproportionate contribution rendered to the recent War of Independence by the Jews of Newport (despite the disastrous toll it took on their personal fortunes). For instance, unbeknownst to the “professional scholar,” a core of patriotic Jewish businessmen actually helped to precipitate the conflict. On October 25, 1765, in the city of Philadelphia, no less than nine Jewish merchants affixed their signatures to the volatile Non-Importation Agreement. They were Benjamin Levy, Samson Levy, Joseph Jacobs, Hyman Levy, Jr., David Franks, Mathias Bush, Michael Gratz and Moses Mordecai.

More than once, Jewish money helped to save the American cause: Haym Solmon advanced to Congress for the Revolutionary War the sum of \$658,007.13; Sheftal and Noah, \$100,000; Isaac Moses, \$15,000. By October 1776, sixteen heavily armed and well-manned vessels had been dispatched from the harbor at Newport. Most were owned by Jews. (See *The Jews in the Making of America* by George Cohen.)

Many of the Jews of Newport also distinguished themselves on the battlefield. Several served as officers. One Jewish veteran by the name of Moses Isaacs had the honor of entertaining General Washington when he came to Newport on March 6, 1781, to meet with General Count

de Rochambeau who was leading the French troops quartered in Newport.

However, the most remarkable manifestation of Jewish solidarity with America's war effort was in the religious realm. When the General Congress at Philadelphia ordered a Continental Fast Day to be observed throughout the United Colonies, the General Assembly of Rhode Island proclaimed July 20, 1775, as their "Public Fast Day." With the exception of the feckless Church of England, all the congregations in Newport, *including Yeshuat Israel*, conducted special services during which time the ministers preached patriotic messages. In the providence of God, a most unusual visitor just "happened" to be in town on that occasion. Rabbi Gutstein writes, citing *The Literary Diary of Ezra Stiles*:

The Congregation Yeshuat Israel joined their non-Jewish brethren in prayer and fasting on this solemn day, conducting a special patriotic service at the synagogue during which Rabbi Samuel Cohen of Jerusalem, a visitor in town from the Holy Land since the latter part of 1772, or early 1773, preached the sermon. He chose for his text the verses in Numbers, "Phineas the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron, the priest, hath turned my wrath away from the Children of Israel in My jealousy. Wherefore sat: Behold, I give unto him My covenant of peace."

Thus we understand that only a month after the climactic Battle of Bunker Hill, a Jewish rabbi from Jerusalem, is standing behind the pulpit of the synagogue in Newport, Rhode Island, preaching a patriotic sermon from Numbers 25:11-12 on behalf of the American Revolution! (How's that for a Jewish conspiracy?)

Such were the sacred memories shared by the formal general and the Hebrew emissary when Moses Seixas greeted President Washington and handed him the following letter:

To the President of the United States of America

Sir:

Permit the children of the stock of Abraham to approach you with the most cordial affection and esteem for your person and merits, and to join with our fellow Citizens in welcoming you to New Port

With pleasure we reflect on those days – those days of difficulty and danger, when the God of Israel, who delivered David from the peril of the sword, - shielded your head in the day of battle: - and we rejoice to think that the same Spirit who rested in the bosom of the greatly beloved Daniel, enabling him to preside over the Provinces of the Babylonish Empire, rests, and ever will rest, upon you, enabling you to discharge the arduous duties of Chief Magistrate in these states.

Deprived as we heretofore have been of the invaluable rights of free Citizens, we now (with a deep sense of gratitude to the Almighty disposer of all events) behold a Government, enacted by the Majesty of the People – a Government which to bigotry gives no sanction, to persecution no assistance – but generously affording to All liberty of conscience, and immunities of Citizenship: - deeming every one, of whatever Nation, tongue, or language, equal parts of the great governmental machine: - **This so ample and extensive Federal Union whose basis is Philanthropy, Mutual Confidence and Public Virtue, we cannot but acknowledge to be the work of the Great God, who ruleth in the Armies of Heaven and among the Inhabitants of the Earth, doing whatever seemeth him good.**

For all the blessings of civil and religious liberty which we enjoy under an equal and benign administration, we desire to send up our thanks to the Ancient of Days, the great preserver of Men – beseeching him, that the Angel who conducted our forefathers through the wilderness into the promised land, may graciously conduct you through all the difficulties and dangers of this mortal life: - and, when like Joshua full of days and full of honor, you are gathered to your Fathers, may you be admitted into the Heavenly Paradise to partake of the water of life, and the tree of immortality. Done and signed by order of the Hebrew Congregation

In Newport Rhode Island August 17th 1790

Moses Seixas, Warden

The "Father of Our Country" dictated and signed the following reply on August 18:

To the Hebrew Congregation in Newport, Rhode Island

Gentlemen.

While I receive, with much satisfaction, your address replete with expressions of affection and esteem; I rejoice in the opportunity of assuring you, that I shall always retain a grateful remembrance of the cordial welcome I experienced in my visit to Newport, from all classes of Citizens.

The reflection of the days of difficulty and danger which are passed is rendered the more sweet from a consciousness that they are succeeded by days of uncommon prosperity and security. If we have wisdom to make the best use of the advantages with which we are now favored, we cannot fail, under the just administration of good Government, to become a great and a happy people.

The Citizens of the United States of America have a right to applaud themselves for having given to mankind examples of an enlarged and liberal policy: a policy worthy of imitation. All possess alike liberty of conscience and immunities of citizenship. It is now no more that toleration is spoken of as if it was by the indulgence of one class of people, that another enjoyed the exercise of their inherent natural rights. For happily the Government of the United States, which gives to bigotry no sanction, to persecution no assistance, requires only that they who live under its protection should demean themselves as good citizens, in giving it on all occasions their effectual support.

It would be inconsistent with the frankness of my character not to avow that I am pleased with your favorable opinion of my Administration, and fervent wishes for my felicity. **May the Children of the Stock of Abraham, who dwell in this land, continue to merit and enjoy the good will of the other inhabitants, while every one shall sit in safety under his own vine and fig tree, and there shall be none to make him afraid.** May the father of all mercies scatter light and not darkness in our paths, and make us all in our several vocations useful here, and in his own due time and way everlasting happy.

Go: Washington

At the time of Washington's visit, Newport's Congregation *Yeshuat Israel* had been worshipping in their own synagogue for twenty-two years. Designed by noted British architect Peter Harrison, the structure was completed in 1763 at a cost of two thousand pounds sterling. Rabbi Gutstein writes:

The synagogue was admirable. Jewish and non-Jewish eyes looked upon it with admiration and awe.

After vicissitudes of the strangest sorts, a few Marranos, having escaped the clutches of the Holy Inquisition, were at last able to walk freely in a beautiful temple of God, a miniature of the temple of Jerusalem.

The extent to which Washington's pledge of safety was fulfilled is evidenced by the providential survival of the colonial synagogue down to the twenty-first century. (While the original synagogue belonging to Congregation Shearith Israel of New York predated the synagogue in Newport, the structure was subsequently destroyed and rebuilt.) *Touro Synagogue* (named after its two primary benefactors, Abraham and Judah Touro, sons of Isaac Touro, the synagogue's *hazzan* (or "reader") from 1759 until the Revolution), is considered one of the finest examples of eighteenth century architecture in America. In 1936, Dr. David de Sola Pool, rabbi of the Congregation Shearith Israel of New York, wrote in his introduction to Rabbi Gutstein's work, *The History of The Jews of Newport*:

The Jew walks through Touro Street in Newport [the street connecting the synagogue with the cemetery, named after Judah Touro] quietly conscious of inheriting a tradition both of American political and religious liberty and of Jewish idealism and religious faith. The synagogue, which has stood for one and three quarter centuries and which has withstood the alarms of war and the fatalities of swiftly changing time, is a witness of Newport's liberality of spirit and reverence for the ancient Bible.... The quiet God's acre in which lies the dust of Newport's Jews of Colonial days speaks of the identification of the Jew with American life for well nigh three centuries since sturdy Jewish pioneers threw in their lot with their fellow Americans in wresting from the silderness a settlement of security and refuge for those of all denominations and races seeking ample living. The Jewish Community Center opposite the Synagogue symbolizes the vigor of the new-old Jewish life which has taken up the broken thread, and is continuing to weave on the American background the ancient pattern of the Jewish spirit.

No greater tribute to Dr. Clarke can be found than the astounding fact that the *oldest existing synagogue in the United States*, erected for the *second oldest Jewish congregation in the land*, "just happens" to be located *around the corner from the first Baptist church in America!* (United Baptist Church) In fact, when one faces the front gate of Touro, the steeple of Dr. Clarke's

church is conspicuously visible in the background to the left. The high-flying American flag situated on the synagogue grounds completes the solemn grandeur. And if that's not exciting enough, the nation's oldest standing *Baptist church*, the Seventh Day Baptist Meeting House – built in 1730 for the faction that departed Clarke's work in 1656 and later structurally attached to the Newport Historical Society building, constructed in 1850 – is literally *right next door to Touro Synagogue! Shalom!*

J.L.M. CURRY

As an appropriate conclusion to this holy chapter, let us travel back in time to eavesdrop on a conversation at a stately dinner party in Madrid, Spain. The setting is the late 1800s. The two men who are speaking to one another are Jabez Lamar Monroe Curry, President Grover Cleveland's Minister Plenipotentiary to Spain, and the famous British philosopher, John Bright. A graduate of Harvard University in 1825, Curry's lifetime achievements required three columns of print in the renowned *Dictionary of American Biography*. Among these were included: college professor, college president, Army officer, member of Congress, and general agent of the Peabody Education Fund (a program of national aid for the removal and prevention of illiteracy among Negroes). His fame was so pronounced in his native Alabama that his bust remains one of the two representing the state in the Capitol's Statuary Hall in Washington D.C.

However, it just so happens that J. L. M. Curry was also, in the words of Thomas Armitage, "a powerful and enthusiastic preacher of the Gospel." He received the degree of D.D. in 1857 from Mercer University. His ministerial load paralleled his secular responsibilities. Dr. Curry served as president of the Alabama Baptist State Convention, the Virginia General Association and the Foreign Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention.

Dr. R. H. Pitts, in his November 12, 1925, address before the Baptist Journal Association, entitled "Soul Liberty – Some of its Implications," related a profound interchange which occurred between his mentor and Mr. Bright at that Madrid dinner reception. In the course of their discussion, Bright was expounding on the many contributions England had made to the world. He then asked Dr. Curry, "What distinct contribution has America made to the science of government?" After pausing a moment, the Baptist ambassador replied, "The doctrine of Soul Freedom." Following a moment of reflection, the philosopher conceded, "A tremendous contribution indeed."

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