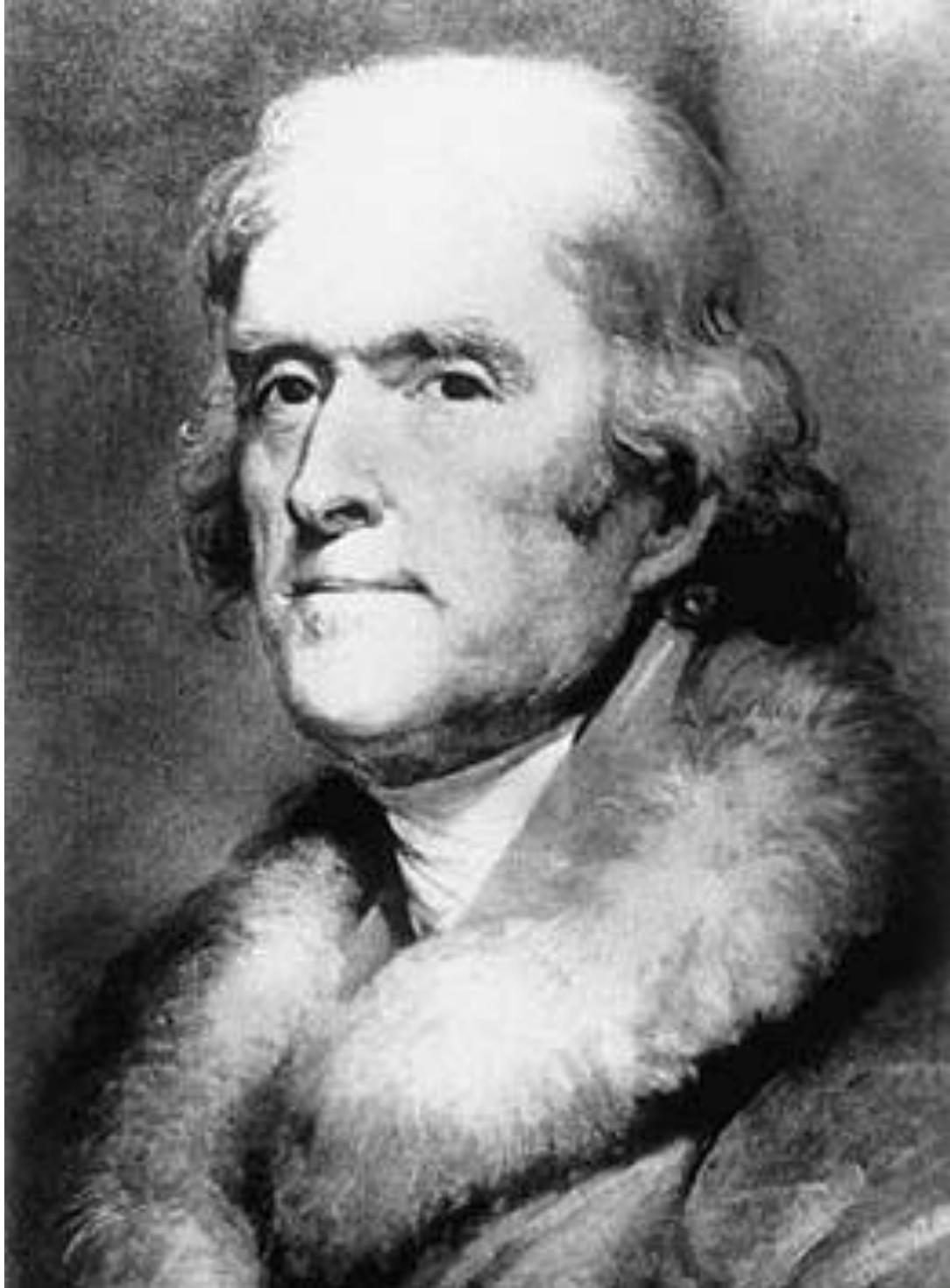


Thomas Jefferson

Exemplar of Early Republicanism



By: Dick Jones

Introduction

Thomas Jefferson was an exceptional man who lived in the midst of an extraordinary period in history. He was born on April 13, 1743 on his father's plantation near Charlottesville, Virginia. In terms of ability and the contributions he made to the early American Republic, he was in the top tier of the Founding Fathers. From eighteenth century Virginia, a state and a time in which several exceptional men lived, "the two greatest...of their day were clearly Washington and Jefferson."¹ Thomas Jefferson continues to inspire Americans and especially those desiring to pursue the Republican ideal he exemplified.

A Brief Biography

Fellow Founding Father John Adams, at various times Jefferson's friend or Federalist antagonist, was prescient in his last words. Adams declared, "Thomas Jefferson still survives." Both Adams and Jefferson would die on the Fourth of July in the year 1826 exactly fifty years after the Declaration of Independence. Separated by hundreds of miles and both at their homes on their last day on earth, the minds of both men turned back to the Declaration. Jefferson asked, "Is it the Fourth?"²

¹ Wills, Garry, *Inventing America, Jefferson's Declaration of Independence*, New York, New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, First Miriner Books Edition, 2002:360.

² *Ibid*, p. 351.

As a young boy, Jefferson was educated by tutors and in small, unremarkable schools near his home in Virginia. At the age of seventeen, he began his studies at the College of William and Mary in Williamsburg. There he flourished under the influence of recent Scottish immigrant, William Small. A proponent of Scottish Enlightenment ideas, Small had “graduated from the Scottish college of Aberdeen”...and he became...“Jefferson’s tutor in mathematics, moral philosophy, and science as well as his surrogate father.” It was Professor Small who introduced Jefferson to the *common sense* of the Enlightenment of eighteenth century Scotland. His influence was profound on the young student as he was willing to spend long hours in discussion and debate as his friend, mentor, and teacher.”³

Following his time at the College of William and Mary, Jefferson began studying law under George Wythe. He was “the most learned lawyer practicing before the Virginia courts”...as well as...“a self-taught classical scholar of rare ability.” Wythe would also be one of the signatories to the Declaration of Independence. It was George Wythe who insisted that Jefferson study the works of the *philosophe* Montesquieu and Scot-Puritan Sir Edward Coke, both of whom would significantly impact his thinking in later years.⁴

The ideas Jefferson absorbed during his early education would be put to good effect as he served Virginia and the early American Republic

³ Randall, Willard Sterne, *Thomas Jefferson—A Life*, New York, New York: Henry Holt and Company, Inc., 1993:38.

⁴ *Ibid*, p. 47.

throughout his life. He authored the Declaration of Independence. He served as Governor of Virginia for two terms during the American Revolution. After the War, he was appointed as Foreign Minister to France and served in that position from 1784 to 1789. President George Washington appointed him as his first Secretary of State, a position that he held during Washington's first term. Jefferson was elected as Vice President under President John Adams in 1797 and successfully ran against the Federalist President in the election of 1800. He would serve two terms as President, acquiring the Louisiana Purchase as one of his most important accomplishments. He later founded the University of Virginia as a counter-balance to what he perceived as excessive clerical influence at the College of William and Mary. His designs for the University of Virginia and his home, Monticello, are still recognized by the American Institute of Architects as two of the ten most significant architectural works in the United States.⁵ Jefferson was indeed an exceptional man.

Jefferson and Natural Law

Conservative thinker Russell Kirk commented that one cannot understand the American Republic until one appreciates that American history and development was rooted “in five cities—Athens, Jerusalem,

⁵ Shuffelton, Frank, *The Cambridge Companion to Thomas Jefferson*, New York, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009:3.

Rome, London, and Philadelphia.” The Roman conception of law in particular would shape the Founding Fathers’ understanding of the need for a transcendent basis for just laws. Early Romans had two bodies of law, the *jus civile* and the *jus gentium*. The first pertains to those laws which applied particularly to Roman citizens. The latter refers to the law of nations or “those rules and laws common to people generally.” From *jus gentium*, Rome’s jurists began to consider “the concept of natural law, a concept toward which some of the Greek thinkers had leaned....natural law...consisted of universal laws, laws that were everywhere applicable.”⁶

Jefferson acknowledged the impact Aristotle, Cicero, and Algernon Sidney had upon his understanding of natural law. Cicero had written:

“There is God’s law from which all equitable laws of man emerge and by which men must live if they are not to die in oppression, chaos, and despair. Divorced from God’s eternal and immutable Law, established before the founding of the suns, man’s power is evil...Men of good will, mindful therefore of the Law laid down by God, will oppose government whose rule is by men...”

⁶ Carson, Clarence B., *Basic American Government*, Phenix City, Alabama: American Textbook Committee, 2001:84.

Sidney in particular relied on Cicero for his understanding of the role Natural Law plays in political philosophy. Political scientist Donald Lutz writes, “It is difficult *not* to conclude that Algernon Sidney was Jefferson’s source along with Aristotle and Cicero in the Declaration.”⁷

Thomas Jefferson proclaimed his belief in natural law in the Declaration of Independence:

When in the Course of human events, it becomes necessary for one people to dissolve the political bands which have connected them with another, and to assume among the powers of the earth, the separate and equal station to which the Laws of Nature and of Nature's God entitle them...We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights..

It is commonly understood that the “great natural law theorist” John Locke is reflected in many of the key ideas presented in Jefferson’s Declaration. It is true that “Jefferson regarded John Locke and Algernon Sidney as two leading sources for the American understanding of the principle of political liberty.”⁸ According to historian Forest McDonald, Locke wrote that “the purpose of uniting

⁷ Lutz, Donald S., *The Origins of American Constitutionalism*, Baton Rouge, Louisiana: Louisiana State University Press, 1988:118.

⁸ Sidney, Algernon, *Discourses Concerning Government*, ed. Thomas G. West, Liberty Fund, Inc., Indianapolis, Indiana: 1996: XV.

under government is to preserve all men in their Lives, Liberties, and Estates’ which Locke calls ‘by the general name property.’” Locke believed that, in order for government to be legitimate, it “must be in accord with the laws of nature.” If government “violates that structure, it ceases to be legitimate and can, under certain conditions, be legitimately overthrown.”⁹

What is less commonly known is that John Locke drew heavily upon Anglican Richard Hooker, “fellow of Oxford and parish priest.” Hooker wrote that “the universe is pervaded by laws which are rational, and could be understood by men’s reason...natural law—discovered through reason—supplements divine law...justice depends on conformity to natural law.” John Locke referred to Hooker as “the judicious Hooker” and acknowledged his debt to him for many of his ideas regarding law and responsible government.¹⁰

Prominent among the legal authorities that Wythe insisted Jefferson study was Sir Edward Coke. Apart from William Blackstone, there was probably no legal authority studied during the founding generation more than Coke. Regarding Natural Law, he wrote:

“Law of nature is that which God at the time of creation of the nature of man infused into his heart, for his

⁹ McDonald, Forest, *Novas Ordo Seclorum—The Intellectual Origins of the Constitution*, Lawrence, Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 1985:65.

¹⁰ Curtis, Michael, ed., *The Great Political Theories*, New York, New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 2008:358.

preservation and direction; and this is *lex aeterna*, the moral law, called also the law of nature. And by this law, written with the finger of God in the heart man, we the people of God a long time governed before the law was written by Moses who was the first reporter or writer of law in the world.”¹¹

Sir Edward Coke, who died in 1634, was a Scottish Puritan and common law authority who wrote prolifically on English constitutional issues dating back to the Magna Carta. Coke’s *Institutes of the Laws of England* declared that kings were subject to “higher laws”, i.e. the laws of nature.¹²

Jefferson a Scottish Enlightenment Man

The concept of Natural Law was central to what became known as the Scottish Common Sense School of philosophy. The ideas of the Scottish Enlightenment cohered in a *weltanschauung* or worldview which would influence not only the Founding Fathers but their entire generation which took for granted the idea that “all adult human beings are endowed with a moral sense—an innate knowledge of what is right

¹¹ Sandoz, Ellis, *Republicanism, Religion, and the Soul of America*: Columbia, Missouri: University of Missouri Press, 2006:59.

¹² Gragg, Rod, *The Declaration of Independence—The Story Behind America’s Founding Document and the Men Who Created It*, Nashville, Tennessee: Rutledge Hill Press, 2005:37.

and what is wrong, of what is good and what is evil.”¹³ President of the College of New Jersey, Presbyterian minister and Scottish Common Sense proponent John Witherspoon wrote:

“The moral sense is precisely the same thing with what in Scripture and common language we call conscience. It is the law which our Maker has written upon our hearts, and both intimates and enforces duty, previous to all reasoning.”¹⁴

Scottish Common Sense Realism emphasizes the capacity to reason and an innate sense of right and wrong. Advocates differ in degree regarding the reliability of this *common sense*, depending on their understanding of the noetic effects of sin. However, all *common sense* advocates would agree that man’s intellectual capacities and his moral sensibilities remain more or less intact.

The Scottish Enlightenment had been “launched” in 1725 with the publishing of Francis Hutcheson’s work, *Inquiring into the Original of our Ideas of Beauty and Virtue*. He was a Professor of Moral Philosophy at the University of Glasgow and a theologically moderate Presbyterian minister. According to historian Douglas Sloan, he had “immense influence upon the leading Scottish intellectuals of the eighteenth century, including Adam Smith, David Hume, and Thomas

¹³ Op cit., McDonald, p. 54.

¹⁴ Witherspoon, John, *The Works of Rev. John Witherspoon*, Volume Six, Harrison, Virginia: Sprinkle Publications, 2005: pp.70-71.

Reid.¹⁵ But his influence would not be limited to Scots. Historian Forest McDonald writes, “Thomas Jefferson, among others, was powerfully influenced by Hutchinson and the Common Sense school.”¹⁶

Jefferson identified “the core consensus of the American community, or *Americanism*” as *common sense*. He coined the term *Americanism* in “a letter to Edward Rutledge of June 24, 1797, in which he spoke of ‘the dictates of reason and pure Americanism.’” Vico explained, “Common sense is judgment without reflection shared by an entire class, an entire people, an entire nation, or the human race.”¹⁷

It was Francis Hutchinson that had written that “all men are originally equal, and they have equal capacities for judging whether rules are good or bad.” His writing impacted Jefferson’s ideas on “property, rights, and the social nature of men.” Jefferson’s view of “natural rights” corresponded completely with Scottish Enlightenment thinking.¹⁸ William Small would be an important mentor in the formative years of the influential Virginian, but he would not be the only significant Scottish Enlightenment influence.

Jefferson used the phrase *common sense* often in his writing. To Jeremiah Moore, he wrote, “I have a great confidence in the *common sense* of mankind in general.” To John Adams he wrote, concerning the upcoming Constitutional convention, “I can never fear that things will

¹⁵ Op. cit., Wills, p. 149.

¹⁶ Op. cit., McDonald, p. 55.

¹⁷ Op. cit., Sandoz, p. 38.

¹⁸ Op. cit., Wills, p. 237.

go far wrong where *common sense* has fair play.” In his reflection on what he wrote in the Declaration of Independence, he commented that he was “merely expressing the *common sense* of the subject.”¹⁹ In each of these instances he was expressing in succinct fashion his belief that men have in common the capacity to reason reliably and to come to judgments concerning what is good and what is bad.

Jefferson’s Republicanism

Thomas Jefferson defined a Republic in a letter he wrote to John Taylor of Caroline, explaining that it was “a government by its citizens in mass, acting directly and personally according to rules established by the majority.” Later, he would elaborate on the necessity of a representative system in a Republic. He wrote in 1823, “...government by the people, acting not in person, but by representatives...”²⁰

Further, Jefferson advocated the need for the Rule of Law in any Republic that could be expected to last. The word coined by the Founding Fathers to express this concept was *constitutionalism*.²¹ He wrote in 1803, “Our peculiar security is in the possession of a written Constitution.” To Robert Livingston he later explained, “The Constitution was meant to be Republican, and we believe it to be

¹⁹ Foley, John P., ed., *The Jefferson Cyclopaedia—A Comprehensive Collection of the Views of Thomas Jefferson*, Vol. 1, New York, New York: Russell & Russell, 1967:166.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, vol. 2, p. 237.

²¹ *Op. cit.*, Sandoz, p. 53.

Republican.”²² Thomas Jefferson was a constitutional Republican who understood the need for the Rule of Law and beyond this, the necessity for statutory or positive law (the Constitution) to conform to Natural Law.

Jefferson’s Republicanism is often explained in the context of his opposition to the Federalism of men like Treasury Secretary Alexander Hamilton and Second President John Adams. As he moved toward running against Adams in the 1800 presidential election, he began to formulate what would in effect become the Democratic-Republican party platform. He stated that he was:

“for preserving to the States the powers not yielded by them to the Union...and I am not for transferring all the powers of the States to the General Government, and all those of the government to the executive branch. I am for a government rigorously frugal and simple, applying all the possible savings of the public revenue to the discharge of the national debt; and not for the multiplication of officers and salaries merely to make partisans, and for increasing, by every device, the public debt, on the principle of its being a public blessing. I am for free

²² Op. cit., vol. 1, p. 190, 193.

commerce with all nations; political connections with none; and little or no diplomatic establishment.”²³

The statement above can be condensed to five bedrock principles of Jefferson’s Republicanism:

1. the *locus* of federal power would be at the state level rather than the national level, excepting those functions of government which must be executed at the national level, i.e. national defense
2. balanced budget government and the avoidance of or elimination of deficit spending
3. free trade and either no or low tariffs
4. the avoidance of international treaties which would tend to overrule American statutory law or self-interests
5. minimal international bureaucracy and avoidance of too much institutionalization in the practice of foreign relations

These five principles contrasted dramatically with the ideas of Federalist Alexander Hamilton, and to a lesser extent, President John Adams.

²³ Rutland, Robert Allen, *The Democrats—From Jefferson to Clinton*, Columbia, Missouri: Louisiana State University Press, 1995: 15-16.

In addition to the principles enumerated above, Jefferson's *constitutionalism* implicitly militated against a loose constructionist view of the Constitution. That is not to say that he believed the Constitution was beyond amending; in fact, he wrote with sarcasm of those who thought the Constitution was "too sacred to be touched." However, he also wrote, "Our peculiar security is in the possession of a written Constitution. Let us not make it a blank paper by construction." He believed the Constitution itself had provided the best means of issuing forth changes, i.e. the amending process, and that the majority of the American people could be trusted with that process.²⁴

Throughout the 1790's, the difference between Hamilton, Adams, and the other Federalists to Jefferson and the Republican-Democratic faction became more and more apparent. The Federalists tended to interpret the Constitution broadly, allowing for the expansion of the power and role of the national government. Jefferson and the other Democratic-Republicans "insisted upon a limited role for the general (national) government." The Federalists "sought government policies which promoted manufacturing" while Jefferson and his followers "leaned heavily toward free trade and free enterprise."²⁵

Jefferson's strong *states' rights* position (the first principle listed above) would become most evident in his response to the Adams' administration's Alien and Sedition Acts. The Sedition Act of 1798

²⁴ Op. cit., vol. 1, p. 199.

²⁵ Op. cit., Carsen, p. 245.

rendered it a crime to “write, present, utter, or publish...any false, scandalous, and malicious writing or writing against the government of the United States, or either house of the Congress of the United States, or the President of the United States with an intent to defame (them)...or to bring them...into contempt or disrepute.” Jefferson and fellow Virginian James Madison responded quickly to this threat to Republican rights and liberties with two resolutions. Jefferson authored the Kentucky Resolution and Madison the Virginia Resolution. The Resolutions propounded the right of a state government to *interpose* itself between the overreaching national government and *nullify* any enactment of the national government which the individual state viewed to be unconstitutional.²⁶

The Kentucky Resolution which Jefferson authored was much more comprehensive than the Virginia Resolution. Jefferson first asserted that “the Union was founded by a compact among the states, ‘and that the government established by the Constitution was constitutionally limited and that whensoever the general government assumes undelegated powers, its acts are unauthoritative, void, and of no force.’” It also took the position that any powers not delegated to the national government were reserved by the states, hence states had the right of *interposition*.²⁷

²⁶ Op. cit., Shuffelton, p. 3, 40.

²⁷ Op. cit., Carsen, pp. 246-249.

Generally, other states did not immediately join Virginia and Kentucky in their advocacy for *interposition* and *nullification*. However, the position of Jefferson and Madison did establish an understanding of the United States Constitution which would later serve as the justification for secession by champions of Southern independence. The ideas of Jefferson and Madison, evinced in the two historic resolutions, continue to animate *states' rights* advocates in our day.

Jefferson's Religious Sentiment

The generation in which Thomas Jefferson grew to maturity was intensely religious in terms of world-and-life view. All of life tended to be understood as interconnected and interdependent parts of a whole. Historian Sydney Ahlstrom explains that “conceptions of God, man, human rights, the state, and history” were drawn together by the American version of the Scottish Enlightenment.²⁸ Robert Middlekauff explained:

“...The generation that made the Revolution were the children of the twice born, the heirs of this 17th century religious tradition (Puritanism). George Washington,

²⁸ Op. cit., Sandoz, p. 130.

Thomas Jefferson, John Adams, Benjamin Franklin...may not have been men moved by religious passions, but all have been marked by the moral dispositions of a passionate Protestantism. They could not escape the culture: nor did they try. They were imbued with an American moralism that colored their perceptions of politics...their responses—the actions of men who felt that Providence had set them apart for great purposes—gave the Revolution much of its intensity and much of its idealism.”²⁹

The secularist so prominent in our own generation and culture was hardly to be found in 18th century America.

Renowned historian Forest McDonald writes that Jefferson lived in “a society in which almost everyone believed in *a future state of eternal rewards and punishments*.”³⁰ Jefferson, too, always believed in the doctrine of future rewards and punishments, as did the popular deist Benjamin Franklin. Jefferson consistently maintained two other doctrinal beliefs as well, which were central to his religion. He believed that *there is only one God, and he all perfect and that to love God with all thy heart and thy neighbor as thyself is the sum of religion*. He

²⁹ Middlekauff, Robert, *The Glorious Cause—The American Revolution 1763-1789*, Vol. 11, New York, New York: Oxford University Press, 1982:48.

³⁰ Op. cit., McDonald, p. 54.

called his religious system *Christianism*, which may be more accurately termed “rationalistic Unitarianism.”³¹

Jefferson was reared in the Anglican Church. His father served on the Anglican Church’s vestry and probably had him baptized as an infant, though no record exists to prove this. He continued to attend church service for most of his life, though, as a teenager, he ceased to believe the fundamentals of the Christian faith. The most influential minister or theologian in Jefferson’s adult life was Joseph Priestley, a Unitarian. He was particularly interested in Priestley’s books, *History of the Corruptions of Christianity* and *History of Early Opinion Concerning Jesus Christ*. He attended Priestley’s church for a time in the 1790’s after meeting him in Philadelphia.³²

In his adulthood, his attitude toward church hardened, and he had little regard for organized religion, which he called sectarianism. In spite of this, throughout his life he continued in his appreciation of Jesus as an ethical and moral teacher. He edited his own version of the gospels, expunging any reference to miraculous occurrences or to the deity of Christ. Not surprisingly, he was especially antagonistic toward Calvinism.³³

Regarding the fundamental Christian doctrine of the Trinity, Jefferson wrote to John Adams in 1813:

³¹ Op. cit., Samuelson, p. 147.

³² Ibid., p. 145.

³³ Ibid., p. 146.

“It is too late in the day for me in sincerity to pretend to believe in the Platonic mysticisms that three are one, and one is three; and yet that the one is not three, and the three are not one; to; to divide mankind by a single letter into consubstantialists and like-substantialists.”

He also attacked the clergy in particular,

“But this constitutes the craft, the power and the profit of the priests. Sweep away their gossamer fabrics of factitious religion and they would catch no more flies.”³⁴

In another letter written to John Adams ten years later, he railed against John Calvin:

“I can never join Calvin in addressing his God. He was indeed an atheist, which I can never be; or rather his religion was daemonism. If ever men worshiped a false God, he did. The Being described in his five points is not the God Whom you and I acknowledge and adore, the

³⁴ “Ye Will Say I Am No Christian”—*The Thomas Jefferson/John Adams Correspondence on Religion, Morals, and Values*, ed. Bruce Braden, Amherst, New York: Prometheus Books, 2006: p. 87.

Creator and benevolent Governor of the world; but a daemon of malignant spirit.”³⁵

Jefferson believed religion was an intensely personal matter. As a consequence, he seldom made public pronouncements on Christianity beyond the religious convention of his day. Exceptions to this are the instances of his personal correspondence. To friends like John Adams and James Madison, he was decidedly frank and evinced the skepticism that is evident above. He wrote to a Unitarian minister, “I rejoice that this blessed country of free inquiry and belief, which has surrendered its creed and conscience to neither kings nor priests, the genuine doctrine of only one God is reviving, and I trust that there is not a young man now living who will not die as a Unitarian.”³⁶ The public religious persona of Jefferson was typical of presidents throughout American history. Outwardly, he was conventional in his religious practices. Privately, he was a Unitarian with deistic leanings.

Jefferson and the Separation of Church and State

Thomas Jefferson’s religious sentiments have long challenged those wishing to understand his view of church and state. He often seemed ambivalent when addressing church and state issues. For example,

³⁵ Ibid., p. 220.

³⁶ Holmes, David L., *The Faiths of the Founding Fathers*, New York, New York: Oxford University Press, 2006:88.

immediately after the Continental Congress approved the Declaration of Independence, that body “charged...him...with designing an official national seal.” Jefferson suggested an image of the ‘children of Israel in the wilderness led by a cloud by day and a pillar (of fire) by night.’”³⁷ His suggestion was ultimately rejected, but it reflected a view of America more consonant with John Winthrop’s *a city set on a hill* than what might be supposed from the author of the *Bill for Establishing Religious Freedom* of 1779.

Jefferson introduced the *Bill for Establishing Religious Freedom* while serving as Governor of Virginia. In it he sought to eliminate any formal relationship between established religion and government, eliminate public financial support for religious organizations, and prohibit punishing those openly professing irreligion or anti-religious sentiment. He wrote:

“We the General Assembly of Virginia do enact, that no man shall be compelled to frequent or support a 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 belief but that all men shall be free to profess, and by argument to maintain their opinions in matters of religion,

³⁷ Op. cit., Gragg, p. 41.

and that the same shall in no wise diminish, enlarge, or affect their civil capacities...”

The bill was not approved until much later, when Madison proposed a revised version in 1785.³⁸

Thomas Jefferson’s view of church-state relations is most often associated with the *wall of separation* metaphor which he used in a letter to the Baptists of Danbury, Connecticut. The Danbury Baptist Association was an alliance including some twenty-six churches. They represented “a religious minority in a state where Congregationalism was the established church.” He wrote to assure the Baptists of his intention to protect their right to practice the Christian faith according to their convictions, without interference from the state. He explained:

“Believing with you that religion is a matter which is solely between man and his God, that he owes account to none other for his faith or his worship, that the legitimate powers of government reach actions of, and not opinions, I contemplate with sovereign reverence that act of the whole American people which dictates that the legislature should make no law separating an establishment of religion, or

³⁸ Adamson, Barry, *Freedom of Religion—the First Amendment and the Supreme Court*, Gretna, Louisiana: Pelican Publishing Company, Inc., 2008:35-36.

prohibiting the free exercise thereof,' thus building a wall of separation between Church and State."³⁹

His convictions reflected in the use of the metaphor have been misappropriated by activist Supreme Court justices in some prominent landmark cases. Further, the metaphor itself is popularly assumed to be found in the Constitution, though it actually originated in President Jefferson's personal correspondence.

Jefferson's mixed feelings regarding the church-state issue can be observed in his attendance at a worship service in the Hall of the House of Representatives on Sunday, January 3, just two days after writing the letter cited above. His enthusiastic participation in a worship service on public or State property clearly contradicts the perception created by a supposed sacrosanct wall of separation between church and state.⁴⁰

In November 1779, as Governor of Virginia, Jefferson had issued a public "Proclamation Approving a Day of Publick and Solemn Thanksgiving and Prayer." In the body of the Proclamation, he declares that "thanksgiving" ought to be offered to "Almighty God, for his mercies and of prayer...that he would grant to his church, the plentiful effusion of divine grace, and pour out his holy spirit on all Ministers of the gospel."⁴¹ This was, of course a proclamation given in the midst of the War for

³⁹ Dreisbach, Daniel L., *Thomas Jefferson and the Wall of Separation Between Church and State*, New York, New York: New York University Press, 2002: 17, 23.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 21.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 138.

Independence from Great Britain, but it does illustrate Jefferson's apparent ambivalence regarding the relationship between church and state.

Jefferson's primary concerns regarding the separation of church and state were to guard against the tendency of the national Congress to interfere in the states' constitutional jurisdiction and thus the religious liberties of the citizens of the various states. This was the original intent of the First Amendment, i.e. the *Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof...*" Jefferson did not fear the individual states' power and authority over its citizens, but he was justifiably concerned about the enlargement of a Federalist inspired national government and the potential threat it posed to religious freedom.

Jefferson the Agrarian

Jefferson was an agrarian by disposition and by conviction. He was a Virginian and a son of the South before all else. Richard Weaver explained that "the South developed as an agricultural region...the type of society which...was patterned on an order then declining in Europe," i.e., a feudal system.⁴² The Southern plantation was the manifestation of the

⁴² Weaver, Richard M., *The Southern Tradition at Bay—A History of Postbellum Thought*, Washington, DC: Regnery Gateway, 1989:32.

agrarian mindset—a paradigm that viewed vocation as a reflection of one’s *weltanschauung*.

Beyond the model of feudal Europe, the old Roman republic continued to inform the agrarian impulse in Jefferson’s generation. One historian wrote:

“the Roman republic was a nation of citizen-farmers, and Roman national ideology glorified the rural past and its values...the Romans themselves made the connection between small farmers and national greatness...”⁴³

At the outbreak of the American Revolution, “nine out of ten people were farmers” in the American colonies.⁴⁴

Jefferson himself would write to John Jay in 1785 that “Cultivators of the earth are the most valuable citizens...the most vigorous...independent...virtuous...” and consequently the best defenders of liberty and independence.⁴⁵ He believed that the early American Republic would survive and prosper as long as America’s economy was primarily “agricultural.”⁴⁶ This love of agriculture and of farming was in marked contrast to Jefferson’s view of city life. He wrote to Dr. Benjamin

⁴³ Thornton, Bruce S., *Vital Remnants—America’s Founding and Western Traditions*, ed. Gary Gregg II, Wilmington, Delaware: ISI Books, 1999:40.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 36.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 60.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 46.

Rush in 1800 that he viewed the “great cities as pestilential to the morals, the health, and the liberties if man.” To M. Piclet in 1803, he wrote that “the inhabitants of commercial cities are clamorous against the order of things (republicanism) established by the agricultural interest.” He counseled a nephew seeking a suitable wife to avoid girls brought up in cities.⁴⁷

Politically, Jefferson’s antipathy toward industrialization and the growth and influence of large cities was evident in his conflict with Federalism and especially with Secretary of the Treasury Alexander Hamilton. The Secretary was an early advocate for national policies which would benefit large merchants and manufacturers, particularly in the Northeast where the Federalist Party was the strongest. Possessing a shrewd and sophisticated financial mind, Hamilton encouraged President Washington toward policies which would expand “the supply of money with a paper currency.” Jefferson believed that money backed by gold or silver would force discipline on the government and benefit the national economy ultimately. The Federalist vision for the early Republic would peak with President John Adams’ administration and decline with the election of Thomas Jefferson in 1800.⁴⁸ It would re-emerge later in the 19th century with Abraham Lincoln and be predominate in 20th century America, even to the present.

⁴⁷ Op. cit., p. 144.

⁴⁸ Op. cit., Carsen, p. 226-229.

Jefferson's First Inaugural

Thomas Jefferson was the first of the Presidents to be “inaugurated in the new capitol of Washington, D.C.” The ceremony took place in the “oval-shaped Senate chamber” with an over-flowing crowd present. Jefferson’s inaugural contrasted sharply with that of George Washington in New York and with that of John Adams in Philadelphia. His predecessors had been transported to the inaugural site in elaborate carriages, and both men wore swords to the ceremonies. Jefferson walked the distance from the boarding house in which he resided to the Capitol building. According to one observer, “His dress was as usual, that of a plain citizen, without any distinctive body of office.”⁴⁹

Jefferson’s Republicanism was evident in the simplicity and style by which he chose to assume office. South Carolinian and Federalist Congressman Robert Goodloe Harper describes in detail the scene and tone of the President’s inaugural ceremony:

“The whole ceremony was conducted with the utmost propriety. As one of those who had not supported the new President in the election, there was no unbecoming exultation; so his opposers manifested by their behavior, a chearful (sic) acquiescence in the decision of the majority.

⁴⁹ Cunningham, Noble E. Jr., *The Inaugural Addresses of President Thomas Jefferson in 1801 and 1805*, Columbia, Missouri: University of Missouri Press, 2001:1.

They attended the ceremony; and after it concluded, they paid a visit to the President, to express their respect to him as the Chief Magistrate of the nation, and their readiness to support him in the proper exercise of his authority. The speech which he delivered previous to his taking the oath, was well calculated to inspire these sentiments, and to afford the hope of such an administration as may conduce to his own glory and the public good. Before the evening all was quiet, as if no change had taken place.⁵⁰

Here Jefferson the President exemplifies what he conceived of as the Republican ideal for the leader of the new Republic.

In his address, the new President expressed the magnanimity necessary for any democratic republic to survive the change from one administration to another. He declared:

“During the contest of opinion through which we have past, the animation of discussions and exertions has sometimes worn an aspect which might impose on strangers unused to think freely, and to speak and write what they think.”

⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 2.

Here he was describing the antagonism evinced during the election *campaign* between the Federalists and the Democratic-Republicans, which had degenerated into vicious *ad hominem* attacks. He continued:

“But every difference of opinion is not a difference of principle. We have called by different names brethren of the same principle. We are all Republicans; we are all Federalists...I know that some honest men fear that a Republican government cannot be strong, that this government is not strong enough. But would the honest patriot in the full tide of successful experiment abandon a government which has so far kept us free and firm...”⁵¹

The newly elected President affirmed the transcendent Republican principles which ought to provide security and continuity, regardless of partisan opinions.

Jefferson’s second inaugural took place on March 4, 1805, again in the Senate chamber. But it would attract much less attention than the first, and the speech he delivered would be less illustrative of his political principles than that given in 1801. By his own comment he explained, the first had been “an exposition of the principles of which I thought it my duty to administer the government.” He went on to

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

remark that it was his intention that the second inaugural speech would provide details of how he had applied those principles during his first term.⁵²

Epilogue

Thomas Jefferson requested that only three things be noted on the gravestone sitting atop his gravesite. He instructed that he be identified as the “Author of the Declaration of Independence, of the statute of Virginia for religious freedom, and Father of the University of Virginia.”⁵³ These achievements evidently were much more important to Jefferson than were the various positions of public office he had held or the accomplishments he attained in each office. Even this discretion demonstrated his desire to maintain Republican simplicity, for which he hoped to be remembered by subsequent generations of Americans—indeed, all posterity.

He was a man of erudition and broad and varied interests. There is a story, perhaps apocryphal, illustrating the depth and scope of Jefferson the man. President John F. Kennedy was having dinner with several Nobel laureates. He looked around the table and quipped that never had so much talent and intelligence been gathered at the presidential table at

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 75.

⁵³ Cunningham, Noble E., Jr., *In Pursuit of Reason—The Life of Thomas Jefferson*, Baton Rouge, Louisiana: Louisiana State University Press, 1987:349.

one time since Jefferson dined there alone. There is much truth in Kennedy's tease.

As impressive as Jefferson's education and erudition might be, the manner in which he put these to practical effect in the service of his country is even more noteworthy. In him one sees the theoretical and the practical united to the benefit of his countrymen. He used his grasp of universal truths and principles, natural law as it were, in working out a *common sense* approach to public life. His loose subscription to Scottish Common Sense philosophy did not manifest itself in the emanations of an ideologue, but rather in the substantive political activity and work of a Founding Father. His Republicanism did provide the principles on which a political party, Democratic-Republicans, would be founded. Yet, in his governance and execution of the high office of president of the young Republic, he broadened his conception of Republicanism, allowing for peace and unity at a crucial moment in American history.

Jefferson had genuine religious principles and convictions, many of which he held in common with orthodox Christians, yet he was not a Christian. His rationalism and skepticism stressed and pushed against the theistic framework from which he viewed the world, accounting for some of the apparent contradictions and inconsistencies of his public comments regarding religion. His religious deficiencies became evident in his willingness to cater to the religious conventions of his day,

rationalizing no doubt, that some pragmatism was necessary for political success. It is also possible that these deficiencies created a vulnerability to significant moral lapses in his personal life.

There is no reason to deny that Jefferson was a champion for the separation of church and state. Notwithstanding this, he never advocated the separation of an individual's religious convictions from the public square, as contemporary secularists are wont to do. Jefferson was more or less of one mind with his contemporaries in understanding the First Amendment as a means of protecting an individual's liberty to put into practice his religious convictions without interference from the State, and to prohibit the establishment of a national or State church. He was no friend to the religious establishment of his own state of Virginia, Anglicanism, prior to and throughout the Revolutionary War, but he was not especially concerned with religious establishment at the state level. He, along with most of the founding generation, would offer the right of emigration from one state to another as the remedy to disaffection with one's home state.

Perhaps no other aspect of Jefferson's personality pointed to his Republican principles as clearly as his agrarianism. For him, Republicanism and agrarianism were inseparable. Throughout the time of his public service, which necessitated the absence from his plantation for years on end, he longed to return to the simplicity of farming and providing oversight to the other agricultural work at Monticello.

Thomas Jefferson was the exemplar of American Republicanism. He personified much of the best of Republican principles and ideals and, perhaps more than any of the other Founding Fathers excepting George Washington and James Madison, was integral and irreplaceable to the establishment of the early American Republic.

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