Part One
The Legacy
The Problematic Heritage of European Education

We will best appreciate the depth of the difficulties the Founders confronted when they turned their thoughts to education if we begin by considering the manifold and problematic educational legacy they inherited from the past. This legacy had been deeply influential in the Founders' own education and represented the natural point of departure for their reflections. Yet they recognized that the previously authoritative notions of education, including many of the notions on which they themselves had been bred, were at some tension not only with one another but, graver still, with the ethos of the new American democratic republic. The paramount educational challenge the Founding generation faced was that of preparing future generations to become democratic citizens who would sustain a regime of individual freedoms as well as responsible self-rule; and no fully satisfactory model of such a program was to be found in either the colonial past or its cultural matrix, the heritage of educational practice and theory derived from Europe.

For Americans in the eighteenth century, it was of course Western Europe that was the source from which learning and education emanated; and Western Europe, from the American perspective, was dominated by two kindred but competing political and cultural centers: Paris and London (with Edinburgh as a rather independent satellite). Great Britain naturally exercised the strongest influence over its colonists or former colonists, but France represented, especially in matters of education and culture, a major alternative. Montesquieu's authority as an educational as well as a political theorist was surpassed only by that of John Locke. The French nation had sided decisively with the Americans in their revolution, and a number of remarkable Frenchmen had fought beside the Americans as comrades in arms. Some of the Founders who were most preoccupied with educational questions—Franklin and Jefferson in particular—lived for years in Paris. They partook of French culture with zest and appreciation, forming close and enduring friendships with French aristocrats. They traveled exten-
sively in France, witnessing firsthand both the charms and the blights of the “Old World.”

Yet the American Revolution opened a fissure not only with England but with Europe generally, with repercussions not only in education but in culture as a whole. Noah Webster expressed the point somewhat dramatically in 1783, in the introduction to the school textbook he published as a contribution to the creation of a new, indigenous American education in language skills.

Previously to the late war, America preserved the most unshaken attachment to Great-Britain: The king, the constitution, the laws, the commerce, the fashions, the books and even the sentiments of Englishmen were implicitly supposed to be the best on earth. . . . But . . . the political views of America have suffered a total change. . . . We find Englishmen practicing upon very erroneous maxims in politics and religion; and possibly we shall find, upon careful examination, that their methods of education are equally erroneous and defective. . . . Europe is grown old in folly, corruption and tyranny—in that country laws are perverted, manners are licentious, literature is declining and human nature debased. For America in her infancy to adopt the present maxims of the old world, would be to stamp the wrinkles of decrepid age upon the bloom of youth and to plant the seeds of decay in a vigourous constitution.

Four years later, at the time of the ratification of the Constitution, Webster closed his essay “On the Education of Youth in America” by appealing to Americans to

unshackle your minds and act like independent beings. You have been children long enough, subject to the control and subservient to the interest of a haughty parent. You have now an interest of your own to augment and defend: you have an empire to raise and support by your exertions and a national character to establish and extend by your wisdom and virtues. To effect these great objects, it is necessary to frame a liberal plan of policy and build it on a broad system of education. Before this system can be formed and embraced, the Americans must believe and act from the belief that it is dishonorable to waste life in mimicking the follies of other nations and basking in the sunshine of foreign glory.

Benjamin Rush begins his “Address to the American People,” published originally in January 1787 in the American Museum, by complaining that “there is nothing more common, than to confound the terms of American Revolution with those of the late American War.” The “American war,” Rush goes on to explain,
“is over; but this is far from being the case with the American Revolution. On the contrary, nothing but the first act of the great drama is closed. It remains yet to establish and perfect our new forms of government, and to prepare the principles, morals, and manners of our citizens for these forms of government, after they are established and brought to perfection.” As Rush’s words indicate, it remained to be seen whether the cultural revolution was to be as successful as the military one. Initially, there was at least as much evidence of disintegration as there was of new inspiration or construction. Yet despite the loss of cultural moorings, Americans were inclined to the view that when it came to education there was no turning back to Europe, or at least to European practice.

If we are to ascend to the most fully reasoned analysis that informs this judgment, we need to turn to that educational and political theorist whom Webster repeatedly cites as authoritative: “the great Montesquieu.” For his understanding of the European spirit, and especially the spirit of European educational institutions, Webster, like so many of his contemporaries, takes his bearings from the Spirit of the Laws. There Montesquieu analyzes the “Old World” of Europe, the world whose spirit so deeply shaped the Founding generation’s own breeding, as a culture descended from feudalism and largely shaped by two coexisting and competing spiritual sources: hereditary nobility and Christianity.

European Education Grounded on Aristocratic Honor

According to Montesquieu, it is from its chivalric aristocratic heritage that European secular education has received its “soul,” or “animating passion.” That passion is “honor”: a deep sense of prideful personal dignity, intimately bound up with a keen sensitivity to one’s social place and rank within a rather rigid hereditary class structure. The code of honor is most brilliantly evident in the upper classes, but it spawns a preoccupation with personal and group dignity or prestige that permeates society, reaching down to the lowest echelons.

Montesquieu does not hesitate to unveil the injustice, conventionality, sloth, vanity, and dishonesty that lurk beneath the glittering surface of the European code of honor. But he insists nonetheless that education in honor plays a highly constructive role in a well-functioning monarchic society. So long as a social and political system reflects the principle of honor, it will be a system in which despotism is checked by competing centers of lawful power and authority. Honor generates and thrives on antagonism, but that antagonism also draws individuals together in a multitude of traditional family, class, regional, professional, and religious communities. Above all, honor breeds a specific sort of civic responsibility—one that is animated, broadened, and made farsighted by the sublimely selfish quest for a share in glory. As the conservative Virginian
Carter Braxton puts it in a remarkable essay inspired by Montesquieu, “In a monarchy limited by laws the people are insensibly led to the pursuit of honour, they feel an interest in the greatness of their princes, [and] unite in giving strength and energy to the whole machine.” Montesquieu’s great disciple William Blackstone, author of the widely read and authoritative Commentaries on the Laws of England, was more enthusiastic in summarizing for English-speaking peoples the importance of education in honor.

The distinction of rank and honours is necessary in every well-governed state ... exciting thereby an ambitious yet laudable ardor, and generous emulation in others. And emulation, or virtuous ambition, is a spring of action which, however dangerous or invidious in a mere republic or under a despotic sway, will certainly be attended with good effects under a monarchy. . . . Such a spirit, when nationally diffused, gives life and vigour to the community; it sets all the wheels of government in motion . . . and thereby every individual may be made subservient to the public good, while he principally means to promote his own particular views.  

But if the Founders were well tutored in the advantages of honor for a monarchic system, they saw with unsentimental clarity how unsuited was this principle—and any education founded mainly on it—to a democratic system, or to what Blackstone dismissed as “a mere republic.” No doubt monarchic honor could and would continue to play some role in the moral ethos of the new nation, but if honor was to survive as a wellspring for the American civic consciousness and education, it would have to be reconceived along republican lines. For this task, the conception of honor handed down from the republics of antiquity proved far more useful than the version available in contemporary European life. The Federalist Papers, in which the notion of honor has a significant part, strike the new keynote.  

We shall later investigate how some notable Founders, especially George Washington, attempted to carry further the reconception of honor and direct it toward more explicit educational goals. But first we need to recognize how limited in applicability the contemporary European idea of education rooted in honor was bound to seem to anyone thoughtfully considering moral and civic education in postrevolutionary America.

Christian Education: The Fear of Roman Catholicism

The alternative, religious pillar of European education appeared to offer more to the fledgling republic in the way of educational guidance. Yet it was by no means obvious that traditional Christian education harmonized with republicanism,
and especially with the unprecedented form of republicanism aimed at in the American Founding. To begin with, it was not easy to free European Christian education from its feudal, aristocratic encrustations. As John Adams lamented in his "Dissertation on the Canon and the Feudal Law," the established church institutions of Europe—and not least the Anglican church that still exerted considerable influence in many of the colonies, especially Virginia—had become deeply imbued with the aristocratic principles of hierarchy and unrepresentative honor."

But the religious threat to which Americans in the Founding period were most keenly alive was the one that they saw posed by Roman Catholic education. Nowadays, and especially in the United States, we find it difficult to comprehend the profound suspicion with which Roman Catholicism was once regarded by principal Founders as well as by many of their English forebears. The Catholic church in the twentieth century has stood as an impressive bulwark against Marxist totalitarianism—particularly in Eastern Europe. Within the United States, the parochial school system has served as an essential refuge for discipline, decency, and intellectual standards in an era when the public school system in urban areas has verged on moral collapse. But we forget, or, as Americans, we never experienced in its most shocking forms, the vast political and educational designs—defensive as well as offensive—of the papacy and the Jesuits in the days when the memory of religious warfare, with all its atrocities on both sides, was still fresh. It is easy to forget how late in the day it was before the papacy finally made its peace with "modernism" or liberalism and, above all, how severe and lasting were the struggles throughout Europe over the role of the church in education. As the historian A. J. P. Taylor has put it, in the context of a discussion of Bismarck's *Kulturkampf* with the Roman Catholic church:

The modern liberal state came everywhere into conflict with the Church. Education, for instance, could be a matter for compromise so long as it was limited to a few. It was bound to cause bitter dispute as soon as it became universal; and after 1871 universal elementary education was everywhere the order of the day. Disputes over religious education dominated the politics of every European country in the last thirty years of the nineteenth century—not merely Germany, but England, France, Belgium, and Austria-Hungary, to name a few at random."

Certainly among Americans of the Founding era the view was widespread that the political and educational role of the Roman Catholic church in Europe had tended to promote, at least in the most recent centuries, despotic ambition in the few, supine slavishness among the many, and hypocrisy, conspiracy, and cruelty generally. The papacy disavowed the quest for temporal suzerainty; but
again and again (and not least in the course of English history) it had intervened to undermine the legitimacy of non-Catholic rulers and boost that of Catholics, seeming to show a tireless energy in defending and advancing the political power of its admittedly often persecuted adherents. Locke, in his famous *Letter Concerning Toleration* (1689), had suggested that so long as the Roman church continued to resemble Islam, inspiring in its adherents a divisive and subversive political allegiance to the papacy, Catholicism could not be afforded the protection of toleration. echoing Locke, Samuel Adams wrote in 1772:

In regard to religion, mutual toleration in the different professions thereof, is what all good and candid minds in all ages have ever practiced; ... Mr. Lock has asserted, and proved beyond the possibility of contradiction on any solid ground, that such toleration ought to be extended to all whose doctrines are not subversive of society. ... The Roman Catholicks or Papists are excluded by reason of such doctrines as these: that princes excommunicated may be deposed, and those they call Hereticks may be destroyed without mercy; besides their recognizing the Pope in so absolute a manner, in subversion of Government, by introducing as far as possible into the states, under whose protection they enjoy life, liberty, and property, that solecism in politics, Imperium in imperio, a Government within a Government, leading directly to the worst anarchy and confusion, civil discord, war and blood shed.

Two years later, on 21 October 1774, the Continental Congress complained to "the people of Great Britain" for allowing Parliament to make Roman Catholicism the established religion of Quebec—"a religion, fraught with sanguinary and impious tenets, ... that has deluged your island in blood, and dispersed bigotry, persecution, murder and rebellion through every part of the world." The Congress likewise protested Parliament's opening Quebec to more Catholic immigrants, "fit instruments in the hands of power, to reduce the free Protestant colonies to the same state of slavery with themselves.

Yet because the Americans were, at least in the late eighteenth century, under no immediate threat from the vicinity of powerful Catholic states, and because the colonies contained only a small minority of Catholics, who at any rate were quiescent and comparatively liberal, the fear of active Catholic subversion and tyranny remained abstract and somewhat histrionic. More concrete was the Founders' unease at the hierarchical and authoritarian character of the Catholic priesthood and the education it seemed to attempt to inculcate in the people. As they gloomily observed the struggle for liberty in South America, and the apparent incapacity of the people to escape their tutelage to a priesthood that allied itself with undemocratic government, Adams and Jefferson felt driven to
wonder, “Can a free Government possibly exist with a Roman Catholic Religion?”  

The Church of England

For many Americans in the eighteenth century, respectable religion meant the established religion, the Church of England. The meaning and the educational function of “established religion,” and therefore the arguments in support of it as an institution, had undergone a long and complex evolution since the term was first introduced. Originally, the term established religion referred to the new situation created by the founding of the Episcopal Church of England by Henry VIII and Elizabeth. The monarch, associated in some crucial matters with Parliament, replaced the pope as the head of the religious hierarchy and either confiscated or became final arbiter of all the possessions of the church—including, in particular, the previously Catholic educational system. Henceforth the bishops, who sat with other nobles in the House of Lords, were appointed by, or through the authority of, the throne, and no changes could be effected in church doctrine except by sanction of an act of Parliament.

Initially, then, religious “establishment” was an English institution directed square against Roman Catholicism and Roman Catholic education and, more obliquely, against the perceived ambitions of various Protestant sects to control education. Only later and gradually did the notion of “establishment of religion” become relaxed and broadened to include officially supported Catholic or non-Episcopalian Protestant denominations in other countries (notably, the Presbyterian church as the “Established Kirk of Scotland” in 1690). And only much later, in particular in some of the American states, did “establishment” connote state support for multiple sects, irrespective of their power over education of the young.

Religious establishment in its original sense came to be fervently embraced in the seventeenth century by English advocates of the divine right of kings, like Sir Robert Filmer; but it received an earlier and much more sober and profound justification in the Elizabethan masterpiece of theology and political theory, Richard Hooker’s Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity (1594). Hooker, a disciple of Thomas Aquinas, transplanted the Thomistic synthesis of biblical and Aristotelian political theory into the Anglican communion. Hooker supported, with fervor but also with some melancholy, the newly established national church as the best means of saving sensible Christian piety and Aristotelian politics in a dire age “full of tongue and weak of brain.” He saw piety, education, and civic spirit mortally threatened, and not only by Roman Catholicism. There was in addition the poor morale, waning faith, and moral laxity poisoning the clergy.
and the laity within the Church of England itself. Still graver, in some respects, was the danger in the Calvinist or Presbyterian reaction, for in Hooker’s eyes, much of this reformist zeal represented a lurch toward fanatic biblical theocracy and moralism, insufficiently advised and checked by reason and respect for tradition. Last, and in a way most sinister of all, Hooker discerned in the spiritual underbrush around him the growth of a new, sophisticated atheism, eager to take advantage of the disarray within Christendom caused by the Reformation. The great fountainhead of the new atheism was that “wise malignant,” Machiavelli, who taught that all religion ought to be conceived as a manmade instrument of political education or indoctrination that could be used to work on the people’s fears in order to make them more law-abiding and pliant in the hands of their “wiser” atheist rulers.

Hooker argues that a state-sponsored religion is necessary for good government because good government requires just men in office. Justice requires the devotion of the individual to the common good; justice, especially among public officials, policemen, and soldiers, demands transcendence, and sometimes even sacrifice, of self-interest. The experience of the centuries teaches that, apart from a heroic or saintly few, officials and citizens cannot be relied upon to overcome self-interest unless they believe the command to do so is divinely sanctioned, unless they see office as a sacred trust. Yet experience also shows that no religion will long endure if it cannot be believed in as the true religion—and believed in by the highest authorities and rulers, not just by the “ignorant” masses. One may, in Machiavellian fashion, hoodwink the common people, but the “ignorant” masses—who, Hooker insists, are not so ignorant as the Machiavellians suppose—will not remain hoodwinked for very long. Hooker therefore dismisses as “a strange kind of madness” the Machiavellians’ attempt to treat religion as merely a useful tool in the hands of unbelieving but shrewd leaders.

Christianity, then, is uniquely beneficial to political life above all because it is the true religion, the only religion which requires no lies. In addition, since it was not invented by men for worldly purposes, Christianity is not a mercenary religion, and the civic virtues it supports and inspires are not merely utilitarian. This indeed is one great testimony to the truth of Christianity: Christianity is the only faith that adequately responds to the human soul’s deepest moral and spiritual longing—for a meaning, task, and destiny that cannot be reduced to mundane calculation of interest.

A just society, Hooker argues, is sincerely and actively concerned not simply with the material but primarily with the spiritual welfare of its citizens; and the welfare of the spirit means the eternal salvation of the soul through Christian repentance and love. A politics that fails to make such redemption its highest priority is neglecting the genuine well-being of its citizenry. In the final analysis,
such a politics is one of indifference rather than of love, of collective selfishness rather than of fraternal justice.

On the other side, establishment of religion is essential to the health of religion itself. If Christianity is to maintain its moral force, a world dominated by economic and political might, the church must have solid economic and legal buttresses. If Christian belief is to be honored by all and successfully implanted in the young, it must be exemplified in the most honored public officials and instilled through public as well as private education. Moreover, adults are not so different from youths when it comes to what imbues them with a sense of respect: they will reliably respect and obey only that authority whose word is backed up by the capacity to coerce.

Last but not least, if priests and bishops are to be truly pious, then they must be men of good works, and politics is the place for the doing of good works. No doubt bishops and lower clergy need to enter the political arena with a special sense of caution. They must be wary of the vices of ambition that have corroded Roman Catholicism. Yet the higher episcopacy should aim at attaining an economic wealth and political preeminence that makes them the highest estate of the realm, in the first rank of the nobility. In the House of Lords, the bishops should play an active part in maintaining the balance of power between monarch and Parliament, Commons and Lords. The clergy should conceive itself to be the conscience of society, and bishops should make that conscience vocal, especially in the realm of education and educational policy. Ecclesiastical courts, governed by canon law, should retain and defend their full traditional jurisdiction. Dissenting views based on the Scriptures are to be tolerated but not encouraged. Heretical views that deny the Trinity, Creation, Providence, Resurrection, or Heaven and Hell are to be actively discouraged. As for idolatry and atheism, they are to be ruthlessly rooted out.

One may well wonder whether the Church of England, from its inception in the machinations of Henry VIII and Thomas Cromwell, was not inspired as much by a Machiavellian as by a Hookerian spirit. Certainly many of the philosophers of the subsequent century who spoke for, as well as those who spoke against, the establishment of religion on the English model reflected an outlook expressed most bluntly by John Locke in his *Letter Concerning Toleration*:

The commonwealth seems to me to be a society of men constituted solely for the preservation and advancing of civil goods. Civil goods I call life, liberty, the integrity and freedom from pain of the body, and the possession of external things, such as estate, money, furniture, and so forth. . . . in truth the whole jurisdiction of the magistrate reaches only to these civil goods, and all civil power, right, and dominion terminates in and is limited to the care and promotion of these things alone.
Those Enlightenment philosophers (such as Montesquieu, David Hume, William Blackstone, and Adam Smith) who praised the English religious establishment tended to do so on the grounds that this establishment made the dominant religion in England tepid, worldly, and undogmatic; at the same time, it tolerated Catholicism and the more fervent Protestant sects, while leaving them under disadvantages that kept them small and fragmented. In other words, the establishment of religion was viewed as a way to soften the dominant religiosity while channeling into harmless rivulets those geysers of religious enthusiasm that inevitably erupt in the populace from time to time.

None of this is meant to deny that there were many fervently pious Anglicans, in America as in old England. But the relative dearth of any educational inspiration or concern arising from Anglicanism in the New World seems to lend some credence to Montesquieu's and Hume's suggestions as to the most widespread consequence of this type of established religion. In those southern states like Virginia where orthodox Anglicanism was strongest, there was little in the way of public or private schooling. The rural dispersion of the population in the South does not by itself explain the relative silence on educational policy, especially in comparison with New England. Indeed, the pattern of settlement of New England—in compact villages rather than scattered farms—was a deliberate decision taken in order to create close-knit communities of educated Christians. The concern or lack of concern with education was as much a cause as it was an effect of the varying patterns of settlement in colonial America.

On the other hand, those rare Anglican political thinkers who did articulate passionate defenses of their religion and its educational mission spelled out a vision of politics, society, and religion that was far too intimately interwoven with European aristocracy to be congenial to the temper of the new American people. The greatest example at the time of the Founding is Edmund Burke, the eloquent friend of the American revolutionaries.

Stung into action by the French Revolution and its assault on traditional religious institutions linked to the crown and the aristocracy, Burke issued a ringing defense of the Church of England. Like Hooker, Burke anchored the case for established religion in the classical republican tradition. But unlike Hooker, Burke stressed the benefits of establishment to political life much more than the benefits to ecclesiastical and contemplative life. Burke also went well beyond both the classical and the Christian traditions in striving to show the harmony between the established religion and the modern preoccupations with economic growth and individual liberty.

Established religion, Burke argues, has an especially important role to play in an age and in a regime grounded on popular sovereignty. For such a religious institution is the surest and sanest check on the inevitable proclivity of the people to neglect its long-range responsibilities to future generations and, worst of all,
to fall prey to the delusion that a people or a majority has the moral right to do as it pleases. Only an educational system guided by a deeply rooted church and staffed by clergymen can be relied upon to insist that the people recall all that it owes to the future and all that it has to learn from a study of the past. Religious establishment is the most reliable source of habits of deference—deference to high moral principle, to venerable traditions, and to men of superior moral and intellectual virtue. At the same time, religious establishment is the most certain way to instill in the more powerful few a sense of their obligations and ultimately humble origins.

This line of argument lays down a plausible and perhaps compelling ground for religious establishment in a mixed or limited monarchy such as the English system. But as Thomas Paine insisted in *The Rights of Man*, his famous reply to Burke, the views here summarized fail to comport with the principles of equality, toleration, and liberation from traditional authority, which Americans believed they had fought for in their Revolution. Besides, the loyalty to the Crown of the Anglican clergy and many of the laity during the Revolution left the Anglican church under a cloud of suspicion. Although at the time of the Founding many Americans remained members of the Anglican communion (two-thirds of the delegates to the Constitutional Convention were at least nominally Episcopalians), Americans found in that allegiance little that could illuminate their educational reflections.

**The Puritans**

Altogether different was the status and significance, for the Founding generation, of the educational heritage derived from the Calvinist wing of the Church of England. Under Cromwell, "Puritanism" had proved its capacity to overthrow traditional monarchy, aristocracy, and church hierarchy—purging educational establishments, especially the universities, in the process. But the Puritans' positive, alternative vision of civic life and education remained ambiguous, particularly in regard to the question of the status of republicanism and the meaning of citizenship. Nothing testifies more vividly to this ambiguity than the remarkable blend of devotion to individual liberation, egalitarianism, and repressive authoritarianism that characterizes the careers of both Oliver Cromwell and John Winthrop—respectively the greatest of the English and American Puritan leaders.

Calvinism called on every individual conscience to struggle, in awareness of the miserable equality of all sinful men before God and under the guidance afforded by constant study of the Scriptures, for inner signs of God's predestined and unmerited election; and then to exemplify that election through energetic
sanctification of the world in public service and laborious vocation. This call dictated an unprecedented concern for education of oneself and one's brethren. As many as possible must become both literate and also trained in some calling, while a few must be afforded the leisure and erudition that would enable them to lead the rest through the intricacies of the sacred word and the thicket of worldly temptations. Accordingly, the first New England colonists had barely settled before they began to establish public schools, and Harvard College was founded within a decade of the establishment of Massachusetts Bay Colony. The curricula of these institutions were by no means limited to biblical or theological studies. Classical languages and literature were judged essential to an informed reading of the Bible and an intelligent judgment of the world.25

Yet the distinctive character of this Calvinist emphasis on education indicates the new foundation for hierarchy and exclusivity. Illumination by faith sets apart the tiny societies of the chosen from the vast unregenerate majority of mankind. Within the company of the chosen, learning and special grace distinguish a God-given elite, which is authorized and obliged to lay down coercive moral and religious legislation.26 No one has captured so well as Ernst Troeltsch the paradox of Calvinism as a social-historical force: its combination of a profoundly pre- or even antimodern central teaching with a capacity to fuel the most vigorous modern social action.

The Calvinist is filled with a deep consciousness of his own value as a person, with the high sense of a Divine mission to the world, of being mercifully privileged among thousands, and in possession of an immeasurable responsibility. This idea of personality, however, which arises out of the idea of predestination, must not be confused with modern individualistic and democratic ideas. Predestination means that the minority, consisting of the best and the holiest souls, is called to bear rule over the majority of mankind, who are sinners.

Writing in 1911, Troeltsch goes on to observe that "down to the present day, the peculiar nature" of the Calvinist conception of community

...stamps the life of the Calvinistic peoples with a unique emphasis on the cultivation of independent personality, which leads to a power of initiative and a sense of responsibility for action, combined with a very strong sense of unity for common, positive ends and values, which are invulnerable on account of their religious character. This explains the fact that all Calvinistic peoples are characterized by individualism and democracy, combined with a strong bias towards authority and a sense of the unchangeable nature of law. ... the Divine Ruler of the world has ordained that some...
should serve, and some should rule, as part of the essence of human life, and not as a result of the Fall.27

As Michael Walzer has shown, the English Puritans, in contrast to the continental (especially Huguenot) Calvinists, forged a powerful revolutionary ethos and organization. The key features of what Walzer calls the “revolution of the saints” included “a well-disciplined citizens’ army in which representative councils arose and ‘agitators’ lectured or preached to the troops, teaching even privates to reflect upon political issues”; the writing and rewriting of constitutions; “the public presentation of whole sets of clamorous demands, many of them from previously passive and nonpolitical men,” for the reorganization of church, state, and educational system; “the formation of groups specifically and deliberately designed to implement these demands, groups based on the principle of voluntary association”; the emergence of a popular and vigorous political journalism; and “above all, the sharp, insistent awareness of the need for and possibility of reform.”28 This revolutionary politics, carried to New England and mitigated and modified over several generations, played an incalculable part in the evolution of the American spirit of stubborn opposition and eventually independence. And yet the mitigations and modifications are at least as important as the original Puritan ethos in the shaping of the distinctive conception of republican politics and citizenship that underlies the American Constitution.

The classic American Puritan statement on democracy and the relations between church and state is that of John Cotton—whose “many writings on church polity were,” in Perry Miller’s words, “looked upon both in New England and in England as the standard expositions of the Congregational system.”

It is better that the commonwealth be fashioned to the setting forth of God’s house, which is the church: than to accommodate the church frame to the civil state. Democracy, I do not conceive that ever God did ordain as a fit government either for church or commonwealth. If the people be governors, who shall be governed? As for monarchy, and aristocracy, they are both of them clearly approved, and directed in scripture, yet so as referreth the soveraigntie to himselfe, and setteth up Theocracy in both, as the best forme of government in the commonwealth, as well as in the church.29

On the voyage to New England in 1630, John Winthrop preached a sermon on charity in which he reminded his fellow refugees that “God almightie in his most holy and wise providence hath so disposed of the Condition of mankind, as in all times some must be rich some poore, some highe and emi-
It suited the wisdom of the infinite and omnipotent Creator, to make the world of differing parts, which necessarily supposes that there must be differing places, for those differing things to be disposed into, which is Order. The like is necessary to be observed in the rational and political World, where persons of differing endowments and qualifications need differing stations to be disposed into, the keeping of which, is both the beauty and strength of such a society. . . . are not some advanced as high above others in dignity and power, as much as the cedars of Lebanon the low shrubs of the valley? It is not then the result of time or chance, that some are mounted on horseback, while others are left to travel on foot. . . . Is it not found by experience, that the greatest part of mankind, are but as tools and Instruments for others to work by, rather than any proper Agents to effect any thing of themselves . . . ? Nothing therefore can be imagined more remote either from right reason, or true religion, than to think that because we were all once equal at our birth, and shall be again at our death, therefore we should be so in the whole course of our lives.

For the Puritans, to be sure, government rests on consent, on a compact between rulers and ruled that echoes the covenant between God and man. Yet just as God's covenant does not for a moment imply his political or moral equality with man, so the consent of the ruled in politics is their acknowledgment of their superiors in Christian virtue and wisdom. This, as Winthrop explains in one of his most solemn and public articulations of Puritan political theory, is “civil or federal liberty,” in contrast to that “natural corrupt liberty,” which so far from entailing any natural right, “makes men grow more evil, and in time to be worse than brute beasts.” Government, in this perspective, is not conceived as “representative” of the people but as ruling over the people; and the giving of unanimous consent does not imply the moral hegemony of majority rule. Well into the eighteenth century, even the relatively liberal (and unusually Aristotelian) Puritan divine John Barnard rejected majoritarianism and described the end of government in these terms:

If the Good of the Subject, considered as distinct from that of the Ruler, were the End of Government, what would the Consequence of this be, but Anarchy, wild Disorder, and universal Confusion? Which would be as destructive to Government as the hottest Tyranny could be. For the civil Rulers of a People have not only their Interests in many respects, twisted to-
together with the Subjects, but some things which belong to them, in a peculiar Manner, as Rulers, which are very essential to the Support of Government; I mean, their distinguishing Honour, their Authority and Power, their more special Security, and the like.\textsuperscript{33}

John Winthrop characteristically draws a parallel between the rule of magistrate over consenting subject and the rule of husband over consenting wife: "the woman's own choice makes such a man her husband; yet being so chosen, he is her lord, and she is to be subject to him, yet in a way of liberty, not of bondage; and a true wife accounts her subjection her honor and freedom." Still, the Puritans hesitate to ground patriarchal authority, in family or state, on simply natural excellence or preeminence. For fallen man, it is not so much natural superiority as it is God-given grace and inspiration (and terror) that truly and adequately distinguish, among the equally miserable sinners, those qualified to assume the responsibilities of office and education in home and society. As Winthrop asserts, "Noe man is made more honourable then another or more wealthy etc., out of any particular and singular respect to himselfe but for the glory of his Creator and the Common good of the Creature, Man; Therefore God still reserues the propperty of these guifts to himselfe."\textsuperscript{34}

It is not surprising, then, that the legislative, coercive promotion of education and conduct in accordance with the true faith is seen as perhaps the highest duty of the magistrate. Warning "Anabaptists and other Enthusiasts" "to keep away from us," Nathaniel Ward proclaims in 1647 that "God doth no where in his word tolerate Christian States, to give Tolerations to such adversaries of his truth, if they have power in their hands to suppress them." The sufferance of false religion is "far worse" than the persecution of true religion, since persecution strengthens faith while toleration saps it. Toleration is inevitably accompanied by doubt and religious insincerity, by the preference for comfort and peace and agreeableness over truth, salvation, and dedication. "It is almost pathetic," Perry Miller remarks, "to trace the puzzlement of New England leaders at the end of the seventeenth century, when the idea of toleration was becoming more and more respectable in European thought. They could hardly understand what was happening in the world." For example, he reports, when Massachusetts Bay was criticized by Anabaptists in 1681 for its policy of intolerance, on the grounds that intolerance was a departure from the faith of the Puritan fathers who fled persecution in England, Samuel Willard, pastor of Old South Church in Boston, wrote of the critics, "I perceive that they are mistaken in the design of our first Planters, whose business was not Toleration; but were professed Enemies of it."\textsuperscript{35}

As late as 1745, Yale College appealed to the view that Christian charity prohibits toleration of religious diversity as the basis for expelling two students who
had, while at home on vacation and in the company of their parents, attended Separatist religious services.

There's scarce any thing more fully and strictly Enjoin'd in the Gospel than Charity, Peace, and Unity among Christians; and scarce any thing more plainly and frequently forbidden than Divisions, Schisms and Separations; And therefore nothing can justifie a Division or Separation, but only some plain and express Direction in the Word of God; which must be understood as a particular exception from the general Rule. . . .

Whereupon it is Considered and Adjudged by the Rector and Tutors, That the said John and Ebenezer Cleaveland, in Withdrawing and Separating from the publick Worship of God, and Attending upon the Preaching of a Lay-Exhorter, as aforesaid, have acted contrary to the Rules of the Gospel, the Laws of this Colony and of the College; and that the said Cleavelands shall be publickly Admonished for their Faults, aforesaid; And if they continue to Justifie themselves and refuse to make an Acknowledgement they shall be Expelled.

And since the principal End and Design of Erecting this College (as declared in the Charter) was, To Train up a Succession of Learned and Orthodox Ministers, by whose Instruction and Example people might be directed in the ways of Religion and good Order; therefore to Educate persons whose principles and practices are directly Subversive of the Visible Church of Christ, would be contrary to the Original Design of Erecting this Society. And we conceive that it would be a Contradiction in the Civil Government, to Support a College to Educate Students to trample upon their own Laws, and brake up the Churches which they Establish and Protect.

The keynote of Puritan life and education was discipline, in government, in the family, and in labor at one's vocation. The natural consequence for Puritan economics was an unprecedented honor ascribed to work and a considerable rise in prosperity. But here again it is a far cry from Puritan industriousness to the commercial and eventually capitalist outlook that was to characterize the political economy of the new American nation. Calvin and his faithful American followers were as severe in their condemnation of lending money at interest ("usury") as had been the medieval scholastics. Lawyers, as Miller says, "were held in contempt," and merchants were viewed with suspicion. Devotion to the accumulation of material wealth beyond a modest competence was condemned as sinful: "It was not intended that work should bring wealth; the ministers had little sense of the possibility of rapid increases in productivity. Instinctively, they tended toward a kind of economic restrictionism. Men should be content, [the
Puritan divine William] Perkins wrote, 'if they have as much as will provide them food and raiment, and thus much lawfully may they seek.'

In education, as we have noted, the Puritans looked to classical literature and to the models there presented as well as to the biblical tradition; but here too a powerful hesitation is evident. The discipline, devotion, Stoicism, public spirit, and strict censorship found in the classical city met with strong approval among the Puritans. But the heathenism, pride, and unqualified exaltation of political and merely moral or philosophic virtue tended to be viewed with grave reserve. It was often the perceived republican or even democratic tendencies of classical political philosophy that awakened unease. In Milton's *Paradise Lost*, the classical civic and philosophic virtues are most conspicuous among the fallen angels in Hell, and it is Satan who delivers the great speech appealing to equality and liberty, while the angels Raphael and Abdiel preach obedience.

In 1641 Na­thaniel Ward gave an election sermon that caused something of a stir, for rea­sons that become evident in Jonathan Winthrop's account:

> In his sermon he delivered many useful things, but in a moral and political discourse, grounding his propositions much upon the old Roman and Gre­cian governments, which sure is an error. . . . Among other things, he ad­vised the people to keep all their magistrates in an equal rank, and not give more honor or power to one than to another, which is easier to advise than to prove, seeing it is against the practice of Israel.

Once we recognize how great a distance separates the Puritan ethos from that of the American Founding, we are prepared to understand why some of the New England leaders of the Revolution and Founding felt compelled to declare their independence not only from England but from the Puritan legacy. Never­theless, it seems too much to claim, as does Rush Welter, that "the purposes and practices of colonial education stand historically as a kind of false start from which it was necessary to turn away before education could become a key princi­ple of the American democratic faith." This judgment overlooks, in the first place, what Bernard Bailyn and Samuel Morison stress: the importance, for sub­sequent American history, of the Puritan commitment to public schooling, which Bailyn describes as "in the context of the age . . . astonishing" and Morison calls "truly extraordinary." Welter also disregards the significance of Puritan discipline for the formation of the private and public habits of industry and service presupposed by a commercial republic. Above all, his assessment fails to take into account the complex development by which original Puritan preach­ing and teaching were transmogrified in the course of the eighteenth century.

In the eighteenth century, Perry Miller writes, as the original doctrine "ceased to arouse their loyalties," the people "went seeking after gods that were utterly
strange to Puritanism." But this search was in some measure led and inspired by
Puritan divines. The crucial transformation in Puritan preaching surfaces most
clearly in the otherwise rather obscure figure John Wise. As Miller points out,
Wise's *Vindication of the Government of New-England Churches* (1717), with its ap­
peal to the authority of Hobbes's student Samuel Pufendorf, embodies nothing
less than a "real revolution in thought" regarding the relation between reason
and revelation, natural and divine law, rulers and ruled, and society altogether. 42

Discourses such as Wise's set the stage for the enormous civic educational im­
 pact of Protestant preachers in the generations leading up to the Revolution.
These preachers sowed some of the most potent seeds of the Revolution by prop­
gagating among the masses Lockean natural religion and natural rights. In doing
so, admittedly, they allowed traditional Christian doctrine to be reshaped by a
new philosophic rationalism and secular republicanism. Some drifted far and
fast from the traditional subordination of reason and republicanism to biblically
based authority. But others succeeded, at least for a time, in integrating revolu­
tionary principles of freedom into authentically biblical doctrines, thus temper­
ing and elevating pure Lockean republicanism. If in the long run they were more
co-opted than co-opting, they left nevertheless an indelible and vital tincture on
American popular culture and self-consciousness. 43

Rush Welter's major error, however, is one that is all too common in our time,
and that hence deserves more searching scrutiny. The error consists in assimilat­
ing the "American democratic faith" to an outlook that remained foreign to
Americans (and, for that matter, to all great democratic societies) until the late
nineteenth century: namely, the view that democracy entails unrestricted "so­
cial leveling" and the jettisoning of all habitual obedience to authority. Adopt­
ing so narrowly egalitarian and libertarian a notion of the "American demo­
cratic faith" inevitably leads Welter to reject even the Founders' educational
ideas as alien to this anachronistic standard.

Early republican commitments to education were limited in other senses
that are particularly striking to anyone who expects to discover a demo­
cratic orientation in the founding fathers' demands for a universal dissemina­
tion of knowledge . . . many of the national plans for education empha­
sized the importance of instruction in common obligations to government
and to the established institutions of society. Within the areas to which
common agreement limited government, an informed obedience on the
part of the people was at least as important as their particular freedoms. 44

If, contrary to Welter, we avoid the pitfalls of simplistic notions of democratic
liberty and equality and instead keep clearly in sight the healthy, organic rela­
tion between effective democratic republicanism and both "common obliga­
tions” and “informed obedience” to law, we will preserve a more balanced understanding of the continuing, though over time steadily diminishing, contribution of the Puritan educational heritage to the “American democratic faith.” Writing to John Adams in the fall of 1790, Samuel Adams laments the sorry history of human liberty, or the lack thereof. With a view to the present and future of liberty in America, he asks rhetorically:

What then is to be done?—Let Divines, and Philosophers, Statesmen and Patriots unite their endeavours to renovate the Age, by impressing the Minds of Men with the importance of educating their little boys, and girls—of inculcating in the Minds of youth the fear, and Love of the Deity, and universal Phylanthropy; and in subordination to these great principles, the Love of their Country—of instructing them in the Art of self government, without which they never can act a wise part in the Government of Societies great, or small—in short of leading them in the study, and practice of the exalted Virtues of the Christian system, which will happily tend to subdue the turbulent passions of Men, and introduce that Golden Age beautifully described in figurative language. 45

Six weeks later, in response to John Adams’s favorable response to this letter, Samuel Adams continues:

Should we not, my friend, bear a grateful remembrance of our pious and benevolent Ancestors, who early laid plans of Education; by which means Wisdom, Knowledge, and Virtue have been generally diffused among the body of the people, and they have been enabled to form and establish a civil constitution calculated for the preservation of their rights, and liberties?

To be sure, Adams then introduces a new chord:

This Constitution was evidently founded in the expectation of the further progress, and “extraordinary degrees” of virtue. . . . It is allowed, that the present age is more enlightened than former ones. Freedom of enquiry is certainly more encouraged: The feelings of humanity have softened the heart: The true principles of civil, and religious Liberty are better understood. 46

Samuel Adams thus limns one of the greatest puzzles of educational thought in the Founding period: to what extent and in what ways were traditional—especially traditional religious—educational ideals to be integrated constructively into the new republican regime?
Benjamin Rush's Christian Republican Education

The ambivalence of thoughtful Americans of the Founding period towards traditional Christian education is nowhere more vividly expressed than in the capacious if somewhat incoherent ruminations of Benjamin Rush. In his essay, "The Bible as a School-Book," Rush argues that all children should be steeped in biblical readings from the earliest possible moment. Insisting that prejudice and habit are all-important in forming the opinions of men, Rush contends that the Bible is a precious reservoir of morally sound opinion, and he stresses that those who do not read the Bible in their youth probably never will. As he puts it in his "Thoughts upon the Mode of Education Proper in a Republic":

The first impressions upon the mind are the most durable. They survive the wreck of the memory and exist in old age after the ideas acquired in middle life have been obliterated. Of how much consequence then must it be to the human mind in the evening of life to be able to recall those ideas which are most essential to its happiness, and these are to be found chiefly in the Bible.47

Yet Rush is on the defensive, gripped by the fear that Christianity is losing its hold on American hearts. He comes to the aid of the flagging faith with every argument he can muster, emphasizing in particular the social utility of the biblical teachings. "If the Bible," he insists, "did not convey a single direction for the attainment of future happiness, it should be read in our schools in preference to all other books, from its containing the greatest portion of that kind of knowledge which is calculated to produce private and public temporal happiness." Rush attacks the deists for weakening religion and paving the way to agnosticism, and he complains that "they have rendered instruction in the principles of Christianity by the pulpit and the press, so unfashionable, that little good for many years seems to have been done by either of them." In speaking of the deists' attempts to get the Bible out of the schools, he warns that "if they proceed in it, they will do more in half a century, in extirpating our religion, than Bolingbroke or Voltaire could have effected in a thousand years." He consoles himself with the rather gloomy hope that teaching the Bible in Sunday schools "will give our religion (humanly speaking) the chance of a longer life in our country."48

Simultaneously, however, Rush endorses the very enlightenment spirit, the very love of progress and innovation and skeptical thinking, that has allowed Deism to flourish. Indeed, in contrast to the pessimism just cited, he sometimes expresses hope that scientific investigation will lend new support to the authority of the Bible: "The time, I have no doubt, will come, when posterity will view
and pity our ignorance of these truths [of the Bible], as much as we do the ignorance of the disciples of our savior, who knew nothing of the meaning of those plain passages in the Old Testament which were daily fulfilling before their eyes."49 Most strikingly, Rush so confidently takes the side of independent, critical thinking against the stultifying hold of "traditional error" that he expresses a wish to see schools established to teach "the art of forgetting"—an art whose first students ought to be America's teachers, legislators, and ministers. Rush cannot quite make up his mind. Convinced of the truth and goodness of Christian faith, he wants it to be taught by traditional authority—and wants to free men from the shackles of traditional authority at one and the same time.

But it would be oversimplifying to portray Rush as content with a simply Christian education, for he is keenly aware that such a program is quite inadequate to prepare Americans for their new political role as republican citizens. For this preeminent task of civic education, Rush insists, guidance has to be sought in an altogether different historical quarter.