

## 4. From the Past to the Future of the “American Israel”: Sermons in the American Revolution<sup>1</sup>

### 1. *Sermons as Agents*

Historians of the American Revolution have offered us fine analyses of revolutionary thought, excellent discussions of the origins of constitutional concepts, and impressive disquisitions on the function and role of theology, religious beliefs and mentalities. We are told that political theories and religious beliefs shaped the intellectual contents of the American Revolution as well as the behavior of the revolutionary generation. Rarely, however, have historians addressed the problem how theories and beliefs reached those whom the English termed “revolutionaries”. Until 1774 English leaders assumed that the term revolutionaries was synonymous with “Massachusetts”. Later that year it suddenly seemed as if the Lord had moved American hearts transforming all into radicals of the sort found in “Massachusetts”. In a gigantic outpouring the Holy Spirit seemed to have infused colonists with revolutionary thoughts. Modern historians of a secular bias have trouble with such claims insisting that all colonists were readers who spent their time inbibing revolutionary pamphlets.

Many find the idea unconvincing that the Holy Spirit or American reading skills transmitted revolutionary thought. Yet until now historians have failed to inform us, what magic convinced ordinary Americans of tenets that people from Portsmouth in New Hampshire shared with those of Edenton in North Carolina. I will offer three hypothetical answers and then concentrate on the last of the three: First, reading minutes of Committees of Inspection and Observation for 1774 – 1776 suggests that face-to-face encounters of these committees with people in villages and towns coupled with gentle and sometimes not so gentle pressures made many familiar with revolutionary thoughts and resolves, recommendations, and explanations of the Continental Congress. Secondly, I am impressed by the argument in Professor Breen’s study on the politization of British consumer goods as agents of trust in binding Americans to

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<sup>1</sup> Revised version of the opening address delivered to the symposion on “The Impact of Halle Pietism on Colonial North America and the Young United States” held at Wittenberg, October 4 – 6, 2002.

revolutionary concepts<sup>2</sup>; thirdly, and now I come to my subject, I argue in this paper, that revolutionary sermons played an important role in spreading, legitimizing, conceptualizing, and rationalizing revolutionary thought within a wider concept of civil millenarianism that contemporaries called “American Israel”.

Analyzing sermons of the American Revolution has not been a major trend in American historiography.<sup>3</sup> If at all they are usually lumped together with pamphlets. Yet there are important differences between both. Pamphlets are published for an anonymous literary audience that has the means to purchase the texts.<sup>4</sup> Sermons are spoken to people whose anxieties, hopes, and expectations are known to the preacher. They reflect the concerns of a particular community; at the same time, the special authority of the minister in his parish puts him into a unique position to interpret these times to his flock. Knowing that parishioners have a choice of churches and ministers to whom they can go,<sup>5</sup> his sensitivity to their concerns suggests a closeness to them that makes his argument more than just an expression of his private thought. Rather, the sermon reflects attitudes and revolutionary thoughts of groups. Sermons blend local concerns with larger theoretical issues and in that respect differ from pamphlets. At the same time, the sermon’s message is carried and explained before its publication by its listeners into families, villages and other communities – the circula-

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<sup>2</sup> T. H. BREEN, *The Marketplace of Revolution. How Consumer Politics Shaped American Independence*. Oxford 2004.

<sup>3</sup> Robert P. HAY, *George Washington: American Moses*, in: *American Quarterly* 21, 1969, p. 780-791; Nathan O. HATCH, *The Origins of Civil Millenialism in America: New England Clergymen, War with France, and the Revolution*, in: *WMQ* 3<sup>rd</sup> Ser. 31, 1974, p. 407-430; Jon T. ALEXANDER, *Colonial New England Preaching on War as Illustrated in Massachusetts Artillery Election Sermons*, in: *Journal of Church and State*, 17, 1975, p. 423-442; Harry S. STOUT, *Religion, Communications, and the Ideological Origins of the American Revolution*, in: *WMQ* 3<sup>rd</sup> Ser. 34, 1977, p. 519-541; Emory ELLIOT, *The Dove and the Serpent: The Clergy in the American Revolution*, in: *American Quarterly* 31, 1979, p. 187-203; Reginald C. STUART, *‘For the Lord Is a Man of Warr’: The Colonial New England View of War and the American Revolution*, in: *Journal of Church and State* 23, 1981, p. 519-532; Melvin ENDY, *Just War, Holy War, and Millenialism in Revolutionary America*, *WMQ* 3<sup>rd</sup> Ser. 42, 1985, p. 3-25; Mark VALERI, *The New Divinity and the American Revolution*, in: *WMQ* 3<sup>rd</sup> Ser. 46, 1989, p. 741-769; Mark NOLL, *The American Revolution and Protestant Evangelicalism*, in: *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 23, 1993, p. 615-638; Sarah J. PURCELL, *‘Spread this martial fire’: The New England Patriot Clergy and Civil Military Inspiration*, in: *Journal of Church and State* 38, 1996, p. 621-639.

<sup>4</sup> The relevant pamphlets are conveniently listed and described by Thomas R. ADAMS, *American Independence. The Growth of an Idea. A Bibliographical Study of the American Political Pamphlets Printed Between 1764 and 1776 Dealing with the Dispute Between Great Britain and Her Colonies*. Austin, TX 1980. *The SAME The American Controversy. A Bibliographical Study of the American Pamphlets about the American Disputes, 1764-1783*. 2 vols., Providence, RI 1980. Best overall analyses are offered by Bernard BAILYN, *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution*, Cambridge, MA 1967, and Gordon S. WOOD, *The Creation of the American Republic 1776-1787*, Chapel Hill, NC 1969.

<sup>5</sup> On the Problem of choice within the context of multiconfessionality in eighteenth-century North America cf. Hermann WELLENREUTHER, *Genese der Multikonfessionalität in Nordamerika, 1607-1830*. In: Hartmut LEHMANN (ed.), *Multireligiosität im vereinten Europa. Historische und juristische Aspekte*. Göttingen 2003, p. 163-182; Frank LAMBERT, *Evangelical Revivals as Communicative Spheres in the Colonial Era*. In: Norbert FINZSCH, Ursula LEHMKUHL (eds.), *Atlantic Communications. The Media in American and German History from the Seventeenth to the Twentieth Century*. Oxford 2004, p. 15-44.

tion of sermons is most likely wider than that of pamphlets. Status within social groups, orality, and distribution in print designate the ministers as powerful transmitters of revolutionary thought.

These are truisms of the revolutionary times. Thus the Provincial Congress of Massachusetts on December 5, 1774, resolved an address to the clergy “desiring them to exhort their people to carry into execution the resolves of the Continental Congress”<sup>6</sup>. Half a year later the North Carolina delegate to the Continental Congress, John Hewes, wrote Samuel Johnston, that he and his colleagues had asked the leading Presbyterian, Lutheran and Dutch Reformed clergy in Philadelphia to ask their brethren in North Carolina to warn their parishioners of the snags of loyalism and the temptations held out by royal governor Josiah Martin.<sup>7</sup> The Lutheran and Dutch-Reformed ministers obliged with a somewhat lengthy pamphlet entitled *Schreiben des Evangelisch-Lutherisch und Reformirten Kirchen-Raths, wie auch der Beamten der Teutschen Gesellschaft in der Stadt Philadelphia, an die Teutschen Einwohner der Provintzen von Newyork und Nord-Carolina*.<sup>8</sup> The Presbyterian Synod of New York, on June 29, 1775, circulated *A Pastoral Letter from the Synod of New York and Philadelphia, to the Congregations under their Care; to Be Read from the Pulpits*, an initiative John Adams hoped would “produce wonderful Effects”.<sup>9</sup> Similarly, the Committee of Safety of South Carolina “engaged one Dutch Clergyman to perform Service at one place on Friday next, & another, at a

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<sup>6</sup> William LINCOLN (ed.), *The Journals of each Provincial Congress of Massachusetts in 1774 and 1775 and of the Committee of Safety, with an Appendix*. Boston, MA 1838, p. 56.

<sup>7</sup> Joseph Hewes to Samuel Johnston, Philadelphia July 8, 1775, William L. SAUNDERS (ed.), *The Colonial Records of North Carolina*, 30 vols., Raleigh, NC 1886-1914, vol. 10, p. 85-86. This initiative obviously did not produce the desired results. In early January, 1776, the North Carolina Delegates with the blessing of the Continental Congress, asked the Presbyterian ministers Elihu Spencer and Alexander McWhorter, to go in person to North Carolina and “explain to the Highlanders and regulators the nature of the dispute between Great Britain and the Colonies”, Paul H. SMITH, et al. (eds.), *Letters of Delegates to Congress, 1774-1789*. 26 vols., Washington, DC 1976-2000, vol. 2, p. 460-461 (North Carolina Delegates to Elihu Spencer, Philadelphia 8, 1775), and vol. 3, p. 28-29 (Joseph Hewes to Samuel Johnston, Philadelphia, Jan. 4, 1776).

<sup>8</sup> Philadelphia: Gedruckt bey Henrich Miller, in der Rees-Strasse, 1775, Evans 14394. This German treatise reprinted the most important texts of the Continental Congress and recommended that they be strictly adhered to.

<sup>9</sup> The epistle of the Synod was printed New York: Shober and Loudon, 1775; I have quoted the Adams’ Diary from SMITH et al. (eds.), *Letters of Delegates to Congress, 1774-1789*, vol.1, p. 478-479. While Adams welcomed the clergies’ activities within their parishes he disapproved of their turning active politicians. When the Swiss pastor from Georgia, John J. Zubly, arrived as Delegate for Georgia in Philadelphia, Adams wrote to his wife Abigail: “...he is the first Gentleman of the Cloth who has appeared in Congress, I can not but wish he may be the last. Mixing the sacred Character, with that of the Statesman, as it is quite unnecessary at this Time of day, in these Colonies, is not attended with any good Effects. The Clergy are universally too little acquainted with the World, and the Modes of Business, to engage in civil affairs with any Advantage. Besides those of them, who are really Men of Learning, have conversed with Books so much more than Men, as to be too much loaded with Vanity, to be good Politicians”, *ibid.*, vol. 2, p. 23.

second place on Sunday next.”<sup>10</sup> On the basis of an analysis of sermons published in 1775 and 1776 and between 1781 and 1783 in North America<sup>11</sup> I argue that, despite John Adams’s conviction that they were “too little acquainted with the World”, the clergy functioned as important transmitters of political concepts, rationalizations of revolutionary behavior, and constitutional critique of English policy to ordinary Americans.

The communicative qualities of pamphlets and sermons suggest the elements of an explanatory model for the transmission of revolutionary thought: The political elite absorbed and shaped concepts, conceptualized the mother country’s policies and squeezed them into resolves, epistles, pamphlets, newspaper articles, institutional actions, and recommendations. These in turn shaped the thinking of local and regional authority figures, defined the political meaning of the material world, and structured activities of local, regional, and colonial committees. Local and regional authority figures adapted the elite’s conceptualizations to modes of thoughts familiar to colonists, be they parishioners, householders, or neighbours. In this process of adaption the sermons played an important role. But as the model makes clear, sermons were *but one of a number of agents* that linked the individual to the larger revolutionary ideology. How important sermons were, future research into the communicative structure of the American Revolution will have to show.

Turning to a Company of Militia, the Rev. Zabdiel Adams of Lunenburg, Massachusetts, on January 2, 1775, thundered: “May we take to ourselves the whole armor of God, that we may be able to stand against the wilds of the devil, and quench all his fiery darts.” His listeners, militia soldiers, officers and members of the congregation in Lunenburg’s meeting house understood: The devils were the British soldiers who were throwing “fiery darts” at those whose “liberty and virtue they ... invade.”<sup>12</sup> This was not the only sermon preached to militia companies about to take the field or to companies raised for the continental army. Between 1775 and 1783 the clergy everywhere was busy encouraging, interpreting, advising, admonishing and comforting their parishioners, soldiers, and others to do what was righteous in their and the Lord’s eyes.

More of those sermons were published in New England than in the middle and southern colonies. For a number of reasons this is not really surprising. First, New

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<sup>10</sup> William Henry Drayton and William Tennent to [South Carolina] Council of Safety, Congaree Store, August 7, 1775, Philip M. HAMER et al. (eds.), *The Papers of Henry Laurens*. Vols.1-[16], Columbia, SC 1968-[2003], vol.10, p. 277-286, here p. 279.

<sup>11</sup> I have excluded two types of sermons from the analysis: Funeral sermons and ordination sermons because both offer no argument beyond their immediate purposes.

<sup>12</sup> Zabdiel ADAMS, *The Grounds of Confidence and Success in War*, represented. A Sermon Preached at a Lecture in Lunenburg, New England, on Monday, January 2d, 1775, To a Detached Company of Militia there, By Z. A., Pastor of the Church in that Place. Published at the Request of said Company. Boston: Mills & Hicks, 1775, p. 7-8, Evans 13789.

England had a tradition in printing sermons and religious tracts and more printers were available there than further south.<sup>13</sup> Second, publishing sermons delivered on fast-days, election days, or in ordination services had a tradition in Massachusetts and Connecticut but not in other colonies. Fewer published sermons in the middle and southern colonies certainly did not mean that ministers there were less active. On the contrary, as John Adams on July 7, 1775, wrote his wife from Philadelphia: “Clergy here, of every Denomination, not excepting the Episcopalian, thunder and lighten every sabbath. They pray for Boston and the Massachusetts – they thank God most explicitly and fervently for our remarkable Successes – they pray for the American Army. They seem to feel as if they were among you.”<sup>14</sup>

An analysis of sermons published during the Revolution has to take account of this regional bias; but enough sermons were published south of New England to allow for broader views. Although we know little about how many prints were sold outside a colony, some most likely were. In addition, some like the North Carolinian Joseph Hewes sent a “few Copies of a Sermon of William Smith, the provost of the College” to his close political ally in North Carolina with the remark “that it is much liked here”.<sup>15</sup> More importantly, all the sermons discussed subjects of more than local or regional interest;<sup>16</sup> this suggests that such a broad analysis will offer insights into what Americans were thinking in those crucial years.

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<sup>13</sup> During the time of the British occupation of Boston, most sermons published in that colony were printed elsewhere; obviously the same applied to Philadelphia and to Charleston after their occupation by British forces.

<sup>14</sup> John Adams to his wife Abigail, Philadelphia July 7, 1775, SMITH et al. (eds.), *Letters of Delegates to Congress, 1774-1789*, vol.1, p. 602; on the clergy’s activities in South Carolina on behalf of the Revolution cf. William Henry Drayton and William Tennent to [South Carolina] Council of Safety, Congaree Store, August 7, 1775, in: HAMER et al. (eds.), *The Papers of Henry Laurens*, vol.10, p. 277-286, here p. 280.

<sup>15</sup> Joseph Hewes to Samuel Johnston, Philadelphia July 8, 1775, SAUNDERS, (ed.), *The Colonial Records of North Carolina*, vol.10, p. 86. Hewes no doubt sent the following sermon: William SMITH, *A Sermon on the Present Situation of American Affairs*. Preached in Christ-Church, June 23, 1775, At the Request of the Officers of the Third Battallion of the City of Philadelphia and District of Southwark, by W. S., D. D., Provost of the College of that City. Philadelphia, Printed and Sold by James Humphreys, Jr., the Corner of Blackhorse Alley, Front Street, 1775, Evans 14459. Benjamin Franklin sent that sermon to Joseph Priestley who mentioned in his acknowledgment that he intended “to get it printed,” Benjamin FRANKLIN, *Papers*, ed. L. W. LABAREE et al., vol.1-[37], New Haven, CT 1959-[2003], vol. 22, p. 190 and *ibid.*, note 2. Cf. the enthusiastic comment on Smith’s sermon by Silas Deane to his wife Elizabeth, Philadelphia June 23, 1775, SMITH et al. (eds.), *Letters of Delegates to Congress, 1774-1789*, vol. 1, p. 537-538.

<sup>16</sup> The following sermons were of local or regional interest only: Samuel BALDWIN, *A Sermon Preached at Plymouth, December 22, 1775, Being the Anniversary Thanksgiving, in commemoration of the first landing of the Fathers of New England, there; anno domini 1620*. By S. B. A.M., Pastor of the Church in Hanover. AMERICA, Massachusetts-Bay: Boston, Printed by Powars and Willis, in Queen-Street, 1776, Pp 39, Evans 14657; Samuel STILLMAN, *Death the last Enemy, destroyed by Christ*. A Sermon Preached, March 27, 1776, Before the Honourable Continental Congress, on the Death of The Honorable Samuel Ward, Esq. One of the Delegates from the Colony of Rhode Island, who died of the small-pox, in this City [Philadelphia] March 26, Aet. 52, Published at the Desire of Many who heard it. By S. S., M. A.. Philadelphia, Printed by Joseph Crukshank, in Market-Street. 1776, Pp 28, Evans 15097; Samuel SEABURY, *A Sermon, Preached before the Grand Lodge, and the Other Lodges of Ancient Freemasons, in*

**Table 1**

**Sermons published in North America 1775-1776, 1781-1783<sup>17</sup>**

Colony/State	1775	1776	1781	1782	1783	All
NH	1	0	0	0	0	1
MA	11	4	0	2	5	22
CT	5	4	0	0	1	10
NY	1	1	0	1	0	3
NJ	0	1	0	0	0	1
DE	1	0	0	0	0	1
PA	8	2	1	1	0	12
MD	0	1	0	0	0	1
VA	1	0	1	0	0	2
SC	0	0	0	1	0	1
GA	1	0	0	0	0	1
Other	0	0	0	1	0	1
All	29	13	2	6	6	56

**Table 2**

**Subjects of Sermons, 1775-1776, 1781-1783<sup>18</sup>**

Themes	1775	1776	1781	1782	1783	All
Fast-Day Sermons	8	0	0	0	1	9
Militia/Soldiers	6	2	1	0	0	9
Election Sermons	3	2	0	1	2	8
Special Themes	1	4	0	1	1	7
Thanksgiving Sermons	5	1	0	0	0	6
Commemorating Battles	0	3	0	2	0	5
Unspecified	1	1	1	1	1	5
Anniversaries	1			1	1	3
Commemorating Events	2	0	0	0	0	2

New-York, at St. Paul’s Chapel, on the Anniversary of St. John the Evangelist, 1782. New York, Printed by Robertson, Mills, and Hicks, 1783, Pp 23, Evans 18180.

<sup>17</sup> Source: Eighteenth-Century Short Title Catalogue, Databank, based on Charles EVANS, *American Bibliography: A Chronological Dictionary of All Books, Pamphlets, and Periodical Publications Printed in the United States of America from the Genesis of Printing in 1639 down to and including the Year 1820*. 13 vols., Chicago IL, 1903-1934; Roger P. BRISTOL, *Supplement to Charles Evans’ American Bibliography*. Charlottesville, VA 1970.

<sup>18</sup> Source: s. note 377.

<b>Sermons Opening Conventions</b>	2	0	0	0	0	2
<b>All</b>	29	13	2	6	6	54

Yet there are some differences between New England sermons and those composed further south. New England sermons follow a pattern: They interpret a biblical text so as to suggest parallels to the dire times, then discuss the conflict with England usually in fairly emotional terms and end with assurances that under certain conditions God might help the cause of America as long as it is a good cause. Sermons preached in Pennsylvania, a colony with numerous pacifists, on the other hand focused more on the legitimacy of war, on the need for tolerance and unity while they tended to spend less time in denouncing England –but denounce they did;<sup>19</sup> some sermons had an

<sup>19</sup> John CARMICHAEL, A. M., *A Self-Defensive War Lawful, Proved in a Sermon, Preached at Lancaster, Before Captain Ross's Company of Militia, in the Presbyterian Church, on Sabbath Morning, June 4, 1775, Now published at the Request of the Author, and corrected by himself from the Copy printed at Lancaster; Humbly offered to the Persusal of the Military Associators of the City, Liberties and County of Philadelphia.* Philadelphia: Printed and Sold by John Dean, Bookbinder, in Laetitia Court, 1775, Pp. 34, Evans 13862; Jacob DUCHÉ, *The Duty of standing fast in our spiritual and temporal liberties, A Sermon Preached in Christ-Church, July 7th, 1775, Before the First Battalion of the City and Liberties of Philadelphia; and now published at their Request.* Philadelphia, Printed and Sold by James Humphreys, Jr., 1775, Pp 25, Evans 14013; David JONES, *Defensive War in a just Cause sinless. A Sermon Preached on the Day of the Continental Fast at Tredyffryn in Chester County, by ...*, Published by Request. Philadelphia, Printed by Henry Miller, 1775, Pp 27, Evans 14133; Jacob DUCHÉ, *The American Vine, A Sermon, Preached in Christ-Church, Philadelphia, Before the Honourable Continental Congress, July 20th, 1775. Being the Day Recommended by them for a General Fast Throughout the United English Colonies of America.* Philadelphia, Printed by James Humphreys, Jr., 1775, Pp 34, Evans 14012; Joseph MONTGOMERY, *A Sermon Preached at Christiana Bridge and Newcastle, The 20th of July, 1775 Being the Day Appointed by the Continental Congress, as a Day of Fasting, Humiliation, and Prayer, Published by Request Philadelphia, Printed by James Humphreys Jr., The Corner of Black Horse-Alley, Front-Street, 1775, Pp. 30, Evans 14261; Thomas COOMBE, A Sermon, Preached before the Congregations of Christ Church and St. Peter's, Philadelphia, on Thursday, July 20, 1775. Being the Day Recommended by the Honourable Continental Congress for A General Fast Throughout the Twelve United Colonies of North America. By T. C., M. A., Chaplain to the Most Noble the Marquis of Rockingham. Published by Request. Philadelphia: Printed for John Dunlap, in Market Street, 1775, Evans 13892. Robert ROSS, *A Sermon in which the Union of the Colonies is considered and recommended; and the Bad Consequences of Divisions are Represented; Delivered on the Public Thanksgiving, November Sixteenth 1775.* By R. R., A. M., Pastor of the Church of Christ in Stratfield. New York Printed by John Holt, in Water-Street, near the Coffee House, 1776, Pp 28, Evans 15070; David GRIFFITH, *Passive Obedience Considered. In a Sermon Preached at Williamsburg, December 31th, 1775 .* By the Rev. D. G., Rector of Shelburne Parish, Virginia. Published at the Request of the General Convention [of Virginia]. Williamsburg, Printed by Alexander Purdie [1776], Pp 26, Evans 14793; William FOSTER, A. M., *A Sermon Preached at Fag's Manor, To Captain Taylor's Company of Recruits on the Lord's Day, February 18, 1776 (and now Published by Request) by the Rev. W. F.* Philadelphia, Printed by John Dunlap, in Market-Street, 1776, Pp. 24, Evans 14758; William LINN, *A Military Discourse Delivered in Carlisle, March the 17th, 1776, to Colonel Irvine's Battalion of Regulars, and a very respectable number of the Inhabitants. Published at the Request of the Officers, by W. L., A. M., Chaplain.* Philadelphia, Printed in the Year 1776, Pp 23, Evans 14828; John WITHERSPOON, *The Dominion of Providence over the Passions of Men. A Sermon Preached at Princeton, On the 17th of May, 1776, Being The General Fast appointed by the Congress through the United Colonies. To Which is added, An Address to the Natives of Scotland residing in America, by J. W., D. D., President of the College of New Jersey.* Philadelphia: Printed and sold by R. Aitken, Printer and Bookseller, opposite the London Coffee-House, Front-Street, 1776, Pp 78, Evans 15224.*

almost ironic tendency.<sup>20</sup> And finally, while New England sermons followed a structural and rhetorical pattern long established, sermons preached in the middle and southern colony displayed a greater variety in form, language and structure.

Sermons were inevitably, so the titles announce, published "at the request" of those that had attended the service or who had invited the pastor to preach a sermon on a particular occasion. One sermon was published because the author had no church at all but felt he had something to share with the public.<sup>21</sup> Two black preachers with close ties to South Carolina published sermons in Philadelphia, in which they energetically focused on the war with England and the glorious cause of the confederated states but very incidentally mixed this general message with pleas to end slavery and extend the blessings of liberty to their brethren.<sup>22</sup> Occasionally a preacher stated explicitly why he felt it important to share his sermon with the wider public. In June 1775 the Rev. Nathan Perkins prefaced his sermon to soldiers from West Hartford, Connecticut, with the remark, that ordinarily preachers abstained from commenting on secular affairs; yet he added: "when necessity calls, it [the church] may with propriety, address us on civil liberty; and at once instruct and warn those who are willing to hazard their lives, in the defence of the privileges of their country."<sup>23</sup> Two days later,

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<sup>20</sup> SMITH, A Sermon on the Present Situation of American Affairs. Preached in Christ-Church, June 23, 1775, Evans 14459. This sermon was reprinted in Wilmington, Delaware by James Adams, Evans 14460, cf. too note 380 above; Daniel BATWELL, M. A., A Sermon, Preached at York-Town, Before Captain Morgan's and Captain Price's Companies of Rifle-Men, on Thursday, July 20, 1775. Being the Day recommended by the Honorable Continental Congress for A General Fast Throughout the Twelve United Colonies of North America. Published by Request. Philadelphia: Printed by John Dunlap, in Market-Street, 1775. Pp 20, Evans 13828; John J. ZUBLY, A Sermon on American Affairs, Preached At the Opening of the Provincial Congress of Georgia, Addressed to the Right Honourable the Earl of Dartmouth. With an Appendix, Giving a Concise Account of the Struggles of Swisserland to Recover their Liberty. Philadelphia, Printed by Henry Miller, 1775, Pp xx+41, Evans 14635; Samuel MAGAW, M. A., A Discourse Preached in Christ-Church, Philadelphia, On Sunday, October 8, 1775, by ... of Kent County, in Delaware. Philadelphia, Printed and Sold by Story and Humphreys in Norris's Alley, near Front-Street, 1775, Pp 14, Evans 14176.

<sup>21</sup> Abner BROWNELL, The Worship of God According to True Christian Divinity; Considered and Improved in a Discourse upon that Subject, Offered to all who have Ears to hear of every Denomination, By A. B., A Member of the (spiritual) Church of Christ, Printed for the Author, in the Year 1782, Pp 24, Evans 17484.

<sup>22</sup> „And now my virtuous fellow citizens, let me intreat you, that, after you have rid yourselves of the British yoke, that you will also emancipate those who have been all their life time subject to bondage," BLACK WHIG, Sermon, On the Present Situation of the Affairs of America and Great-Britain. Written by a Black, And Printed at the Request of several Persons of distinguished Characters. Philadelphia: Printed by T. Bradford and P. Hall, 1782, p.9, Evans 17717. „May we be thankful, and make our states independent states indeed, by gradually abolishing slavery, and making the Aethiopian race comfortable amongst us," AETHIOPIAN, A Sermon on the Evacuation of Charlestown. Philadelphia: Printed for the Author, and Sold by William Woodhouse, in Front-Street, next Door to the Old Coffee-House, 1783, p.10, Evans 18182. Only one other sermon argued for the abolition of slavery, Samuel ANDREWS, A. M., A Discourse, Shewing the Necessity of Joining Internal Repentance, With the External Profession of it. Delivered upon the General Fast, July 20, 1775. By S. A., Rector of St. Paul's Church, in Wallingford, and Missionary from the Society, for propagating the Gospel. New Haven; Printed by Thomas and Samuel Greene, 1775, p.14, Evans 13812.

<sup>23</sup> Nathan PERKINS, Sermon Preached to the Soldiers who went from West Hartford, in Defence of their Country. Delivered the 2d of June, 1775. Being the Day before they marched from that Place. Published

the Rev. John Carmichael added that in times of danger it was but proper that “even the Minister of the *Prince of Peace* ... in such a situation ... would improve the times.”<sup>24</sup> In early July 1775 the Reverend John Duché at the beginning of his sermon to a company of soldiers ingeniously confessed that he had selected a text for his sermon about which he could talk both as a preacher as well as a citizen.<sup>25</sup> And in the year of the Peace of Paris in 1783 Ezra Stiles at the beginning of a sermon that lasted at least four hours similarly confided that he had selected his text only “as introductory to a discourse upon the political welfare of God’s American Israel; and as allusively prophetic of the future prosperity and splendor of the United States.”<sup>26</sup> Finally, the Reverend Daniel Batwell fell back on an old rethorical trick: He prefaced his comments on the controversy between England and the colonies with the remark that he really could not comment on this crisis because Christ’s empire was not of this world, and then cheerfully said all he wanted to say about bad English and good Americans.<sup>27</sup>

The *first* part of the following analysis will – paying due regard to the chronology of the sermons – analyze the political terminology of the sermons, describe their function and link them to the argument developed in the sermons. The *second* part will focus on the religious reasoning. The discussion will show how God’s role and atti-

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at the Desire of the Hearers. By N. P., Pastor of the fourth Church in Hartford. Hartford, Printed by Eben. Watson, near the Great Bridge, n. D., p.3, Evans 14382.

<sup>24</sup> The whole sentence conveys the bluntness clearer: “At a time when the unjust storm of ministerial wrath is discharging itself, in a cruel and ignominious manner, on the noble, patriotic, brave people of the ancient, loyal, important colony of the Massachusetts-Bay, in New England, --- at a time when all the other colonies in North-America, like the true children of a *free-born family*, are roused to some just resentment of such onslaughts, on their natural and legal rights, taking each other as by the hand and uniting by the invincible chains of love, friendship, and interest, are determined to support ... it is but reasonable to suppose, that even the Minister of the *Prince of Peace* ... in such a situation ... would improve the times...”, CARMICHAEL, A Self-Defensive War Lawful, Proved in a Sermon, Preached at Lancaster, Before Captain Ross’s Company of Militia, in the Presbyterian Church, on Sabbath Morning, June 4, 1775, p. 5-6, Evans 13862; in his New Year’s eve sermon the Rev. David GRIFFITH stated the same even more forcefully. In ordinary times the preacher would not comment on worldly affairs. But these were times of the highest importance and thus he thought it high time to pronounce the truth: He considered it necessary, “to remove every impediment from the progress of truth and justice to espouse the cause of humanity and the common rights of mankind. ...the cause of truth, immutable and eternal, should engage their warmest and unremitting attention. The cause of an innocent and helpless posterity; of millions, yet unborn, plead strongly for the utmost exertion of our care and vigilance, in defence of their rights”, GRIFFITH, Passive Obedience Considered. In a Sermon Preached at Williamsburg, December 31th, 1775, p. 24-25, Evans 14793; this sermon is discussed and edited by G. MacLaren BRYDEN (ed.), „Passive Obedience Considered“: A Sermon by the Rev. David Griffith before the Virginia Convention, December 1775, in: Historical Magazine of the Protestant Episcopal Church 44, 1975, p. 77-93.

<sup>25</sup> DUCHÉ, The Duty of standing fast in our spiritual and temporal liberties, A Sermon Preached in Christ-Church, July 7th, 1775, p. 2, Evans 14013.

<sup>26</sup> EZRA STILES, D. D., The United States elevated to Glory and Honor. A Sermon, Preached before his Excellency Jonathan Trumbull, Esq. L.L.D., Governor and Commander in Chief, and the Honorable, the General Assembly of the State of Connecticut, Convened at Hartford at the Anniversary Election, May 8, 1783, By E. S., D. D., President of Yale College. New Haven, Printed by Thomas & Samuel Greene, 1783, p.7, Evans, 18198. This sermon was 99 pages long.

<sup>27</sup> BATWELL, M.A., A Sermon, Preached at York-Town, Before Captain Morgan’s and Captain Price’s Companies of Rifle-Men, on Thursday, July 20, 1775, p. 17, Evans 13828.

tude is explained and linked to the political arguments of the texts. Between 1775 and 1776 ministers used America’s past as a backdrop to an increasingly negative image of England; as this demonized image emerged, ministers began to decode the secular order of the colonies and states as expressions of God’s “American Israel”, the subject of my *third* part. This process enabled the preachers especially after November 1775 to sketch visions of a future “American Israel”. These visions culminated, so I will argue in my *fourth* part, in an utopia about America in the year 2000. Two different functions of these visions emerged: The first is initially linked to the discourse about “independence”. Before May 1776 preachers talked about “independence” in a negative sense but sketched America’s future in positively glowing terms – they spoke of an *independent* America’s greatness. After 1776, these visions of the future projected the utopia of a mighty nation – greatness, nationhood, national memory, and identity are blended in the image of greatness.

## 2. *Demonizing the Mother Country, 1775-1776*

Most sermons delivered in 1775 and 1776 focused in rather long secular parts on three themes: The legitimacy of the colonial cause, oppressive politics of England and the need to preserve colonial rights and liberties. In justifying the colonial cause, most sermons evoked the history of the settlements in North America: William Stearns reminded listeners in June 1775 that “part of these lands by them first settled they purchased by fair bargain of the natives. The rest was obtained by conquest, in a war entered into by them for their own just defence – and they defended their acquisitions by themselves alone for a long time with inconceivable expence of blood and treasure!”<sup>28</sup> To his listeners the implication was obvious: “This, I think, makes our land God’s possession, by way of eminence.”<sup>29</sup> They had, so the preacher continued, obtained a royal charter; but that did not imply that the crown had at that time a legal title to the land: “for they were not seized of them, and consequently had no property in them --- for tho’ we should admit (as we may with safety) that the discovery of an uninhabited country may give the discoverers a right to such lands, yet this rule could not operate in this case, because this country was actually inhabited by the aboriginal Indians, of whom our forefathers purchased.”<sup>30</sup> Stearns’ foray into the history of Massachusetts established in his and his parishioners’ minds a crucial point that he re-

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<sup>28</sup> William STEARNS, A. M., A View of the Controversy subsisting between Great-Britain and the American Colonies. A Sermon Preached at a Fast, in Marlborough in Massachusetts-Bay, on Thursday, May 11, 1775, Agreeable to a Recommendation of the Provincial Congress, By W. S., Published at the Desire of the Hearers. Watertown, Printed by Benjamin Edes, 1775, p.13, Evans, Nr. 14474.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., p.14.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., p.14.

peated once more: “... these lands are thus clearly ours... What any man acquires by his own labour and toil, he has an exclusive right to.”<sup>31</sup> And everybody accepted this as an undisputable truth.

More preachers evoked the history of their colony for other purposes: They painted their past as happiness in paradise. For the Rev. Joseph Montgomery of New-castle, Delaware, past times “were our halcyon days”<sup>32</sup>; and the Rev. Nathan Perkins in the same month, June 1775, preached in West Hartford that “America was particularly happy under the shadow of the wings, and in the enjoyment of the friendship of Britain. Indeed no people more happy, more free, more virtuous could be found wherever the circling sun performs its destined course” – until but lately England’s new oppression had cruelly destroyed this happiness.<sup>33</sup> Argumentatively evoking the past stressed the unheard off newness of England’s policy; emotionally, history suggested the happiness that was to be regained; and, as the Rev. Henry Cumings in Billerica, Massachusetts, added, recalling history meant recalling past happiness, things that cheered up at a time that offered little to cheer the mind.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, p.15. STEARNS was not the only pastor who sought to establish a title to the colony independent of the crown –and, I might add, in blatant disregard of the rights of native Americans. In July 1775, Daniel BATWELL assured his listeners in York-Town, Pennsylvania, that „[F]rom the poor untutored Indian it [the colony] has uniformly disdained to borrow, and abhorred to steal: Fair and open purchases have preceded every settlement“ – the implication is of course the same, BATWELL, A Sermon, Preached at York-Town, Before Captain Morgan’s and Captain Price’s Companies of Rifle-Men, on Thursday, July 20, 1775, p.15, Evans 13828. By December 1775 this view was obviously widespread. Without going into details Samuel BALDWIN stated: „All possessions, rights and privileges, being the immediate grant of heaven, or honestly acquired, or rightfully descended, as an inheritance, are to be guarded with care against all encroachments,“ BALDWIN, A Sermon Preached at Plymouth, December 22, 1775, p.14, Evans 14657. Similarly on New Year’s eve Nathan FISKE, Remarkable Providences to be gratefully recollected, religiously improved, and carefully transmitted to Posterity. A Sermon Preached at Brookfield On the last Day of the Year 1775. Together with Some Marginal Notes etc. Giving an Account of the first Settling of the town in the Year 1660; its Desolation by the Indians in Philip’s War, in 1675; its Distresses in Queen Anne’s War; and its Increase and Improvements to the present time. By N. F., A. M., Pastor of the third Church in Broookefield. Boston, New England, Printed by Thomas and John Fleet, 1776, p.28, Evans 14754; on the European roots of these concepts and their importance for Spanish and English concepts in the early modern period cf. Claudia SCHNURMANN, Europa trifft Amerika. Atlantische Wirtschaft in der Frühen Neuzeit, 1492-1783 (= Europäische Geschichte, Fischer TB Nr. 2490), Frankfurt a. M., 1998.

<sup>32</sup> MONTGOMERY, A Sermon Preached at Christiana Bridge and Newcastle, The 20th of July, 1775, p.26, Evans 14261.

<sup>33</sup> PERKINS, Sermon Preached to the Soldiers who went from West Hartford, in Defence of their Country. Delivered the 2d of June, 1775, , p. 5, Evans 14382; similarly SMITH, A Sermon on the Present Situation of American Affairs. Preached in Christ-Church, June 23, 1775, p. 11, Evans 14459; DUCHÉ, The American Vine, A Sermon, Preached in Christ-Church, Philadelphia, Before the Honourable Continental Congress, July 20th, 1775, p. 17-20, Evans 14012; Jonas CLARKE, The Fate of Blood-thirsty Oppressors, and Gode’s tender Care of his distressed People. A Sermon, Preached at Lexington, April 19, 1776, To commemorate the Murder, Bloodshed, and Commencement of Hostilities between Great-Britain and America, in that town, by a Brigade of Troops of George III, under Command of Lieutenant-Colonel Smith, on the Nineteenth of April, 1775. To which is added A Brief Narrative of the principal Transactions of that Day. By J. C., A. M., Pastor of the Church in Lexington, Massachusetts State. Boston, Printed by Powars and Willis, 1776, p. 22, Evans 14679.

<sup>34</sup> HENRY CUMINGS, A Sermon Preached in Billerica, On the 23d of November, 1775. Being the Day appointed by Civil Authority, for a Public Thanksgiving Throughout the Province of Massachusetts-Bay.

The contrasts were stark. For America was, so the clergy preached in Massachusetts’ and Connecticut’s churches, in the clutches of evil ministers who had conspired to enslave England *and* America: “Can it be any longer a secret”, the Rev. Oliver Noble cried at Newburyport on March 8, 1775,

*“that a Plan has been systematically laid, and persued by the British ministry, near twelve years, for enslaving America; as the STIRRUP by which they design to mount the RED HORSE of TYRANNY and Despotism at home? Well did despots at home know, that if charming FREEDOM spread her olive branches in America, emigrations from them to us, would soon go near to depopulate their own country; weakening them and strengthening us, until America became invincible; and therefore open strides of arbitrary power, were first to appear in the Colonies, while the mines were having at home; but when we were subdued they would open their batteries with safety against British liberty and Britons be made to feel the same oppressive hand of despotic Power.”*<sup>35</sup>

Two months later the Rev. Joseph Perry informed the Members of the Connecticut Assembly that the British ministry pursued a “determined plan” to establish “*absolute despotism, and as the certain consequence, cruel tyranny, and the total slavery of all America*”<sup>36</sup> The Rev. Nathan Perkins added in early June, that this “despotic plan” was the result of the “influence of bribery”<sup>37</sup>, supplemented, so the Rev. Enoch Huntington lamented six weeks later, by “unjustifiable methods, of secret intrigue and open violence.”<sup>38</sup> By December this conviction had lost its novelty. The Rev. Baldwin of Ply-

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By H. C., A. M., Pastor of the Church there. Massachusetts-Bay: Worcester, Printed by I. Thomas, near the Court House, p.11, Evans 14723.

<sup>35</sup> Oliver NOBLE, Some Strictures upon the Sacred Story Recorded in the Book of Esther, shewing the Power and Oppression of State Ministers tending to the Ruin and Destruction of God’s People: -- And the remarkable Interpositions of Divine Providence, in Favour of the Oppressed, in a Discourse Delivered at Newbury-Port, North Meeting House, March 8, 1775, In Commemoration of the Massacre at Boston, March the Fifth, 1770, by O. N., A. M., Pastor of a Church in Newbury, Preached at the Request of a Number of Respectable Gentlemen of said Town, and Now Published at the General Desire of the Hearers. Newbury-Port, New England, Printed by R. Lunt and H. W. Tinges [?], 1775, p. 26, Evans 14352.

<sup>36</sup> Joseph PERRY, A Sermon Preached before the General Assembly of the Colony of Connecticut, at Hartford, on the Day of their Anniversary Election, May 11, 1775. By J. P., Pastor of the first Church of Christ, in East Windsor. Hartford, Printed by Eben. Watson, Near the Great Bridge, 1775, p. 7, Evans. 14383.

<sup>37</sup> PERKINS, Sermon Preached to the Soldiers who went from West Hartford, in Defence of their Country. Delivered the 2d of June, 1775, p. 6, Evans 14382.

<sup>38</sup> Enoch HUNTINGTON, A Sermon Delivered at Middletown, July 20th, A. D. 1775, The Day appointed by the Continental Congress, to be observed by the Inhabitants of all the English Colonies, on the Continent, As a Day of public Humiliation, Fasting and Prayer. By E. H., A. M. and pastor of the first Church in Middletown, Published at the Request of the Auditors. Hartford, Printed by Eben. Watson, near the Great Bridge, 1775, p. 17, Evans 14124.

mouth matter of factly referred to the “preconcerted plan” and Elijah Fitch to the “deep laid plot”<sup>39</sup>.

This conspiracy was, at least in 1775, not the work of the King, who was still good, but of his ministers, who told “sordid slanders and infamous lies” about Americans.<sup>40</sup> These “designing, mischief-making ministers”<sup>41</sup> were “gratify[ing] their own licentious desires at the expence of the blood and treasure of his [i.e. King’s] subjects.”<sup>42</sup> In England they had already succeeded in destroying the glorious constitution. Indeed, the president of Harvard College, Samuel Langdon, thought that “the general prevalence of vice has changed the whole face of things in the British government.”<sup>43</sup> And Enoch Huntington agreed: “The *British* constitution ... at length, under the hands of bribery and corruption, ... seems *rotten* to the very core.”<sup>44</sup>

These sermons held few surprises for people who had read pamphlets and tracts published in London after 1763; in the wake of the controversy about John Wilkes writings on corruption authored by Henry St. John, Viscount Bolingbroke, were revived and enriched with a wealth of information on supposedly corrupt election practices in rotten or money-greedy English boroughs; in 1775 key tracts like that of James

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<sup>39</sup> BALDWIN, A Sermon Preached at Plymouth, December 22, 1775, p. 27, Evans 14657; ELIJAH FITCH, A Discourse, the Substance of which was delivered at Hopkington, on the Lord’s Day, March, 24, 1776, being the next Sabbath following the Precipitate Flight of the British Troops from Boston. By E. F., A. M., Published at the Request of the Hearers. Boston, Printed by John Boyle in Marlborough Square, 1776, p. 3, Evans 14755; the Massachusetts Governor and Commander-in-Chief of British troops in North America, Thomas Gage was convinced, that “the designs of the leaders of the rebellion are plain, and every day confirms the truth of what was asserted years ago by many intelligent people, that a plan was laid in this province and adjusted with some of the same stamp of others for a total independence whilst they amused people in England called the friends of America, as well as many in this country, with feigned professions of affection and attachment to the parent state and pretended to be aggrieved and discontented only on account of taxation, that they have designedly irritated government by every insult whilst they artfully poison the minds of the people and ripened them for insurrections,” Thomas Gage to the Earl of Dartmouth, 20 August 1775, Boston, in: K. G. DAVIES (ed.), Documents of the American Revolution, 1770-1783, 21 vols, Shannon, Ireland, 1972-1981, vol. 11, p. 81-82, quotation on p. 81.

<sup>40</sup> NOBLE, Some Strictures upon the Sacred Story Recorded in the Book of Esther, shewing the Power and Oppression of State Ministers tending to the Ruin and Destruction of God’s People; -- And the remarkable Interpositions of Divine Providence, in Favour of the Oppressed, in a Discourse Delivered at Newbury-Port, North Meeting House, March 8, 1775, p. 24, Evans 14352; SAMUEL LANGDON, Government Corrupted by Vice and recovered by Righteousness. A Sermon preached before the Honorable Congress of the Colony of the Massachusetts-Bay, in New England, Assembled in Watertown, on Wednesday, the 31st Day of May, 1775. Being the Anniversary fixed by Charter for the Election of Counsellors. By ... President of Harvard College in Cambridge. Watertown, MA, Printed and Sold by Benjamin Edes 1775, p. 10, Evans 14145; PERKINS, Sermon Preached to the Soldiers who went from West Hartford, in Defence of their Country. Delivered the 2d of June, 1775, p. 6, Evans 14382.

<sup>41</sup> CARMICHAEL, A Self-Defensive War Lawful, Proved in a Sermon, Preached at Lancaster, Before Captain Ross’s Company of Militia, in the Presbyterian Church, on Sabbath Morning, June 4, 1775, p. 30, Evans 13862.

<sup>42</sup> DUCHÉ, The Duty of standing fast in our spiritual and temporal liberties, A Sermon Preached in Christ-Church, July 7th, 1775, p. ii, Evans 14013.

<sup>43</sup> LANGDON, Government Corrupted by Vice and recovered by Righteousness. A Sermon preached before the Honorable Congress of the Colony of the Massachusetts-Bay, in New England, Assembled in Watertown, on Wednesday, the 31st Day of May, 1775, p. 15, Evans 14145.

<sup>44</sup> HUNTINGTON, A Sermon Delivered at Middletown, July 20th, A. D. 1775, p. 18, Evans 14124.

Burgh were reprinted in America.<sup>45</sup> It is, however, less likely that the parishioners who listened to these sermons were familiar with this scathing critiques of English politics. I suspect that they were first introduced to these views by the preachers, and this may account for the preachers' dwelling on this aspect with somewhat more relish than one would otherwise expect. In a larger sense the general description of conspiracies, evil ministers, and corrupt English politics provided the explanatory context for English colonial politics.

Three words dominate preachers' descriptions of English colonial politics: "oppression", "despotism" and "tyranny". The Rev. Oliver Noble evoked the "oppressive hand of despotic Power"<sup>46</sup>; the President of Harvard, Samuel Langdon, saw "America ... threatened with cruel oppression."<sup>47</sup> Even the mild-mannered president of Prince-

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<sup>45</sup>James BURGH, *Political Disquisitions; or, An enquiry into public errors, defects, and abuses. Illustrated by, and established upon facts and remarks, extracted from a variety of authors, ancient and modern.* Calculated to draw the timely attention of government and people, to a due consideration of the necessity, and the means, of reforming those errors, defects, and abuses; of restoring the constitution, and saving the state. Philadelphia: Printed and sold by Robert Bell, in Third-Street; and William Woodhouse, in Front-Street., 1774, Evans 13851; Henry St. John, Viscount BOLINGBROKE, *The freeholder's political catechism.* Very necessary to be studied by every freeman in America, [New London, Conn.]: re-printed and sold by T. Green., 1769, Evans 11450; on BOLINGBROKE and his influence on North American political thought in the 1760s and 1770s cf. Isaac KRAMNICK, *Bolingbroke and his Circle. The Politics of Nostalgia in the Age of Walpole*, Cambridge, MA 1968, and *The SAME, Republicanism and Bourgeois Radicalism. Political Ideology in late Eighteenth-Century England and America*, Ithaca, NY 1990; on Catherine MACAULAY and her influence in America cf. Vera NÜNNING, "A Revolution in Sentiments, Manners, and Moral Opinions." *Catherine Macaulay und die politische Kultur des englischen Radikalismus, 1760-1790* (= *Anglistische Forschungen*, Bd. 255), Heidelberg 1998; in his election sermon of 1763 to the Connecticut Assembly Ezra STILES quoted from „the celebrated historian Mrs.Catharine Macaulay, that ornament of the republic of letters, and the female Livy of the age," STILES, *The United States elevated to Glory and Honor. A Sermon, Preached before his Excellency Jonathan Trumbull, Esq. L.L.D., Governor and Commander in Chief, and the Honorable The General Assembly of the State of Connecticut, Convened at Hartford at the Anniversary Election, May 8, 1783*, p. 20, Evans 18198; on the discourse on corruption cf. Hermann WELLENREUTHER, *Korruption und das Wesen der englischen Verfassung im 18. Jahrhundert*, in: *Historische Zeitschrift* 234, 1982, p. 33-62.

<sup>46</sup> NOBLE, M. A., *Some Strictures upon the Sacred Story Recorded in the Book of Esther, shewing the Power and Oppression of State Ministers tending to the Ruin and Destruction of God's People: -- And the remarkable Interpositions of Divine Providence, in Favour of the Oppressed, in a Discourse Delivered at Newbury-Port, North Meeting House, March 8, 1775*, p. 26, Evans 14352

<sup>47</sup> LANGDON, *Government Corrupted by Vice and recovered by Righteousness. A Sermon preached before the Honorable Congress of the Colony of the Massachusetts-Bay, in New England, Assembled in Watertown, on Wednesday, the 31st Day of May, 1775*, p. 6, Evans 14145; cf. Rev. Nathan PERKINS' remark, that England „over these oppressions longs to stretch her iron rod," PERKINS, *Sermon Preached to the Soldiers who went from West Hartford, in Defence of their Country. Delivered the 2d of June, 1775*, p. 5, Evans 14382; the Rev. Jacob DUCHÉ prayed that the King would remove his evil ministers who sought to „seek to change his government into oppression," DUCHÉ, *The Duty of standing fast in our spiritual and temporal liberties, A Sermon Preached in Christ-Church, July 7th, 1775*, p. ii, Evans 14013; the Rev. Daniel BATWELL was sure that evil rulers „made laws on purpose to oppress, or corrupt the people," BATWELL, *A Sermon, Preached at York-Town, Before Captain Morgan's and Captain Price's Companies of Rifle-Men, on Thursday, July 20, 1775*, p. 14, Evans 13828; the Rev. Enoch HUNTINGTON devoted the whole application of his interpretation of the text to „that designs to enslave and oppress us, and bring us into absolute subjection to arbitrary power," HUNTINGTON, *A Sermon Delivered at Middletown, July 20th, A. D. 1775*, p. 17, Evans 14124; the Rev. Ezra SAMSON was sure Americans had „great reason to complain of oppression and tyranny," Ezra SAMSON, *A Sermon Preached at Roxbury-Camp, before Col. Cotton's Regiment; on the 20th of July P.M. 1775. Being A Day set apart for Fasting and*

ton College, the learned Dr. John Witherspoon, could not but focus a long section of his sermon in mid-May 1776 on “*The ambition of mistaken princes, the cunning and cruelty of oppressive and corrupt ministers*”<sup>48</sup>; six weeks before the Declaration of Independence the Rev. Samuel West assured the General Court of Massachusetts, that only “intolerable oppression” absolved the subject from absolute obedience to rulers, and this of course was, so he explained, the case of the good people of Massachusetts, who “find themselves cruelly oppressed by the parent state.”<sup>49</sup>

Even more colorful were the uses of the word “tyranny”: The Rev. Oliver Noble saw England mounted on the “RED HORSE of TYRANNY and Despotism”<sup>50</sup>; determined, so the Rev. Joseph Perry added, to establish “*cruel tyranny, and the total slavery of all America.*”<sup>51</sup> Yet not long thereafter the Rev. Daniel Batwell assured his parishioners, that “with domination founded in tyranny the allwise and alljust ruler has no connections.”<sup>52</sup> The Baptist minister David Jones, in discussing the problem of non-resistance, broadened the meaning of “tyranny”: “Is there any essential difference between being robbed by a *protestant* or a *papist*? Is it not the very same thing? Tyranny is Tyranny, slavery is slavery, by whomsoever it is imposed.”<sup>53</sup> In 1776 the ex-

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Prayer, throughout all the United Colonies of America. By E. S., Colleague Pastor of the First Church in Plympton [Published at the Request of the Officers of said Regiment]. Watertown, Printed and Sold by Benjamin Edes, 1775, p. 17, Evans 14450; even the Rev. David GRIFFITH in his address to the Provincial Congress of Virginia on New Year’s Eve 1775 felt sure that the House of Commons’ claim was „unnatural, unjust and oppressive,“ GRIFFITH, *Passive Obedience Considered*. In a Sermon Preached at Williamsburg, December 31th, 1775, p. 21, Evans 14793; In spring 1776 the Rev. Elijah FITCH saw the „cords of oppression“ in the hands of the authors of „deep laid plots,“ FITCH, *A Discourse, the Substance of which was delivered at Hopkington, on the Lord’s Day, March, 24, 1776*, p. 3, Evans 14755; while the Rev. Jonas CLARKE dedicated his whole anniversary sermon in Lexington to „The Fate of Blood-thirsty Oppressors,“ CLARKE, *The Fate of Blood-thirsty Oppressors, and Gode’s tender Care of his distressed People. A Sermon, Preached at Lexington, April 19, 1776*.

<sup>48</sup> WITHERSPOON, *The Dominion of Providence over the Passions of Men. A Sermon Preached at Princeton, On the 17th of May, 1776*, p. 5-6, Evans 15224.

<sup>49</sup> SAMUEL WEST, *A Sermon Preached before the Honorable Council, and the Honorable House of Representatives, of the Colony of the Massachusetts-Bay, in New England, May 29th, 1776. Being the Anniversary for the Election of the Honorable Council for the Colony, by S. W. , A. M., Pastor of a Church in Dartmouth. Boston, Printed by John Gill, in Queen Street, 1776*, p. 19, p. 21, Evans 15217.

<sup>50</sup> NOBLE, *Some Strictures upon the Sacred Story Recorded in the Book of Esther, shewing the Power and Oppression of State Ministers tending to the Ruin and Destruction of God’s People: -- And the remarkable Interpositions of Divine Providence, in Favour of the Oppressed, in a Discourse Delivered at Newbury-Port, North Meeting House, March 8, 1775*, p. 26, Evans 14352.

<sup>51</sup> PERRY, *A Sermon Preached before the General Assembly of the Colony of Connecticut, at Hartford, on the Day of their Anniversary Election, May 11, 1775*, p. 7, Evans 14383.

<sup>52</sup> BATWELL, M. A., *A Sermon, Preached at York-Town, Before Captain Morgan’s and Captain Price’s Companies of Rifle-Men, on Thursday, July 20, 1775*, p. 14, Evans 13828.

<sup>53</sup> JONES, *Defensive War in a just Cause sinless. A Sermon Preached on the Day of the Continental Fast at Treddyffryn in Chester County, by ...*, p. 16, Evans 14133. In November 1775 the Rev. Ebenezer BALDWIN took a wider view: „The European Kingdoms are already groaning,“ so he informed his listeners, “under the Weight of Tyranny, Corruption and Luxury: They will doubtless e’er that Time be much in the State of the present Eastern Empires. But when ever this glorious State of the Church takes Place, civil Liberty must be enjoyed, for Religion cannot subsist, in this flourishing State, under Tyranny and Despotism,“ Ebenezer BALDWIN, *The Duty of Rejoicing under Calamities and Afflictions, Considered and Improved, in a Sermon Preached at Danbury, November 16, 1775. A Day set Apart for Thanksgiv-*

cited talk about tyranny began to calm down. John Witherspoon quietly pointed out, that if there existed between the colonies "a certain distance from the seat of government, ... an attempt to rule will either produce tyranny and helpless subjection, or provoke resistance and effect a separation."<sup>54</sup> And less than two weeks later, the Rev. Samuel West assured the General Court of Massachusetts, that „The servants of sin and corruption are subjected to the worst kind of tyranny in the universe“ and that therefore „The authority of a tyrant is of itself null and void.“<sup>55</sup> Six weeks later Thomas Jefferson and with him the Delegates to the Continental Congress reached the same conclusions and signed the Declaration of Independence.

Why would the „evil ministers“ of George III want to oppress the colonists and establish despotism and tyranny in North America? The American clergy had no doubts: According to the Rev. Oliver Noble the English government and „designing, and detestable patriots have in every age, nation, and country in the world, at one time or other, led their blind confiding country-men, into the very jaws of slavery, vassalage, and ruin.“ At the root of the trouble with England was, so Noble added, nothing but that „we WILL NOT BE SLAVES.“<sup>56</sup> Yet the aim of the English government was, as the Rev. Nathan Perkins pointed out, that „we must be scourged into vassalage like slaves.“<sup>57</sup> But the Rev. John Carmichael was sure that no patriotic American would „submit tamely to the galling yoke of *perpetual slavery* ... for as we are the descendants of Briton, *we scorn to be slaves*.“<sup>58</sup> The Rev. Enoch Huntington of Middletown, Connecticut, neatly put the problem: „Are not patriots of distinction, friends of their country and patrons of liberty, proscribed for slaughter, and whole fleets and armies, the ultima ratio, instead of sound reason, and the principles of the British constitution, and of right and religion, made use of to convert us as a people, to a state of the most abject slavery to the crown, court-parasites, minions, and placemen of Great

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ing in the Colony of Connecticut. By E. B., A. M., Pastor of the First Church of Christ in Danbury. New York: Printed by Hugh Gaine, Bookseller and Stationer, at the Bible and Crown, in Hanover-Square, 1776, p. 40, Evans 14656; a similar view is expressed by CUMINGS, A Sermon Preached in Billerica, On the 23d of November, 1775, p. 9, Evans 14723.

<sup>54</sup> WITHERSPOON, The Dominion of Providence over the Passions of Men. A Sermon Preached at Princeton, On the 17th of May, 1776, p. 44, Evans 15224.

<sup>55</sup> WEST, A Sermon Preached before the Honorable Council, and the Honorable House of Representatives, of the Colony of the Massachusetts-Bay, in New England, May 29th, 1776, p. 13, p. 14, Evans 15217.

<sup>56</sup> NOBLE, Some Strictures upon the Sacred Story Recorded in the Book of Esther, shewing the Power and Oppression of State Ministers tending to the Ruin and Destruction of God's People: -- And the remarkable Interpositions of Divine Providence, in Favour of the Oppressed, in a Discourse Delivered at Newbury-Port, North Meeting House, March 8, 1775, p. 5, 23, Evans 14352.

<sup>57</sup> PERKINS, A. M., Sermon Preached to the Soldiers who went from West Hartford, in Defence of their Country. Delivered the 2d of June, 1775, p. 9, Evans 14382.

<sup>58</sup> CARMICHAEL, A Self-Defensive War Lawful, Proved in a Sermon, Preached at Lancaster, Before Captain Ross's Company of Militia, in the Presbyterian Church, on Sabbath Morning, June 4, 1775, p. 6, p. 32, Evans 13862.

Britain?”<sup>59</sup> And that meant nothing else, so the Rev. Joseph Montgomery from Newcastle, Delaware, maintained, than „ to reduce us from the glorious character of free-men to that of slaves.“ With a nice sense for the concrete meanings of slavery the Rev. Ezra Samson summed it all up: „In a word, we must be slaves, learn to grovel in the dust, and from thence look up to our imperious masters, in order to receive from their griping hands, the scanty pittance which they might please to afford us.“<sup>60</sup> Americans faced a stark alternative in this fight: „THE LIBERTY or SLAVERY of the AMERICAN WORLD,“ so the Rev. Jonas Clarke on April 19, 1776, in Lexington reminded his listeners in his anniversary sermon.<sup>61</sup> Yet slavery was not only the antipode to liberty. It changed human beings in a fundamental way, as the Rev. Judah Champion suggested in his election sermon to the General Court of Connecticut in May 1776: „Slavery ... debases the mind – clogs the finest movements of the soul; discourages industry, frugality, and every thing praise-worthy; introduces ignorance and poverty, with the most sordid vices, and universal misery.“<sup>62</sup> Slavery would thus undercut all efforts to establish a republic of virtuous citizens.

Again, once independence was declared, the term „slavery“ gradually disappeared from the vocabulary of preachers; yet there are three exceptions: The Rev. Andrews asked, what even two African preachers did not dare do so directly: „whether our detaining in captivity, a part of our fellow creatures, can be reconciled with our own principles of liberty, and if not, to examine, whether it is not necessary, either to change our principles, or let the *oppressed go free*, for how can we expect, God will work that deliverance for us, which we refuse to give to others?“ He got of course no answer; the fact that Black Whig and Aethiopian –they thought it wiser to publish under pseudonyms -- aside no one dared to raise this issue speaks loud enough.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> HUNTINGTON, A Sermon Delivered at Middletown, July 20th, A. D. 1775, p. 19, Evans 14124.

<sup>60</sup> SAMSON, A Sermon Preached at Roxbury-Camp, before Col. Cotton’s Regiment; on the 20th of July P.M. 1775, p. 18, Evans 14450; The Rev. Ebenezer BALDWIN added for good measure „Chains of Slavery“ to the description. In order to avoid this gruesome fate, Americans had no alternative, but to fight. For „If conquered in this War the worst of Deaths awaits great Numbers, and the worst of Slavery the Survivors ... *to live*, must be Slaves to the Conquerors,“ Ebenezer BALDWIN, The Duty of Rejoicing under Calamities and Afflictions, Considered and Improved, in a Sermon Preached at Danbury, November 16, 1775, p. 22, p. 26-27, Evans 14656.

<sup>61</sup> CLARKE, The Fate of Blood-thirsty Oppressors, and Gode’s tender Care of his distressed People. A Sermon, Preached at Lexington, April 19, 1776, p. 29-30, Evans 14679.

<sup>62</sup> Judah CHAMPION, Christian and Civil Liberty and Freedom considered and Recommended: A Sermon, Delivered Before the General Assembly of the Colony of Connecticut, at Hartford, on the day of their Anniversary Election, May 9th, 1776. By J. C., A. M., Pastor of the first Church of christ in Litchfield. Hartford, Printed by E. Watson, near the Great Bridge, 1776, p. 14, Evans 14675.

<sup>63</sup> ANDREWS, A. M., A Discourse, Shewing the Necessity of Joining Internal Repentance, With the External Profession of it. Delivered upon the General Fast, July 20, 1775, p. 14; BLACK WHIG, Sermon, On the Present Situation of the Affairs of America and Great –Britain, p. 9, Evans 13812; AETHIOPIAN, A Sermon on the Evacuation of Charlestown, p. 10, Evans 18182.

The conceptual framework ministers sketched was familiar to colonists who knew about corrupt governors who endangered their rights: There was a conspiracy by evil ministers who were determined to establish a despotic and oppressive tyranny by enslaving North Americans, propagating vices and by indulging in widespread corruption. In the widest sense this aimed at subverting the „British constitution, which for ages has stood the guardian of the means of her subject’s happiness, the envy of foreign nations, and the administration of the whole world,“ as the Rev. Joseph Perry informed his listeners.<sup>64</sup> The object of that perversion was Parliament: The Rev. Enoch Huntington put it into the following query: „Is it not acknowledged that a venal corrupt majority in the British Parliament, voting altogether at the nod of the minister, govern all the public acts and conduct of that body ... And is not this corrupt and venal body, sometimes with equal pomp and impiety held up to our view by themselves and others, as *omnipotent*.“<sup>65</sup> In their sermons the preachers did not focus on the individual parliamentary acts the colonies objected to, but instead concentrated on the Declaratory Act’s claim „that the parliament has a right to make laws to bind us in all cases whatsoever.“<sup>66</sup> This claim was heinous, in particular because first, no one knew what the Parliament’s claim would cover next<sup>67</sup> and second, because the colonists had „never swore allegiance to the Parliament of Great Britain,“ as the Rev. Carmichael pointed out.<sup>68</sup> Why should they then “lye prostrate at the feet of any British minister or British parliament”, the Rev. Huntington asked?<sup>69</sup>

The sermons did not bother with the details of British measures or the fine points of colonial reasoning; they focused on the key issues and these were so hermetically and coherently joined together that the colonial listener got the impression that he was

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<sup>64</sup> PERRY, A Sermon Preached before the General Assembly of the Colony of Connecticut, at Hartford, on the Day of their Anniversary Election, May 11, 1775, p. 7, Evans 14383. Similar LANGDON, Government Corrupted by Vice and recovered by Righteousness. A Sermon preached before the Honorable Congress of the Colony of the Massachusetts-Bay, in New England, Assembled in Watertown, on Wednesday, the 31st Day of May, 1775, p. 6, Evans 14145.

<sup>65</sup> HUNTINGTON, A Sermon Delivered at Middletown, July 20th, A. D. 1775, p. 18-19, Evans 14124.

<sup>66</sup> JONES, M.-A., Defensive War in a just Cause sinless. A Sermon Preached on the Day of the Continental Fast at Tredyffryn in Chester County, p. 19, Evans 14133. Indeed, the little word “*whatsoever*” acquired an ominous prominence in these sermons: “invaluable inheritance ... too dearly bought to be given up on any terms whatsoever”, (PERRY, A Sermon Preached before the General Assembly of the Colony of Connecticut, at Hartford, on the Day of their Anniversary Election, May 11, 1775, p. 17, Evans 14383), “laws are not good, except they ... defend the subject against ... arbitrary power ... or any body of men whatsoever” (JONES, M.-A., Defensive War in a just Cause sinless. A Sermon Preached on the Day of the Continental Fast at Tredyffryn in Chester County, p. 13-14, Evans 14133).

<sup>67</sup> “I am clearly convinced, that if we submit in the present dispute, liberty of conscience will be next invaded by that lordly Court and corrupt Parliament .... This renders our dispute with Great Britain of the utmost importance to all of every denomination”, FOSTER, A Sermon Preached at Fag’s Manor, To Captain Taylor’s Company of Recruits on the Lord’s Day, February 18, 1776, p. 12, Evans 14758.

<sup>68</sup> CARMICHAEL, A Self-Defensive War Lawful, Proved in a Sermon, Preached at Lancaster, Before Captain Ross’s Company of Militia, in the Presbyterian Church, on Sabbath Morning, June 4, 1775, p. 31, Evans 13862.

<sup>69</sup> HUNTINGTON, A Sermon Delivered at Middletown, July 20th, A. D. 1775, p. 25, Evans 14124.

caught in a trap. All hope seemed in vain; those who had, like the Delegates to the Continental Congress in their “Address to the People of England” of July 1775 hoped, that the people of England would stand up for the rights of their American Brethren, admitted by early 1776, that this was an illusion.<sup>70</sup> The way ministers described the English position demonstrated the evil logic of people bent on destroying the good. Gradually England, her king, and her people lost all positive qualities: In his sermon on March 24, 1776, the Rev. Elijah Fitch described England as the “kingdom of darkness”<sup>71</sup>. By the end of May 1776 England became identified with evil itself; it was the whore of Babylon, the apocalyptic “tyrannical monster” itself: “can words more strongly point out”, so the Rev. Samuel West on May 29, 1776 queried his listeners in his election sermon, “or exhibit in more lively colours, the exceeding rage, fury and impetuosity of tyrants in their destroying and making havock of mankind. To this beast we find the dragon gave his power, seat and great authority, i. e. the devil constituted him to be his viceregent on earth; this is to denote that tyrants are the ministers of satan, ordained by him for the destruction of mankind.”<sup>72</sup> Five weeks later independence was declared.

### 3. *“The Cause of AMERICA ... is the cause of GOD”*

America was, and the preachers left their parishioners in no doubt about it, engaged in a desperate struggle against what in 1775 could still be called with some affection

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<sup>70</sup> NOBLE, *Some Strictures upon the Sacred Story Recorded in the Book of Esther, shewing the Power and Oppression of State Ministers tending to the Ruin and Destruction of God’s People: -- And the remarkable Interpositions of Divine Providence, in Favour of the Oppressed, in a Discourse Delivered at Newbury-Port, North Meeting House, March 8, 1775*, p. 23, Evans 14352.

<sup>71</sup> FITCH, *A Discourse, the Substance of which was delivered at Hopkington, on the Lord’s Day, March, 24, 1776*, p. 7, Evans 14755; on April 9, 1776, the Rev. CLARKE was sure, that Egypt’s fate as oppressor of Israel would be England’s fate, too, CLARKE, *The Fate of Blood-thirsty Oppressors, and God’s tender Care of his distressed People. A Sermon, Preached at Lexington, April 19, 1776*, p. 7, p. 29-30, Evans 14679. Exactly one month later the Rev. Judah CHAMPION decried that Massachusetts was defiled „by worse than savage hands,“ CHAMPION, *Christian and Civil Liberty and Freedom considered and Recommended: A Sermon, Delivered Before the General Assembly of the Colony of Connecticut, at Hartford, on the day of their Anniversary Election, May 9th, 1776*, p. 31, Evans 14675.

<sup>72</sup> WEST, *A Sermon Preached before the Honorable Council, and the Honorable House of Representatives, of the Colony of the Massachusetts-Bay, in New England, May 29th, 1776*, p. 54, p. 65, Evans 15217; ZUBLY, *A Sermon on American Affairs, Preached At the Opening of the Provincial Congress of Georgia, p. 24*, Evans 14635; FOSTER, *A Sermon Preached at Fag’s Manor, To Captain Taylor’s Company of Recruits on the Lord’s Day, February 18, 1776*, p. 14, Evans 14758, all thought that the colonial position was supported by significant parts of the English population. John WITHERSPOON was, as far as I can see, the first preacher, who declared this belief erroneous. In his address to the Scottish settlers in North America, that was annexed to his sermon of May 29, 1776, he pointed out: „As to Great-Britain itself, time has now fully discovered that the real friends of America in any part of that kingdom were very few, and those whose friendship was disinterested, and in no degree owing to their own political factions, still fewer. The wise and valuable part of the nation were, and as yet are, in a great measure ignorant of the state of things in this country,“ WITHERSPOON, *The Dominion of Providence over the Passions of Men. A Sermon Preached at Princeton, On the 17th of May, 1776*, p. 62, Evans 15224.

“parent”<sup>73</sup>, but which by May 1776 at least in the eyes of the New England clergy had lost all traces of humanity: “If”, so the Rev. Jonas Clarke cried in mid-April 1776, “she [i. e. England] be a mother, she is an unnatural, monstrous one, who if she does not forget, yet shews she hath no compassion upon her children, but rather delights in their blood.”<sup>74</sup> Confronted and threatened by such a merciless, brutal, and tyrannical devilish monster, the colonists needed all the help they could get – above all that of God. Without God they would be lost. Yet the God of Congregationalists and Presbyterians was all-knowing but unscrutinable. Everything was predetermined; but what was determined was only known to God.<sup>75</sup> Only God knew the “great and infinitely wise Plan” and no American had knowledge of his “over-ruling Providence”. Yet there were indications and preconditions that might reveal a bit of both and tilt the scale in the Americans’ favor. One such indication was to be found in the relationship between God and his people, and that again was predicated on whether the people lived according to God’s commandments.

There was hope. The Rev. Zabdiel Adams assured his listeners, that God “loveth righteousness, and is particularly concerned for the happiness of his great family of mankind.”<sup>76</sup> But that offered little assurance, as the Rev. Nathan Perkins reminded his parishioners: “Whether we realize it or not, it is true, God could with infinite ease cut us down and send us to endless misery.” Reassurance was not even attainable by acknowledging “our constant dependance on God the great creator and moral governor and supreme lawgiver of the universe.”<sup>77</sup> Sure, God was generally inclined to help those who turned to him, but he made his help contingent on the goodness of his people; the problem really was whether in God’s eyes the Americans were good

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<sup>73</sup> SMITH, A Sermon on the Present Situation of American Affairs. Preached in Christ-Church, June 23, 1775, p.12, Evans 14459. DUCHÉ, The Duty of standing fast in our spiritual and temporal liberties, A Sermon Preached in Christ-Church, July 7th, 1775, p. 15, Evans 14013; BATWELL, A Sermon, Preached at York-Town, Before Captain Morgan’s and Captain Price’s Companies of Rifle-Men, on Thursday, July 20, 1775, p. 17, Evans 13828; MONTGOMERY, A Sermon Preached at Christiana Bridge and Newcastle, The 20th of July, 1775, p. 9, Evans 14261. Already in 1775 the term “parent” seems to disappear from sermons. On the importance of kinship-terminology in Revolutionary discourse cf. Melvin YAZAWA, *From Colonies to Commonwealth. Familial Ideology and the Beginnings of the American Republic*. Baltimore, MD 1985, chap. 3.

<sup>74</sup> CLARKE, The Fate of Blood-thirsty Oppressors, and Gode’s tender Care of his distressed People. A Sermon, Preached at Lexington, April 19, 1776, p. 20, Evans 14679.

<sup>75</sup> The congregational minister of Danbury on November 16, 1775, offered the following formula: „All Calamities and Afflictions brought upon Individuals or Communities are calculated to subserve the Purposes of divine Wisdom, are necessary Parts of God’s great and infinitely wise Plan. God governs the World: Nothing takes Place but according to his over-ruling Providence,“ Ebenezer BALDWIN, The Duty of Rejoicing under Calamities and Afflictions, Considered and Improved, in a Sermon Preached at Danbury, November 16, 1775, p. 11, Evans 14656.

<sup>76</sup> ADAMS, The Grounds of Confidence and Success in War, represented. A Sermon Preached at a Lecture in Lunenburg, New England, on Monday, January 2d, 1775, p. 8, Evans 13789.

<sup>77</sup> PERKINS, Sermon Preached to the Soldiers who went from West Hartford, in Defence of their Country. Delivered the 2d of June, 1775, p. 10, Evans 14382.

enough for him to side with them. A few preachers were sceptical. The Rev. Samuel Andrews of Wallingford in Connecticut fumed on July 20, 1775: “To make public, solemn professions of repentance, while we go on still, and persist obstinately in our wickedness, is the greatest prevarication with God, and a most solemn and public way of affronting him, and cannot fail of exciting his indignation and heavy displeasure.”<sup>78</sup> Andrews’ God was unrelenting, hard, demanding, a God that expected without mercy that both sides fulfill their contract obligations: Help was to be had but only for the really true sinner.

Most other preachers were more responsive to the need of their parishioners for reassurance. For clearly, people did not come into the church or get ready to march to war and be told that there was no chance for God to help them; these expectations exerted pressures and these pressures shaped the clergy’s theology. But they did not offer God’s help for nothing. Two conditions had to be fulfilled: The Americans’ cause had to be just – and this is the reason, why in 1775 all preachers discuss the political conflict in such detail –, and Americans had to turn to God. Repenting their sins, would help, but most preachers did not overly stress this aspect.<sup>79</sup> If these conditions were met, then, so Zabdiel Adams in January 1775, “God will favor and succeed them in it; *that the Captain of the Lord’s host will be for them, and fight their battles.*”<sup>80</sup> Oliver Noble admonished his listeners “not to dispond or despair, but commit our cause to God, and stand FAST ... The Cause of AMERICA (now in controversy) is the cause of GOD, never did Man struggle in a greater, or more righteous CAUSE.”<sup>81</sup> The

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<sup>78</sup> ANDREWS added for good measure: “We have already fasted and cryed repeatedly unto God for deliverance since the commencement of our troubles; but as yet, God does not appear to regard our cries; -- the cloude grows still blacker and heavier, and now seems to be just ready to burst with irresistible fury upon our heads.” The only hope ANDREWS held out for his parishioners in these desparate times was true and sincere repentance. Then “he [God] will *probably*, save our land from ruin .. but certainly our souls from perdition”, ANDREWS, A. M., A Discourse, Shewing the Necessity of Joining Internal Repentance, With the External Profession of it. Delivered upon the General Fast, July 20, 1775, p. 10-11, Evans 13812 (italics mine).

<sup>79</sup> Typical was the following statement: “My Brethren let us repent and implore the divine mercy. Let us amend our ways, and our doings; reform every thing which has been provoking to the most high, and thus endeavor to obtain the gracious interpositions of providence for our deliverance”, LANGDON, Government Corrupted by Vice and recovered by Righteousness. A Sermon preached before the Honorable Congress of the Colony of the Massachusetts-Bay, in New England, Assembled in Watertown, on Wednesday, the 31st Day of May, 1775, p. 22, Evans 14145. The Rev. William GORDON in his election sermon thought that after the conflict with England had been resolved it was time, that „we should certainly repent and reform”, William GORDON, M. A., A Sermon preached before the Honourable House of Representatives, On the Day intended for the Choice of Counsellors, Agreeable to the Advice of the Continental Congress. Watertown, Printed and Sold by Benjamin Edes, 1775, p. 21, Evans 14073.

<sup>80</sup> ADAMS, The Grounds of Confidence and Success in War, represented. A Sermon Preached at a Lecture in Lunenburg, New England, on Monday, January 2d, 1775, p. 9, Evans 13789.

<sup>81</sup> NOBLE, Some Strictures upon the Sacred Story Recorded in the Book of Esther, shewing the Power and Oppression of State Ministers tending to the Ruin and Destruction of God’s People: -- And the remarkable Interpositions of Divine Providence, in Favour of the Oppressed, in a Discourse Delivered at Newbury-Port, North Meeting House, March 8, 1775, p. 20, Evans 14352. On May 11, 1775, the Rev. Joseph PERRY came to the same conclusion: „Our cause is a good one, it is the cause of religion, of lib-

Presbyterian minister John Carmichael on June 4, 1775 was even more direct: After proving that England was in the wrong and America right, he cheerfully told Captain Ross's Company of Militia in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, "I am happy, that I can with a good conscience, congratulate you and myself this day, on the certainty we have, for the justice and goodness of our cause ... he [God] is on our side, we hope, and if God is on our side, we need not fear what man can do unto us."<sup>82</sup> By the end of the year the problem was settled: God is with his "American Israel". On December 22, 1775, Samuel Baldwin cried: "Then America and the desert shall rejoice and blossom as the rose, and the ransomed of the Lord shall return, and come to Zion with songs and

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erty, of our country, and consequently the cause of God! If we place a humble and a penitent trust in the Almighty, we need not fear, *though the seas roar and the waves toss themselves*, for with Him are infinite power, wisdom, goodness, justice, and faithfulness. He hath said, and he will make it good, *If ye be with me I will be with you, and If God be for us who can be against us*," PERRY, A Sermon Preached before the General Assembly of the Colony of Connecticut, at Hartford, on the Day of their Anniversary Election, May 11, 1775, p. 16, Evans 14383.

<sup>82</sup> CARMICHAEL, A Self-Defensive War Lawful, Proved in a Sermon, Preached at Lancaster, Before Captain Ross's Company of Militia, in the Presbyterian Church, on Sabbath Morning, June 4, 1775, p. 31-32, Evans 13862. Similarly GORDON, A Sermon preached before the Honourable House of Representatives, On the Day intended for the Choice of Counsellors, p. 20-21, Evans 14073. Six weeks later the Rev. Daniel BATWELL's message to York Town's rifle men was "That good time will come; let us not doubt it for we have a gracious master in heaven." For "there is no reason to think that any state legitimately constituted, will be destroyed by his supreme fiat." BATWELL, A Sermon, Preached at York-Town, Before Captain Morgan's and Captain Price's Companies of Rifle-Men, on Thursday, July 20, 1775, p. 13, p. 14, Evans 13828. For the Baptist Minister David JONES the problem was even simpler: Since God had ordered, so he declared on the same day, the "higher powers" to "secure the property and promote the happiness of the whole community", doing the opposite meant that such a government "resisteth the ordinance of God, and receiveth finally condemnation, and that justly." God was bound to be on America's side, although JONES was not that blunt; nevertheless he asserted that "when our dependance is on the almighty God, we may hope for success." That hope was already well founded, "for a martial spirit from God has spread throughout the land," JONES, Defensive War in a just Cause sinless. A Sermon Preached on the Day of the Continental Fast at Tredyffryn in Chester County, by ..., p. 12, p. 22, p. 24, Evans 14133. The Rev. Ezra SAMSON on July 20, 1775 prayed for God's assistance and concluded his sermon with the assurance: "Kind Heaven hath heard our cries, owned the JUSTICE OF OUR CAUSE, and appeared for us in numerous ways almost miraculous. The holy and mighty arm of God hath lately gotten us repeated and most surprising victories", SAMSON, A Sermon Preached at Roxbury-Camp, before Col. Cotton's Regiment; on the 20th of July P.M. 1775, p. 20, Evans 14450. Toward the end of the year preachers more and more simply affirmed, that God had made America's plight his cause. Thus in mid-November the Rev. Ebenezer BALDWIN proclaimed, "that we can with Confidence commit our Cause to him who judgeth righteously", Ebenezer BALDWIN, The Duty of Rejoicing under Calamities and Afflictions, Considered and Improved, in a Sermon Preached at Danbury, November 16, 1775, p. 30, Evans 14656; With somewhat less assurance the Rev. Henry CUMINGS a week later reminded his listeners of "the wonders, which God hath wrought for this *American Israel* in times past", CUMINGS, A Sermon Preached in Billerica, On the 23d of November, 1775, p.18, Evans 14723; equally reluctant is Thaddeus MACCARTY, Praise to God, a Duty of continual Obligation. A Sermon, Preached at Worcester, Thursday, November 23d, 1775. Being a Day of Public Thanksgiving, by the Appointment of the General Assembly, by T. M. A. M., Pastor of the church in Worcester. Published by Desire of many of the Hearers. Massachusetts-Bay: Worcester, Printed and sold by I. Thomas at the Printing Office near the Court House, p. 27-28, Evans 14830. On the other hand, the Rev. Isaac MANSFIELD, Jr. simply stated on the same day, that "God's providence" had lately been visible everywhere, Isaac MANSFIELD, Jr., A Sermon Preached in the Camp at Roxbury, November 23, 1775; Being the Day appointed by Authority for Thanksgiving Through the Province, By I. M., jun., A. M. Chaplin to General Thomas' s Regiment, in the Continental Army. Published at the Request of the Officers in the said Regiment. Boston: Printed by S. Hall, at his Office in School-Street, 1776, p. 23, Evans 14831.

everlasting joy upon their heads; they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.”<sup>83</sup> And the Rev. William Foster in mid-February 1776 remarked: “...nothing can afford such ... comfort ... as a firm and unshaken confidence that the Lord Jehovah is on our side, and the cause we engage in, is the cause of God.” In his conclusion he summarized the case under the heading “Things proposed, namely to offer some grounds of security arising from God’s being on our side. ... 1st His most perfect knowledge of all possible events, lays a foundation of encouragement ... 2d God has not only the most perfect knowledge of all persons and things, but has the secret management of all in his own hand. ... 3rd. He is bound by his faithfulness to stand by and support a righteous cause ... Lastly, Omnipotence is engaged on our Side.”<sup>84</sup>

The question on which side God would stand, that so much occupied preachers in 1775, is after February 1776 for two reasons a non-issue: First, everyone was convinced that England was in the wrong and America’s cause just and therefore right in the eyes of God; secondly and more importantly, preachers declared the constitutional order of the colonies sanctioned by God. This argument is based on two premises: First, “The law of nature gives men no right to do any thing that is immoral, or contrary to the will of God, and injurious to their fellow creatures; for a state of nature is properly a state of law and government, even a government founded upon the unchangeable nature of the Deity”, so the Rev. Samuel West suggested; “secondly, Though magistrates are to consider themselves as the servants of the people, seeing from them it is, that they derive their power and authority; yet they may also be considered as the ministers of God ordain’d by him for the good of mankind ... whatever right reason requires as necessary to be done, is as much the will and law of God, as tho’ it were enjoined us by an immediate revelation from heaven, or commanded in the sacred scriptures.” Violating a constitution sanctioned by God of course invites God’s wrath on the violator. The consequence was obvious: For West the English king was a tyrant and “tyrants are the ministers of satan.”<sup>85</sup>

#### *4. The Future before May 1776: Independence*

With God on America’s side and indeed not only responsible for the success of the war but also for decent constitutional arrangements and orderly government, accom-

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<sup>83</sup> Samuel BALDWIN, A Sermon Preached at Plymouth, December 22, 1775, p. 39, Evans 14657.

<sup>84</sup> FOSTER, A Sermon Preached at Fag’s Manor, To Captain Taylor’s Company of Recruits on the Lord’s Day, February 18, 1776, p. 3, p. 18-19, Evans 14758; similarly FITCH, A Discourse, the Substance of which was delivered at Hopkington, on the Lord’s Day, March, 24, 1776, p. 28, Evans 14755.

<sup>85</sup> WEST, A Sermon Preached before the Honorable Council, and the Honorable House of Representatives, of the Colony of the Massachusetts-Bay, in New England, May 29th, 1776, p. 11, p. 16, p. 65, Evans 15217.

plishments, that were completed just as the Delegates to the Continental Congress got ready to sign the Declaration of Independence, the road was clear for turning from the past to the future. Yet surprisingly, this only partially reflects the sequence of arguments in the sermons. Before April 1776, sermons mentioned “independence” as the most radical version of “future” only negatively. The Rev. John Carmichael said first, what others that year stressed too: the accusation that they were “‘rebels’, who would throw off all government, – would be ‘independent and what not’”, was false. “We desire no such things – we desire to be as we were in the beginning of the present unhappy reign ... we declare ourselves the subjects of King George the third.”<sup>86</sup> Only in April 1776 did the tone change: The Rev. Jonas Clarke confessed in his sermon commemorating the Battle at Lexington and Concord on April 19, 1776, that none had ever dreamt of independence “had they not been urged, and even forced upon such an expedient, by measures of oppression and violence, and the *shedding of innocent blood*.”<sup>87</sup> Four weeks later, the learned president of the college of Princeton John Witherspoon offered the first well reasoned argument for independence. Pointing out that the distance between England and America made communication difficult and knowledge of the other tenuous he concluded, when “there is a certain distance from the seat of government, there an attempt to rule will either produce tyranny and helpless subjection, or provoke resistance and effect a separation.”<sup>88</sup>

In contrast to this rather reluctant talk about the *immediate* future, preachers more enthusiastically enlarged on the future “American Empire”: On June 23, 1775, the Anglican Rev. William Smith recalled his thoughts on America’s future that he had published in the 1750s;<sup>89</sup> yet in his sermon he changed the perspective: Now not the colonies as such had their future praise sung but he now rejoiced in devising “such a plan, and to behold British Colonies spreading over this immense Continent, rejoicing in the common rights of Freemen, and imitating the Parent State in every excellence – is more glory [for the mother country] than to hold lawless dominion over all the na-

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<sup>86</sup> CARMICHAEL, A Self-Defensive War Lawful, Proved in a Sermon, Preached at Lancaster, Before Captain Ross’s Company of Militia, in the Presbyterian Church, on Sabbath Morning, June 4, 1775, p. 31, Evans 13862; similarly ROSS, A Sermon in which the Union of the Colonies is considered and recommended; and the Bad Consequences of Divisions are Represented; Delivered on the Public Thanksgiving, November Sixteenth 1775, p. 10, Evans 15070; CUMINGS, A Sermon Preached in Billerica, On the 23d of November, 1775, p. 17, Evans 14723.

<sup>87</sup> CLARKE, The Fate of Blood-thirsty Oppressors, and Gode’s tender Care of his distressed People. A Sermon, Preached at Lexington, April 19, 1776, p. 22, Evans 14679.

<sup>88</sup> WITHERSPOON, The Dominion of Providence over the Passions of Men. A Sermon Preached at Princeton, On the 17th of May, 1776, p. 44, Evans 15224.

<sup>89</sup> William SMITH’s poem on America’s rising glory is part of his pamphlet: Some Thoughts on Education. New York 1752, p. 19-36, re-printed in Kenneth SILVERMAN (ed.), Colonial American Poetry. New York 1968, p. 380-386; cf. William D. ANDREWS, William Smith and the Rising Glory of America. In: Early American Literature 8, 1973, p. 33-43.

tions on the face of the earth!”<sup>90</sup> Smith carefully tied future greatness to the status of the colonies; he saw the “British Colonies spreading”, not “states”. This precisely marks the difference to the vision of America’s future outlined by the pastor of Danbury in New York. In his sermon on November 6, 1775, Ebenezer Baldwin “hazard[s] ... a Conjecture ..., I would suppose these Colonies to be the Foundation of a great and mighty Empire; the largest the World ever saw, to be founded on such Principles of Liberty and Freedom, both civil and religious, as never before took place in the World; which shall be the principal Seat of that glorious Kingdom, which Christ shall erect upon Earth in the latter Days.”<sup>91</sup> The difference is obvious: Where William Smith saw the colonies “imitating the Parent State”, Baldwin envisaged “these Colonies to be the Foundation of a great and mighty Empire”. In a long annotation he fleshed out these general and millennial thoughts: He conjectured that a century later America’s population would have increased to 48 Million people, and around the year 2000 it could have reached 192 Million inhabitants:

*“About this time the American Empire will probably be in its Glory. This Empire will differ in its Origin from any that have ever been in the World. All other great Empires have been formed by uniting different Nations under one Government by Conquest: This, by the natural Growth of one People. Conquest is ever followed by arbitrary and despotic Government ... The Empire forming in British America, having a different Origin, rising from the Growth of a single People used to the Enjoyment of both Civil and religious Liberty from its infant State, it is highly probable, may grow up to its Heights under the friendly Auspices of Liberty.”*<sup>92</sup>

Not all preachers were as concise in their description of future greatness; but some shared Ebenezer Baldwin’s excited expectations.<sup>93</sup> The Rev. William Forster in February 1776 marvelled “to what prodigious pitch of wealth and greatness ... the Conti-

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<sup>90</sup> SMITH, A Sermon on the Present Situation of American Affairs. Preached in Christ-Church, June 23, 1775, p. 19, Evans 14459.

<sup>91</sup> Ebenezer BALDWIN, The Duty of Rejoicing under Calamities and Afflictions, Considered and Improved, in a Sermon Preached at Danbury, November 16, 1775, p. 38, Evans 14656.

<sup>92</sup> It could be argued that the formula “empire forming in British America” tied America’s greatness to its remaining within the British Empire. Yet that was not what BALDWIN had in mind. For his argument is clearly based on the theory of “empires moving west” (*translatio imperii*). While America experienced greatness, empires in Europe were declining, then rotting: “The European Kingdoms are already groaning under the Weight of Tyranny, Corruption and Luxury: They will doubtless e’er that Time be much in the State of the present Eastern Empires.” Then he went a step further. He linked this concept to the coming of Christ’s kingdom: “Since it is in the last Ages of the World that America is to enjoy this prosperous State, and as this is the time, in which Christ’s Kingdom is to be thus gloriously set up in the World, I cannot think it chimerical to suppose, America will largely share in the Happiness of this glorious Day, and that the present Scenes are remotely preparing the Way for it”, Ebenezer BALDWIN, The Duty of Rejoicing under Calamities and Afflictions, Considered and Improved, in a Sermon Preached at Danbury, November 16, 1775, p. 38-40, Evans 14656.

<sup>93</sup> E. g. Samuel BALDWIN, A Sermon Preached at Plymouth, December 22, 1775, p. 39, Evans 14657.

ment of North-America [will] have arrived! I am firmly of the sentiment that its future growth will be much more rapid than the past ... . What countless millions of land yet uncultivated! What a bondless extent of country traversed only by savages and wild beasts ... we may believe that God designs the settlement of its remotest boundaries for the enlargement of his son’s kingdom.”<sup>94</sup> In early April 1776 Enoch Huntington offered yet another proof that talking about the future implied talking about independence:

*“Providence hath blessed us on this continent with all the resources which we could ever desire, in a united, virtuous improvement of which, to be a free and happy people. Not exposed to the disadvantages of a little island, surrounded on all sides with ocean, and under the immediate eye of jealous arbitrary power, we inhabit a vast continent, which, in itself, yields to the diligent and virtuous industry and invention of the inhabitants, all things necessary for their subsistence, comfort, protection and defence.”*<sup>95</sup>

It is one thing to ponder the potential of the near future; it is another, to sketch out visions of greatness at a time when independence was not yet gained, the war more likely lost than won and people torn between two radically different alternatives: Slavery or liberty. Historians are used to metaphors about America’s greatness and the bookshelves are filled with tracts discussing the many who belaboured America’s “Manifest Destiny”. But these visions were developed at times, when things looked less desperate, when territorial expansion was not a distant possibility but in full swing, and millions from Europe landed on America’s shores. Why then did ministers sketch such visions of greatness in 1775 and early 1776, visions, that were obviously not principally advanced as a means to sketch millennial expectations? The answer, I think, is to be sought in the key elements of these visions: These are first the *translatio-imperii*-concept that implied the decay of eastern empires, second the fascination with the growth of populations as a sign that the new world offered radically different living conditions from the old, a fascination that can be traced back to at least Benjamin Franklin’s essay *Observations Concerning the Increase of Mankind, Peopling of Countries, etc.* (1751)<sup>96</sup>, and third, the American infatuation with the vast territory of the continent as space to be cultivated. I know of no missionary – except the Moravian ones – who travelled west after 1763 who did not repeatedly comment on the fertility of the soil,

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<sup>94</sup> FOSTER, A Sermon Preached at Fag’s Manor, To Captain Taylor’s Company of Recruits on the Lord’s Day, February 18, 1776, p. 16, Evans 14758.

<sup>95</sup> Enoch HUNTINGTON, The Happy Effects of Union, and the Fatal Tendency of Divisions. Shewn in a Sermon, Preached before the Freemen of the Town of Middletown, At their Annual Meeting, April 8, 1776, By E. H. A., M., Pastor of the first Church of Christ in Middletown. Hartford, Printed by Eben Watson, at the Sign of the Connecticut Arms, Near the Great Bridge, 1776, p. 24, Evans 14805.

<sup>96</sup> Benjamin FRANKLIN, Observations Concerning the Increase of Mankind, Peopling of Countries, etc. (1751), in: Benjamin FRANKLIN, Benjamin, Papers, ed. LABAREE et al., vol. 4, p. 227-234; for a discussion of the demographics of Franklin cf. WELLENREUTHER, Ausbildung und Neubildung, p. 389-391.

the exciting prospects of settling this beautiful land, and the wasteful use Indians made of this wonderful gift of God.<sup>97</sup>

### 5. *The Future as a Vision of the American Israel*

These elements characterize the sermons that in the early 1780s enlarge once more on the future greatness of America. By now it is a commonplace that America can but be great: In September 1781 the anonymous Black Whig exclaimed “America! A name which I hope will be remembered while sun and moon endured: An Empire which, in my opinion, in spite of all opposition, will be one of the greatest in the world!”<sup>98</sup> In April 1782 the Rev. Philip Payson devoted the major part of his anniversary sermon on the Battle of Lexington and Concord not to the justice of the American Cause and the cruelty of the British soldiers but explicitly to the future of America:

*“The time ... was come, when a new Empire should arise in the world, and a nation be born in a day; that wisdom which governs the world ... prepared the causes in the natural, the moral, and political world.... Hence a spirit of liberty must stimulate this large people, and like a spreading torrent flow over the land: the passions of men must be aroused: the sword ... must be drawn; and ... scenes of blood and carnage must ensue ... that the foundation of the new Empire ... might be laid in blood; -- a foundation sadly ominous of its future overthrow and ruin, which, in their turn and order, will be the fate of all the kingdoms and empires of the world.”<sup>99</sup> Love of liberty, so Payson, had “conspired, under Providence, to cement this people in a band of union ... Thus united and bound, these American States ... form a large empire, which ... in the course of nature, to exceed all the empires of the world; they spread over an amazing extent of country, that by rapid population is daily filling with inhabitants. It is not improbable but the extensive countries of Canada and Nova Scotia will ere long be joined in the union: nor is it impossible but the West-India islands, from their local situation, may, in some future period, become the property of these American States. Alas! What surprising productions, what extensive prospects, has this great spirit of liberty, under Providence produced?”<sup>100</sup>*

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<sup>97</sup> David JONES, A Journal of two visits made to some nations of the Indians on the west side of the river Ohio, in the years 1772 and 1773, Philadelphia 1774, reprinted for Joseph Sabin with a Biographical Notice of the Author, by Horatio Gates JONES. [New York 1865], passim; Franklin B. DEXTER (ed.), Diary of David McClure, Doctor of Divinity, 1748-1820. New York 1899, passim.

<sup>98</sup> BLACK WHIG, Sermon, On the Present Situation of the Affairs of America and Great-Britain, p. 8, Evans 17717.

<sup>99</sup> Philipp PAYSON, A Memorial of Lexington Battle, and of some signal Interpositions of Providence in the American Revolution. A Sermon preached at Lexington, On the Nineteenth of April 1782. The Anniversary of the Commencement of the War Between Great-Britain and America, which Opened in a most Tragical Scene, in that Town on the Nineteenth of April, 1775, By P. P., A. M., Pastor of the Church in Chelsea. Boston. Printed by Benjamin Edes & Sons, in Cornhill, 1782, p. 10, Evans 17655.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid., p. 12.

Payson’s future empire contained all the classical visions, yet at the same time encompassed more than the North American continent. I refer, of course, to Payson’s remarks about the “West-India islands”, but equally to the increasing tendency of preachers, to contrast America’s positive values with those of degenerate Europe. Thus the second anonymous black preacher bemoaned the decline of England, then added: “North America, this new world, far excels you in humanity, generosity, and valour; they have caught the genial flame from your ancient fires, and it is cheerfully distended through these magnificent United States.”<sup>101</sup> Not only did America “excel ... in humanity”, its Revolution was already having wonderful effects on the miserable conditions in the old world, as the Rev. Zabdiel Adams in April 1783 carefully pointed out. Fired by the wonderful example of America, the spirit of liberty was “aroused ... in Ireland”, gave “free toleration” to French Protestants, and induced the king of Spain “to put an end to the *Inquisition*.”<sup>102</sup> The Rev. David Tappan on May 1, 1783, in his lecture that marked the ratification of the Peace of Paris, agreed: America’s success has kindled the desire for liberty throughout the world. Then he firmly set this development into the context of the christian history of salvation: „these and other similar events form a grand chain of Providence, in which the American Revolution is a principal link – a chain, which is gradually drawing after it the most glorious consequence to mankind; which is hastening on the accomplishment of the scripture-prophecies relative to the *Millennial State*, the golden age of the church and world in the latter days. – How magnificently great do the works of Jehovah towards America appear, when viewed in this light!”<sup>103</sup> All these elements were united in the election sermon of Ezra Stiles of May 8, 1783, a sermon that sketched the future of America in grandiose detail into the history of humanity.

Stiles’s teleological utopia rested on three biblical pillars: On the biblical concept of land, on Japhet, son of Moses and brother of Sem and Ham, whose offspring settled Europe and from Europe America, and on Josua, whose descendants (Canaaites) reached either with Phoenician ships or more likely as the lost tribes of Israel via Asia and the Bering Street North America; the first represented God’s chosen people in

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<sup>101</sup> AETHIOPIAN, A Sermon on the Evacuation of Charlestown, Philadelphia: Printed for the Author, and Sold by William Woodhouse, in Front-Street, next Door to the Old Coffee-House, 1783, p. 8, Evans 18182.

<sup>102</sup> Zabdiel ADAMS, The evil designs of men made subservient by God to the public good; particularly illustrated in the *rise, progress* and *conclusion* of the American war. A Sermon preached at Lexington, on the Nineteenth of April, 1783; Being the Anniversary of the Commencement of the War between Britain and America, which broke out in that Town on the 19th of April, 1775. By Z. A., A. M., Pastor of the Church in Lunenburgh. Boston, Printed by Benjamin Edes and Sons, in Cornhill, 1783, p. 24-25, Evans 17807.

<sup>103</sup> David TAPPAN, A Discourse Delivered at the Third Parish in Newbury, on the First of May, 1783, Occasioned by the Ratification of a Treaty of Peace between Great-Britain, and the United States of America, by D. T., A. M., Pastor of the Church in said Parish, Salem: Printed by Samuel Hall, near the Court-House, 1783, p. 12, Evans 18203.

America, the latter, Stiles meant native Americans, those who had forsaken God. This configuration prompted Stiles’ first four predictions: first, the descendants of Japhet “are increasing with great rapidity; and the *Indians* as well as the million *Africans* in America, are decreasing *as rapidly*”, and second, “thus an unrighteous Slavery may at length, in God’s good providence, be abolished and cease in this land of LIBERTY.” The fast increase of the European population in North America thirdly suggested to Stiles that they will soon surpass Europe’s population and equal that of the “oriental empires”; fourth, people of English stock “will ultimately produce the general population of America.”<sup>104</sup> This adoption of theories on the origins of humankind, widely discussed in Europe since the sixteenth century,<sup>105</sup> served three purposes: It established a hierarchy between populations that were chosen (Japhet) or rejected (Canaanites) by God and projected the decline of those who had adored Baal and the dominance of God’s chosen people. The latter would, Stiles predicted, finally surpass Europe’s population – a prediction that implied a general decline of Europe as well as the inevitable rise of America to “high and distinguished honor among the nations of the earth.”<sup>106</sup>

Stiles’ second section focused on the “grand question”: “What is the happiest form of government?”<sup>107</sup> His discussion drew on the thoughts of two authorities: the “capital ideas of Harrington’s *Oceana*”, which, so he explained, have “been singularly verified in new England”, and by “the celebrated historian Mrs. Catharine Macaulay, that ornament of the republic of letters, and the female Livy of the age”, whose discussion of ancient constitutional models he extensively quoted.<sup>108</sup> Taking New England as his Harringtonian model – a free people “amply charged with property”<sup>109</sup> – he characterized the American constitution as “democratical Aristocracy, standing upon the annual elections of the people, and revocable at pleasure.” This “is the polity which combines the United States; and from the nature of man, and the comparison of ages, I believe it will approve itself the most equitable, liberal, and perfect.”<sup>110</sup> Stiles’s constitutional thoughts reflected John Adams’ scepticism of “pure democracy”, integrated

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<sup>104</sup> STILES, *The United States elevated to Glory and Honor. A Sermon, Preached before his Excellency Jonathan Trumbull, Esq. L.L.D., Governor and Commander in Chief, and the Honorable The General Assembly of the State of Connecticut, Convened at Hartford at the Anniversary Election, May 8, 1783*, p. 7-14, quotation p. 14, Evans 18198.

<sup>105</sup> For a summary of these theories and their importance for defining Europe’s greatness in the eighteenth century cf. WELLENREUTHER, *Ausbildung und Neubildung*, p. 632-635.

<sup>106</sup> STILES, *The United States elevated to Glory and Honor. A Sermon, Preached before his Excellency Jonathan Trumbull, Esq. L.L.D., Governor and Commander in Chief, and the Honorable The General Assembly of the State of Connecticut, Convened at Hartford at the Anniversary Election, May 8, 1783*, p. 7, Evans 18198.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 17.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 8, p. 20.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 17.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 20-21.

the American constitutional model into the concept of Polybios “mixed constitution”, and associated America with the “progressive” discourse of contemporary England.<sup>111</sup> After extolling the growth of population, the extension of the settlements over the continent, the proliferation of trade with all European nations, and the emergence of manufactures in North America as well as the rise of science and education, Stiles summarized his vision: “before the millenium, the English settlements in America, may become more numerous millions, than that greatest dominion on earth the chinese empire.” And he continued: “Posterity ... will ... acknowledge, that this american Joshua was raised up by God, and *divinely formed* by a peculiar influence of the Sovereign of the Universe, for the great work of leading the armies of this american Joseph (now separated from his brethren), and conducting his people through the severe, the arduous conflict, to liberty and independence.”<sup>112</sup> America would become the haven for Europe’s craftsmen – who, becoming Americans, would “doubtless produce something very new, singular, and glorious.”<sup>113</sup> Arts would, he believed, “be transplanted from Europe and Asia, and flourish in America with an augmented lustre”.<sup>114</sup> Not even the English language would remain untouched by America’s graces: “The rough sonorous diction of the english language may here take its athenian polish and receive its attic urbanity; as it will probably become the vernacular tongue of more numerous millions, than ever yet spoke one language on earth”, he assured his listeners. And he added for good measure that this “athenian polish” would never be defiled by “provincial dialects” or “foreign dialects of foreign conquests.”<sup>115</sup> Above all Stiles proclaimed America the present and future example for Europe and the World; even in his own time the beneficent effects of America as the land of liberty were showing in Europe.<sup>116</sup> Indeed, Stiles was sure that America was predestined to be the land of liberty and the refuge for all of Europe’s persecuted: For, so he concluded, it is

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<sup>111</sup> John ADAMS, *Thoughts on Government: Applicable to the Present State of the American Colonies*. In a Letter from a Gentleman to his Friend. Philadelphia 1776, reprinted with the earlier versions in Robert J. TAYLOR (ed.), *Papers of John Adams*, vol.1 – [8], Cambridge, MA 1977 – [1989], vol. 4, p. 65-93, and generally Peter SHAW, *The Character of John Adams*, Chapel Hill, NC 1976, p. 94-97; on the reception of Harrington’s thought cf. J. G. A. POCOCCO, *Machiavelli, Harrington, and English political Ideologies in the Eighteenth Century*. In: *WMQ* 3<sup>rd</sup> Ser. 22, 1965, p. 547-583; on Macaulay cf. NÜNNING, “A Revolution in Sentiments, Manners, and Moral Opinions.”

<sup>112</sup> STILES, *The United States elevated to Glory and Honor. A Sermon, Preached before his Excellency Jonathan Trumbull, Esq. L.L.D., Governor and Commander in Chief, and the Honorable The General Assembly of the State of Connecticut, Convened at Hartford at the Anniversary Election, May 8, 1783*, p. 35-36, p. 37, Evans 18198.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 50.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 51.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 51.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, p.50-51.

“the will of heaven, and especially after the recent salvations of the Most High, that we should be *a holy people unto the Lord our God*.”<sup>117</sup>

Stiles’s vision is more than just a vision of America’s future greatness: It is the fullest description of the United States as a separate, distinct nation within a hegemonically structured world. He defined the elements of this nation in four spheres: In terms of growth (territorial expansion, population growth, economic growth), in terms of happiness due to a constitution defined as “democratic aristocracy”, in terms of the emergence of specific American arts, sciences and inventions as well as language; and finally this America would not only be an example to the world but “*a holy people unto the Lord our God*”, led by “this American Joseph” as the “American Israel”. Settled by Japhet’s people it would or probably had already outgrown its old world origins. America had become a world of its own with its own history, as Stiles as well as other preachers had stressed. And this historicity, which included by 1783 already the “American Revolution”,<sup>118</sup> had, too, its own heroes as well as its own memories.

The construction of national memories began early: Already in January 1775 the Rev. Zabdiel Adams had marvelled at the “unbroken courage” and “invincible heroism” of God’s people.<sup>119</sup> And in November 1775 the Rev. Henry Cummings was sure that “unborn millions will rise up and call ...noble patriots and sons of freedom ... blessed”; they would, he felt, “more deservedly receive the honours and praises of future generations, than the memories of many renowned heroes of antiquity.”<sup>120</sup> George Washington was, of course, the greatest of the heroes. Even Ezra Stiles rhapsodized lyrically: “But thou, O Washington, forgottest thyself, when thou lovedst thy bleeding country.”<sup>121</sup> Yet most importantly, Stiles as well as most other preachers extolled the virtues of patriotism. Already in June 1775 the Rev. John Carmichael spoke of the “noble, patriotic, brave people of the ancient, loyal, important colony of the Massachusetts-Bay, in New England”<sup>122</sup>; a month later the Rev. Enoch Hunting-

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<sup>117</sup> Ibid., p.74.

<sup>118</sup> TAPPAN, A Discourse Delivered at the Third Parish in Newbury, on the First of May, 1783, p. 12, Evans 18203.

<sup>119</sup> ADAMS, The Grounds of Confidence and Success in War, represented. A Sermon Preached at a Lecture in Lunenburg, New England, on Monday, January 2d, 1775, p. 9, Evans 13789.

<sup>120</sup> I have inverted the quotation. The correct version reads: “Should this be the effect of the vigorous exertions of the noble patriots and sons of freedom, who, at the risk of their lives and estates, are now engaged in the defence of their country, against the violent assaults of arbitrary power, unborn millions will rise up and call them blessed...” CUMINGS, A Sermon Preached in Billerica, On the 23d of November, 1775, p. 10, Evans 14723.

<sup>121</sup> STILES, The United States elevated to Glory and Honor. A Sermon, Preached before his Excellency Jonathan Trumbull, Esq. L.L.D., Governor and Commander in Chief, and the Honorable The General Assembly of the State of Connecticut, Convened at Hartford at the Anniversary Election, May 8, 1783, p. 42, Evans 18198.

<sup>122</sup> CARMICHAEL, A Self-Defensive War Lawful, Proved in a Sermon, Preached at Lancaster, Before Captain Ross’s Company of Militia, in the Presbyterian Church, on Sabbath Morning, June 4, 1775, p. 5, Evans 13862.

ton bemoaned the fate of “patriots of distinction, friends of their country and patrons of liberty”;<sup>123</sup> the Rev. Samuel Magaw in October 1775 believed that the “same pure flame which raises the soul to God” animated the “the real Patriot”, thus linking more clearly than his predecessors “patriotism” to the notion of the “American Israel.”<sup>124</sup> In the same month the Rev. Samuel Baldwin felt confident that “the unwearied exertions of the patriots, friends and benefactors of this country will bring about a happy termination of all our troubles.”<sup>125</sup> And in late March 1776 the Rev. Samuel Stillman in his funeral sermon on Rhode Island’s Delegate to the Continental Congress, Samuel Ward, described the deceased as a “thorough patriot; a real, steady friend to the rights of mankind; he could neither be *awed*, nor *bribed* to sell his country, or sacrifice her freedom.”<sup>126</sup> By 1782 the Rev. Payson Philipp stated that public memory had already “[recorded] a large number of names ... for Patriots and heroes.”<sup>127</sup> Ezra Stiles finally extended the meaning of “patriot” to include “patriotic politicians” on whom he showered fullsome praise.<sup>128</sup> Only two weeks later the Rev. Cumings offered the most comprehensive definition of “patriotism”:

*“Virtuous patriotism, far from implying any ill-will to the rest of mankind, is nothing else, but the principle of universal benevolence, exercised as far as a man’s power extends, upon the objects that claim his first regards... his first obligation is to those, with whom he is more immediately connected, and where providence has assigned him his station and sphere of usefulness... True it is, patriotism is but a blind affection, and essentially defective as to any virtuous excellence, if it prompts a man to defend the cause of his country when his country forms*

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<sup>123</sup> HUNTINGTON, A Sermon Delivered at Middletown, July 20th, A. D. 1775, p. 19, Evans 14124; cf. too COOMBE, A Sermon, Preached before the Congregations of Christ Church and St. Peter’s, Philadelphia, on Thursday, July 20, 1775, p. 11, Evans 13892.

<sup>124</sup> MAGAW, A discourse Preached in Christ-Church, Philadelphia, On Sunday, October 8, 1775, p. 13, Evans 14176.

<sup>125</sup> Samuel BALDWIN, A Sermon Preached at Plymouth, December 22, 1775, p. 38, Evans 14657.

<sup>126</sup> Samuel STILLMAN, Death the last Enemy, destroyed by Christ. A Sermon Preached, March 27, 1776, Before the Honourable Continental Congress, on the Death of The Honorable Samuel Ward, Esq. One of the Delegates from the Colony of Rhode Island, who died of the small-pox, in this City (Philadelphia) March 26, Aet. 52, Published at the Desire of Many who heard it. By S. S., M. A.. Philadelphia, Printed by Joseph Crukshank, in Market-Street. 1776, p. 27, Evans 15097. Similar in early April HUNTINGTON, The Happy Effects of Union, and the Fatal Tendency of Divisions. Shewn in a Sermon, Preached before the Freemen of the Town of Middletown, at their Annual Meeting, April 8, 1776, p. 27.

<sup>127</sup> PAYSON, A Memorial of Lexington Battle, and of some signal Interpositions of Providence in the *American Revolution*. A Sermon preached at Lexington, On the Nineteenth of April 1782, p. 6, Evans 17655.

<sup>128</sup> STILES, The United States elevated to Glory and Honor. A Sermon, Preached before his Excellency Jonathan Trumbull, Esq. L.L.D., Governor and Commander in Chief, and the Honorable The General Assembly of the State of Connecticut, Convened at Hartford at the Anniversary Election, May 8, 1783, p. 46, Evans 18198.

*itself into a faction against the rights of mankind, and is wickedly endeavouring to bring other states and nations under it's arbitrary jurisdiction and government.”<sup>129</sup>*

Virtue and patriotism were inseparably united; while “virtue” denoted the moral attitude that defined the citizen within a republican commonwealth, “patriotism” described the special obligation a person had assigned to him by providence toward that same republican commonwealth.

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In one sense, this definition of patriotism describes the sermons I have analyzed. They, too, signalled the special obligation preachers felt not only to their parishioners but, on a larger scale, to their colonies and later states and confederation. In doing so they provided their listeners with interpretations of current events, with explanatory models as interpretations of England’s policy as well as America’s justified and legitimate reactions. As the year 1775 drew to a close they increasingly began to talk about future greatness as an indirect discourse about a future independent America, then by late spring they openly talked about that momentous event itself: independence. By that time their parishioners knew that God was on their side, were comforted with the thought that God would not let them down if they would not neglect their duty and turn away from God. As independence became reality, the future became the new focus; it was a grandiose vision that Ezra Stiles, president of Yale, and other preachers developed. At the same time that vision was embedded not only in the history of Christian salvation, talked not only of God’s chosen people, but linked that new future to the history of America, to national values, and the memory of glorious accomplishments: In the late eighteenth century preachers were important masons working on the building of a new nation. Secular and religious visions and orders were inseparably blended into one; providence had shaped the past and would, if the American Israel would stay faithful, guide its future. This future was not only visionary but drew concretely on features America had to offer: Land, agricultural products, natural resources, an obligingly declining Native American population, an expansive view, in short, features the listeners could identify with. Europe was already profiting from America’s accomplishments, others would follow until God himself would come and erect in America his kingdom. As things were, this was to be an American kingdom where English most likely was spoken undefiled by foreign influences. These sermons

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<sup>129</sup> Henry CUMINGS, A Sermon Preached before his Honor Thomas Cushing, Esq; Lieutenant- Governor, the Honorable the Council, and the Two Branches of the General Court of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, May 28, 1783. Being the Anniversary of General Election. By H. C., A. M., Pastor of the Church of Billerica. Boston, Printed by T. J. Fleet, 1783, p. 21-22, Evans 17899.

translated complex theories and concepts into thoughts familiar to the parishioners. The listeners would leave the church comforted, refreshed and full of joy and hope.

And, of course, they would spread the good word: the reason for opposition to the British tyrant, the joys of the past to be regained in the future, the good news of God accepting his “American Israel” and the glorious future ahead of them with Christ’s coming in the year two thousand. These sermons effected thus more than pamphlets and treatises: They linked complex analyses of the behaviour of the mother country to political experiences and constitutional positions of the colonists, supplied legitimating concepts couched in secular *and* religious terms to ordinary people that wanted to know why they would want to sacrifice their all, and finally, they made the parishioners transmitters, agents and advocates of the spoken word to wider audiences. In contextualising civil events within broader religious contexts these sermons opened religious spaces to secular concepts like “happiness“; in doing so ministers linked secular “happiness” to their vision of an eschatological future.

As so often, John Adams found the right words: writing to the Rev. Zabdiel Adams, whose views I have discussed earlier, he assured the minister that he was convinced that “it is Religion and Morality alone, which can establish the Principles upon which Freedom can securely stand ... [People] may change their Rulers ... but they will not obtain a lasting liberty. They will only exchange Tyrants and Tyrannies. You cannot therefore be more pleasantly, or usefully employed than in the Way of your Profession, pulling down the Strong Holds of Satan.” And he added: “This is not Cant, but the real sentiment of my Heart.”<sup>130</sup>

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<sup>130</sup> SMITH, et al. (ed.), *Letters of Delegates to Congress, 1774-1789*, vol. 4, 278-279, here p. 279.