

ABSTRACT

Religious and Republican Enlightenment Influences in Early American Education, 1740-1819

Thomas J. Tacoma, M.A.

Mentor: Thomas Kidd, Ph.D.

Histories of education covering the time period of 1740-1820 frequently overlook the importance of religion to educational endeavors. Colleges and academies founded in the 18th century grew out of religious motivations, though a comparison of the educational thought of Benjamin Franklin (a founder of the College of Philadelphia) and John Witherspoon (president of the College of New Jersey) reveal that both were indebted to Enlightenment ideals. After the Revolution, most proposals for education in the young nation built more on those Enlightenment republican ideals than on religious motivations, though they failed to come to fruition. By the early decades of the 19th century, a full synthesis of Enlightenment, republican education and religious education had emerged.

Competing Religious and Republican Enlightenment Influences
in Early American Education, 1740-1819

by

Thomas J. Tacoma, B.A.

A Thesis

Approved by the Department of History

Jeffrey S. Hamilton, Ph.D., Chairman

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of
Baylor University in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree
of
Master of Arts

Approved by the Thesis Committee

Thomas S. Kidd, Ph.D., Chairman

Andrea L. Turpin, Ph.D.

Perry L. Glanzer, Ph.D.

Accepted by the Graduate School
May 2014

J. Larry Lyon, Ph.D., Dean

Copyright © 2014 by Thomas J. Tacoma

All rights reserved

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	v
CHAPTER ONE: Introduction: Rip Van Winkle and the Study of Early America	1
CHAPTER TWO: The Religious Purposes of Education in Colonial American Thought, 1740-1775	9
CHAPTER THREE: The American Enlightenment and Christian Education: A Comparative Analysis of the Educational Ideals of Benjamin Franklin and John Witherspoon	31
CHAPTER FOUR: “To Make Them Men, Citizens, and Christians”: Republican Aspirations for a National System of Education, 1779-1800	52
CHAPTER FIVE: Religion and Republican Virtue in Educational Thought in the Early Republic, 1800-1819	77
CHAPTER SIX: Conclusion	100
BIBLIOGRAPHY	105

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This thesis was produced at Baylor University, but I would first like to acknowledge several professors from my undergraduate days who helped me reach graduate school. Paul Rahe, Richard Gamble, and John Somerville, all of Hillsdale College, were each in their own way particularly influential in those formative years. Funding provided through Baylor University from the Guittard family has made my graduate studies possible and, truly, brought me to Baylor. Professors at Baylor as well—Kim Kellison, Julie Sweet, James SoRelle, and Beth Allison Barr—have helped me to mature as a young scholar. Barry Hankins has helped me to wrestle through some of the challenges of “doing” history and to understand American religious history. My fellow graduate students both inside and outside of class have provided key moral support throughout these years; they have also helped me understand American religious history more thoroughly. The members of my thesis committee, Andrea Turpin, Perry Glanzer, and Thomas Kidd, have given me valuable and generous critiques and suggestions that have immeasurably improved my work. Thomas Kidd, my advisor, has helped guide my thesis to its finished form, and I am greatly indebted to him for his assistance. My family has been a source of continual encouragement, and my dear wife Ashley, who moved from Wisconsin to Texas so we could be near each other during our long engagement, has been a great blessing to me throughout these graduate school years.

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

Rip Van Winkle and the Study of Early America

Like Washington Irving’s tale of a man falling asleep in one society and waking up decades later in another, this project is at its heart a before-and-after study of American education and the American Revolution. Just as “Rip Van Winkle” humorously contrasts pre-Revolutionary and post-Revolutionary American life and society, this study endeavors (without Irving’s levity) to unpack the differences as well as the similarities between colonial American education and early national or republican education.¹ Irving described a sleepy, easy-going state of life in colonial New York; this study begins with the context, conditions, and ideals of colonial education. Then, just as Irving explored the society of an independent but unified United States, this project describes and examines the changes and similarities of American education in the 1780s, 1790s, and 1800s. In effect, this thesis aims to re-weight the emphasis on religious education during the late colonial and early republican eras through a textured analysis of religion’s longevity.

This thesis had its genesis in the works of Nathan O. Hatch’s analysis of Christianity in America—how the Revolution unleashed forces of democratization in religion—and in Paul Rahe’s study of republics, ancient and modern.² Both of them, as works demonstrating vast research and insight into the American character, raised a

¹ In this and following chapters, the terms “early national” and “early republican” era of American history refer to the same time period, roughly from 1776 to 1812.

² Nathan Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989). Paul Rahe, *Republics Ancient and Modern*, 3 vols (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1994).

question which neither explicitly addressed but which still appeared relevant to any study of the changes brought about by the American Revolution: How did the American Revolution change American education? Or even more basically, did it change education? A democratization thesis such as that offered by Nathan Hatch seemed plausible to suppose at the outset, but digging more deeply into the sources, primary and secondary, was necessary before drawing any conclusions. What I soon found should hardly have been a surprise—the history of education during this time period was intimately connected with the history of religion. It soon became apparent that understanding the context of religious changes of this era was necessary for any understanding of educational changes. Consequently, the interaction of American religious thought in the eighteenth century with the Enlightenment ideas coming out of Europe—whether an English/Lockean variety, a current of Scottish Common Sense Realism, or a strain of the French philosophe school—would also factor into the study of educational ideals. In short, the project was rapidly growing into an unwieldy task, and while I have attempted to include some analysis of all of these streams of thought (English vs. Scottish vs. French vs. American Enlightenment thought), none are addressed in their entirety and certainly not comprehensively. Indeed, as the study grew into a new focus on religious and philosophical ideas and education, the experience of women and minorities, which had originally been planned as a centerpiece of the project, moved by necessity into the background. While I hope no group is entirely ignored, multiple additional chapters would be necessary to do justice to these groups' varied experiences across the time period in question.

With the extensive resources available to me by the Moody and Jones Libraries at Baylor University, I have been able to examine a variety of sources in the course of this study. Especially helpful in uncovering primary sources have been the documents made available online in the Early American Imprints Databases (Series Evans, 1639-1800, and Series Shaw-Shoemaker, 1801-1819). Focusing on what eighteenth and early nineteenth century educators, pastors, and public figures had to say about education has provided a picture of what many at the time believed to be the purpose and function of education across the second half of the eighteenth century and the first twenty years of the nineteenth. Sermons, pamphlets, and several books about education speak exactly to that question. Other sources, such as college and academy charters, laid out at a practical level what their founders hoped the schools would become. Private letters also reflect the actual developments, in some cases, taking place at these various institutions of learning.

In the secondary literature, several major trends were easily and quickly distinguished. Many authors concentrated explicitly on the political function of education; others were largely concerned with its religious aspects. A twentieth century historiographical trend of focusing on the story of Enlightenment “progress” throughout the period also emerged quite clearly. Many of these writers came out of the Teacher’s College of Columbia University and had their books published in the 1960s and 1970s. The emphasis on religious education came later, from religious historians such as George Marsden and Mark Noll. While I build on and sometimes challenge some of their work, it should be clear that many and even most of my ideas are indebted to Marsden’s and Noll’s insightful analysis and research. Noll’s understanding of the uneasy relationship

between evangelicalism and republicanism has been of particular use to my treatment of educational thought in the last few chapters.³

This is a “Rip Van Winkle” study of American education, and its guiding question asks what changes were brought about in American education as a consequence of Revolution and independence from Britain. Before answering that question, it must be acknowledged that there was no single version of “American education” before the Revolution, nor was there a single “education” after the Revolution. There were, rather, various threads of ideology in American education, and only a few of those are traced through this study. The first strand is that of religious education. I locate in the turbulence of the Great Awakening a renewed emphasis on education for the purpose of teaching children and young adults orthodox Christian doctrine and piety. This strand runs unbroken through the years of the Revolution into the years of the young American Republic—Christian pastors and parents (and Jewish educators, too) never ceased in their concern for teaching their descendants true religion. A second current of thought prior to the Revolution was that of education for the purpose of teaching children to behave virtuously. While of course this drew some of its strength on traditional religious education, it ballooned in the years following the Revolution as ambitious educators sought to establish a republican virtue in all members (or at least all citizens) of American society. A third current of thought prior to the Revolution was a concern for practical education. This took the form of seeking to establish curricula that trained

³ See for example Mark Noll, *Princeton and the Republic: The Search for a Christian Enlightenment in the Era of Samuel Stanhope Smith* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), or Noll, “The American Revolution and Protestant Evangelicalism,” *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History* Vol. 23, No. 3 (Winter, 1993), 615-638. Noll argues that the synthesis of evangelical and republican thought should strike us as an oddity, and though religious and political leaders at the time believed the two could exist in perfect harmony, today we can more clearly see tensions between.

young people in the English language rather than in classical tongues; in scientific and mechanic studies rather than in literary and theological. This strand of educational thought also continued across the Revolution, and though it may not have fully blossomed until many years later, it certainly altered American education in the early years of the new nation.

Before describing the outlines of this study, we ought to map some of the basic contours of American education of the eighteenth century. Of course, trends in education varied by geography, family wealth, and race, but it was true across the time period in question that very few Americans living in the colonies or in the early republic had any sort of regular, systematic education. Only a tiny fraction of the population—around one percent—was college educated. Those who did receive regular schooling, at lower or higher levels, were almost always white men from families who could afford to school them. A slightly larger number of white men received an education in a local academy, while many more received an education of sorts within the home. Some white women were educated in generally “ornamental” studies—in basic literacy as well as more artistic or musical endeavors. Furthermore, the educated black man or woman, or Native American, was a rarity indeed. Lastly, almost all educational endeavors in colonial America revolved around religious purposes—either teaching basic Christian doctrines or more generally forming individuals to live pious and morally upright lives.⁴

It is with that idea—that education aimed at inculcating and promoting religion—that the first chapter begins. With the Great Awakening of the 1740s, and Christianity remained at the center of educational thought at the time. Consequently, we believe that

⁴ See for example, Wayne J. Urban and Jennings L. Wagoner Jr, *American Education: A History*, 5th ed (New York: Routledge, 2014), 11-49.

the historiographical trend of the mid-to-late twentieth century of ignoring religion in studies of education at that time period was a misguided “Enlightenment narrative” of progress toward secularization of education. That trend and its more current manifestations in current textbooks in the history of education are analyzed, and its shortcomings are then displayed by a description and analysis of the flurry of colleges founded in the years between 1740 and 1775 because of the Great Awakening. From the educational ideas of their founders to the charters and operation of the colleges themselves, it is clear that most higher education during that time period was intentionally religious. Though not disputed, this point has rather been under-emphasized.

Chapter two opens a comparative discussion of the educational ideas of two great colonial leaders in the field of education, Benjamin Franklin and John Witherspoon. Franklin, whose religious beliefs separated him from the ranks of orthodox believers, supported an education concerned with training youths for an earthly existence. Thus practical studies in the language of their country and the sciences that would lead to mechanical and material progress were of great importance to him. Of highest importance, though, was promoting a form of virtue that was also suited to an earthly existence. Franklin was less concerned with teaching children to live lives pleasing to a Deity in Heaven than with teaching them to live lives pleasing to their fellow man. Witherspoon, by way of contrast, was an orthodox Christian, indeed a Presbyterian minister from Scotland. He combined the moral philosophy of his professors in Scotland with orthodox Christian doctrines, believing that both morality and piety could and should be taught. His teachings at the College of New Jersey would be especially influential as his students went out and started academies and colleges of their own.

Chapter three transitions to the years immediately following the conclusion of America's War for Independence to examine the educational proposals written by optimistic republican thinkers. This diverse group included luminaries such as Benjamin Rush, Noah Webster, Samuel Knox, and Thomas Jefferson. Jefferson articulated the theory as early as 1778—virtue was necessary to sustain a republican form of government; therefore it was necessary to teach virtue to the citizens of the republic to preserve it in its purity. Almost all of these writers believed that a state-wide or national plan of education was necessary for such a task. Some, such as Rush, believed that teaching religion in these schools was necessary for teaching true religion. Others drew on the ideals of the Enlightenment and moral philosophy as sources to sustain civic virtue. Despite the large number of proposed plans of schools and school systems, almost none came to fruition.

Chapter four picks up where the second and third chapters left off by examining how both religious and republican motives to education existed together. Though a proliferating number of religious schools and colleges were founded after the Revolution, they shared their religious focus with a republican purpose. Indeed, numerous sermons, essays, and books from the early nineteenth century explained that the purpose of education still remained the teaching of Christian religion. At the same time, the idea of education for the purpose of forming a virtuous citizenry also continued in full vigor. Perhaps a conflation of the terms “religion,” “morality,” and “virtue” had something to do with it. Picking up on George Marsden's analysis of the role of moral philosophy in early America, this chapter examines how the tension between religion and moral philosophy unfolded in this early republican era.

This study encompasses a wide range of topics—education, religion, philosophy, and politics—and asks some broad and open-ended questions. We do well to remember that the proposed answers to those questions remain tentative. This is not a comprehensive analysis of American educational history before and after the Revolution; rather, it is the beginnings of a personal investigation into the origins of American education. The past is a foreign country that demands long, patient, and careful study to understand. This work is brief, but it seeks to uncover some understanding of centuries past. It is to those eighteenth century beginnings and the world of the colonial America—of a Rip Van Winkle before his long slumber—to which we now turn.

CHAPTER TWO

The Religious Purposes of Education in Colonial American Thought, 1740-1775

In the field of history of education in the United States, the most-studied time periods seem to be the second half of the nineteenth century and the whole of the twentieth. Education and educational thought in the eighteenth century, while not ignored, have not received the same degree of attention. This is likely a consequence of several factors, with the leading factor being its lack of significance for contemporary schools. But this is not to say that educational thought in the eighteenth century has been neglected; to the contrary, several notable histories of education in colonial British America, including Lawrence Cremin's masterful 1970 survey of the time period, explore colonial educational practices and thought. Many of these works, however, being written in the mid-to-late twentieth century, generally assume what might be called an "Enlightenment narrative" of the progress of modernity and rationalism. They often focus on the towering figure of John Locke and his *Thoughts on Education* and his direct or indirect influence in the American colonies. These came through the works of such persons as Isaac Watts or Benjamin Franklin. Indeed, many textbook histories of education celebrate such writers while missing the central place of religion in education. Even while recognizing—perhaps in one brief paragraph—that most educational thought in the eighteenth century aimed at inculcating religious precepts and doctrines in youth, the weight and presentation of evidence focuses more on this "Enlightenment narrative" of rationalism, pragmatism, and Lockean thought. If, as Herbert Butterfield still reminds us, historians ought not to emphasize the similarities of the past with our own times, and

if, as Alister Chapman, John Coffey, and Brad S. Gregory reminded us again in 2009, historians ought to seek to understand the past by “seeing things their way,” then in the field of eighteenth century educational history, historians should remember what was most important to the educators and educational theorists then.¹ The true focuses of educational thought in British America, as far as it regarded its purpose and ultimate goals, remained religion and morality.

Part of approaching the past with nuance means opening an understanding of the Enlightenment that encompasses both a secular and a Christian perspective. The “Enlightenment” as a movement in ideas was embraced by the orthodox and unorthodox, and it was appropriated into educational thought by both. While some historians of education have focused primarily on the history of education under the influence of a secular Enlightenment, others have looked at its Christian manifestations. The former include the likes of Allen O. Hansen or Wilson Smith; the latter include religious historians such as George Marsden or Mark Noll. Current history of education textbooks tend to see more of the liberal, scientific Enlightenment approach to educational history than the influence of a Christian Enlightenment. A fuller discussion of the differences between these forms of Enlightenment thought in America will take place in Chapter Two, but it is a distinction worth noting here.

Take for example Allen O. Hansen’s *Liberalism and American Education in the Eighteenth Century*. Originally published in 1926 in the heyday of Progressive educational ideas, Hansen’s book proved its enduring influence when it was reprinted in

¹ Herbert Butterfield. *The Whig Interpretation of History* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1965), p. v. Alister Chapman, John Coffey, and Brad S. Gregory, eds. *Seeing Things Their Way: Intellectual History and the Return of Religion* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2009).

1965 and again in 1977. Despite its title, the book focuses on liberalism in the last quarter of the century. The early chapters, however, reveal his interest in the “Dominant Ideas of the Eighteenth Century.” Hansen lays out his vision of the ideals of the eighteenth century, and they are, in accordance with his thesis and the title of his book, the liberal ideals of the rationalist Enlightenment. In his chapter summary, Hansen concluded:

The idea that man was progressive by nature stimulated an analysis of the conditions that govern progress. This led to the conception of man as a being governed by natural law, the discovery of which was necessary in order that progress might be scientifically directed. . . . Institutions could alone be justified if they contributed to the advancement and welfare of mankind. . . . The only adequate means for freeing man from the limitations of superstition and archaic institutions would be a system of education that would make inevitable a scientific, objective, experimental attitude that would lead to creative innovation and that would energize reconstruction of everything related to the progress of man.²

Hansen looked toward the future years of the American Revolution and the theories of education that would spring up in its wake, but this summary view of the whole of the eighteenth century indicates his emphasis on liberal ideals.

More tangible proof of Hansen’s enduring influence, however, emerges from an examination of the edited collections on educational thought in the eighteenth century, as well as in proper histories of education. Several collections and anthologies of primary source materials help to perpetuate the “Enlightenment narrative” of educational thought. Foremost among these is Wilson Smith’s *Theories of Education in Early America, 1655-1819*.³

² Allen O. Hansen. *Liberalism and American Education in the Eighteenth Century*, 2nd ed. (New York: Octagon Books, 1977), 20-21.

³ Wilson Smith, ed., *Theories of Education in Early America, 1655-1819* (New York: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc. 1973).

Smith presents educational thought during this time period with relative even-handedness, and it would be unfair to represent him as being as narrowly focused as Hansen. All the same, his editorial comments in introducing even famous religious educators such as John Witherspoon indicate his modernist inclinations. He sees the theories of John Locke everywhere—which, again to be fair, they were—but stresses repeatedly the incredible influence Locke had in American educational thought. John Clarke, who “did more than any other British educator in the mid-eighteenth century to clarify systematically the ideal curriculum of a Latin grammar school,” was “the first missionary to America for Lockean ideas of schooling.”⁴ It was likewise with Isaac Watts: Smith writes that Lockean ideas permeated his thought and that his “theme that the teacher must well understand the characteristics of youth and tailor his methods to ‘the temper and inclination of the child’ is Lockian, liberal, and modern.”⁵ Moreover, in his editorial introduction to Henry Home, Lord Kames, Smith pointedly stresses this “Enlightenment narrative,” writing that “Kamesian principles of morality were, moreover, Lockian, and their teaching was grounded upon the Enlightenment view of God as the great designer Jefferson shared with Kames the historical perspective of the Enlightenment that religion is not itself morality, but is rather the greatest support of morality.”⁶ Again to Smith’s credit, the narrative told by his selections is not wholly one-sided, for he presents the debate over sectarian education through the arguments of William Livingstone and William Smith, Jr, in their newspaper, the *Independent*

⁴ Smith, 61-62.

⁵ Smith, 98. Smith uses a different spelling of “Lockean.”

⁶ Smith, 129. Smith entitles this section “Lord Kames’s Educated Man Anticipates the Jeffersonian View.” This section, perhaps more than any other in the book, shows Smith’s emphasis on looking at modern, or at least liberal, educational ideas in the eighteenth century.

Reflector, against Thomas Clap’s defense of Yale College and denominational control of education. It is here that Smith acknowledges “For the next century of American higher education Clap’s argument was to prevail.”⁷ Rather than elaborate on that, Smith goes on to describe Benjamin Franklin’s educational plans and proposals, noting of Franklin’s *Idea of the English School* that its utilitarian nature “was prototypical of much that changed the course of American secondary schooling.”⁸ It was Franklin’s ideas, furthermore, that gave birth to the academies that displaced Latin schools so prevalent in early America.⁹ Finally, even in the case of John Witherspoon, Smith underscores that the popularity of his writings was not in what he had to say but in his influence as a famous educator and teacher of famous men. Witherspoon’s *Letters on Education*, writes Smith, “illustrate an accommodation of religious belief to secular social conditions that characterizes American education from the pre-Revolutionary years through the mid-nineteenth century.” According to Smith, though Witherspoon “is professedly concerned with the religious upbringing of children,” what “actually emerges from his pages is counsel on the behavior of parents toward their children in a culture that was increasingly secular, interdependent, urban, and upwardly mobile. . . . The result is advice that mixes traditional Calvinist doctrine with some Enlightenment concepts of child-rearing.”¹⁰

Histories of education also generally misrepresent the religious purposes of education by focusing more on new Enlightenment ideas than on the continued central

⁷ Smith, 163.

⁸ Smith, 175.

⁹ Smith, 176.

¹⁰ Smith, 185.

place of religion in education. Lawrence Cremin, whose 1970 work *American Education: The Colonial Experience* is among the most comprehensive histories of education of that time, looks to how piety was “rationalized” in the eighteenth century. Beginning with John Locke and his influence on the colonies, Cremin explored how Isaac Watts, Philip Doddridge, and James Burgh adopted his ideas into their own educational works. Even in the thought of Cotton Mather, though his “pietism suffuses his discussions of education,” a rationalism of sorts can be detected. Interestingly, in the conclusion of this chapter, Cremin writes in one short paragraph that “For all the doctrinal refinements and subtleties of Mather, Johnson, and Witherspoon, conventional piety retained a central place in eighteenth-century educational thought.” Where are the representatives of that thought? Apparently everywhere, though receiving little mention. Tellingly, perhaps, Cremin ends the chapter with a paragraph about the educational thought of Benjamin Franklin and Thomas Jefferson, who both “rationalized piety to the extreme, the result that, although they remained nominally Christians, Christian piety in its traditional form no longer remained the chief end of education. Together, they pointed the way for other institutions than the church to play the decisive role in the education of the people.” In telling the history of educational thought this way, Cremin underscores the importance of Enlightenment rationalism while implicitly denying the importance of traditional piety by not discussing it.¹¹

Lorraine Smith Pangle and Thomas L. Pangle’s *The Learning of Liberty* also perpetuates the “Enlightenment narrative” of educational history. Religion in educational

¹¹ Lawrence A. Cremin, *American Education: The Colonial Experience 1607-1783* (New York: Harper and Row, 1970), 277-302.

thought is outside of the scope of their study, but not totally excluded. Major religious figures such as John Milton and John Locke (who wrote, after all, *The Reasonableness of Christianity*) feature largely in their story, but only to the purpose of showing the continuity with or break from the ancient republican educational ideas. While they celebrate John Locke's innovations in education, their focus is on specifically republican education one century later. What they do have to say about Locke is interesting. Locke was unclassical in his approach to education; his was a vision of social virtues rooted in civility. For him, education is for this life (though arguably not ignoring the next). The Pangles's narrative of educational thought jumps right from Locke to Ben Franklin, in whose proposed academy "the cultivation of Puritan religious spirituality, as well as the Quaker spirituality that was more familiar in the existing schools of Philadelphia, ceased to be a goal."¹²

More recent histories also demonstrate this inclination to tell the story of the progress of the Enlightenment. *American Education: A History*—in its 4th edition in 2009—tells a story of education for piety in the seventeenth century and of growing Enlightenment progress in the eighteenth. Much to its credit, this book does attend to the importance of religion in colonial education even into the eighteenth century, but, following the trends of recent times, seeks to underscore the growing religious pluralism and need for tolerance in religious institutions. Thus the diverse middle colonies of Delaware, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania are celebrated for their heterogeneity and for the "growth of toleration," and it is Benjamin Franklin who emerges as the hero-critic of

¹² Lorraine Smith Pangle and Thomas L. Pangle. *The Learning of Liberty: The Educational Ideas of the American Founders* (Lawrence, KA: University of Kansas Press, 1993), 76.

“current forms of institutionalized education.” Not in diminishing the importance of education to the people of that time, then, but in celebrating the increase of pluralism, this book likewise emphasizes, if indirectly, the progress of “Enlightenment” ideals.¹³

For all of this attention to “Enlightenment ideals” and forward-looking analysis to an age of widespread non-religious education, was there room for a pro-Christian Enlightenment? Perhaps the proliferation of religious colleges in the late colonial period ought to be understood as exactly that—a pro-Christian Enlightenment. This idea is taken up in a following chapter, but it is worth noting that George Marsden indirectly touches on this idea with his discussion of moral philosophy in *The Soul of the American University*.

As a religious historian, Marsden underscores the centrality of religion to early American education. In that work, he provides “an account of the influence of Protestantism in shaping American higher education.”¹⁴ Marsden argues that in America especially, even the non-religious educational ideas imported from Europe were mediated through its religious heritage such that a Protestantism was essentially the established faith. All of the leading universities during this time—Harvard, Yale, William and Mary—were religious institutions, as were most of the academies that sprang up throughout the colonies and young states. These religious origins set a pattern for later schools to follow.¹⁵

¹³ Wayne J. Urban and Jennings I. Wagoner, Jr. *American Education: A History*, 4th ed., (New York: Routledge, 2009), 52-64.

¹⁴ George Marsden, *The Soul of the American University: From Protestant Establishment to Established Nonbelief* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), viii. See also James Burtchaell, *The Dying of the Light: The Disengagement of Colleges and Universities from their Christian Churches* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998). Burtchaell examines seventeen different colleges and their historic ties to Christian denominations, Dartmouth among them.

In that, then, this chapter will follow Marsden’s lead by examining the religious heritage of educational institutions and ideals in the eighteenth century. Leading educational thinkers and founding charters of various schools all point to Christianity’s central importance in developing education in the late colonial era, but the role of newer “Enlightenment” ideas must not be ignored either. Neither “to emphasize certain principles of progress in the past and to produce a story which is the ratification if not the glorification of the present,”¹⁶ nor to ignore the real changes that were occurring in eighteenth century thought—this requires attention to both the changes and the continuities of the era. From a variety of persons writing for various audiences, this was the case in 1740 as much as in 1775.

John Clarke, a schoolmaster in England in the early eighteenth century, wrote an *Essay Upon the Education of Youth in Grammar-Schools*, and it is an excellent place to begin for what it reveals about the purposes and means of education in the mid-eighteenth century.¹⁷ Indeed, Clarke brought Lockean psychology to bear on traditional education even while explaining the importance of learning for virtue and religion. In his book, first published in England in 1720, then republished in 1730 and 1740, Clarke articulated a detailed vision of the classical Latin-school curriculum that schoolmasters everywhere in the English-speaking world found extremely useful. He wrote that “Tho’ the forming the Mind to Virtue is the main thing to be aimed at in Education, yet it is not the only one: Learning, or the Knowledge of Things, is another, and Skill in Languages, at least the

¹⁵ Marsden, 4-31.

¹⁶ Butterfield, v. Butterfield’s British spelling of “emphasise” has been Americanized here.

¹⁷ Clarke’s significance lies in the popularity of this book among schoolteachers in isolated academies in the 18th century. His curriculum as laid out in this work was adaptable to the small schoolhouses existing in the colonies. See Wilson Smith, pp. 61-62.

Latin, as an Introduction to it.” For Clarke, however, the moral purpose of education was central, for, as he repeated, “*Virtue*, as I took notice in the Beginning, should be the principal Thing aim’d at in Education, since every thing else Youth are to be instructed in, receives its Value from it.” Clarke explains that for this cultivation of virtue, students should study religion: “right Notions of *God* and *Religion* should be instill’d into their Minds now and then.” Their thoughts about religion are of greatest importance to them, both in “the Life they are to lead here upon the Earth, as well as that to come, and therefore, if they are in any measure capable of understanding them before they leave the School, as, in this Method of Education, I think they will: there can be no Objection against what I have advised, worth an Answer.” While affirming the traditional notions of the purpose of education—the Christian religion and inculcation of virtue through the study of classical texts in Latin and Greek—Clarke promotes new methods of education tempered by a more Lockean understanding of human understanding, as well as attention to the somewhat new idea of the study of proper English.¹⁸ This reveals an Enlightenment influence in his educational ideas but also indicates the central place of religion and virtue as motives to education.

Certainly in many American colonies and in Britain as well, the decade of the 1740s was a period of religious fervor—the height of the Great Awakening, at least in New England, took place early in the decade. Educational thought from those years reflects that, for example, in the “Letter from John Sergeant to Dr. Benjamin Colman of

¹⁸ John Clarke, *An Essay Upon the Education of Youth in Grammar-Schools. In Which the Vulgar Method of Teaching is Examined, and a New One Proposed, for the More Easy and Speedy Training Up of Youth to the Knowledge of the Learned Languages; Together with History, Chronology, Geography, &c.*, in *Theories of Education in Early America*, ed. Wilson Smith (New York: Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1973), 62-97.

Boston, Concerning the Education of Indian Education,” published in 1743. The full title of the publication states that the purpose of educating Native American children was to civilize them by teaching them English, virtue, and piety. The goal here, not atypical for the era, was for Native Americans to adopt European-style habits of industry and politeness; the work of education for Indian children was “in the most effectual Manner [to] change their whole Habit of thinking and acting.”¹⁹ As Edward Andrews has amply shown, one of the major methods of evangelism during this time period was through education. The education and Christian catechizing of natives, as well as Africans brought as slaves to the New World, featured prominently in evangelistic efforts. As one example, Andrews examines the efforts of English missionaries (Eleazar Wheelock’s school) to train Iroquois as missionaries, and thus natives could school Indian children to be able to read the Bible.²⁰ The hoped-for result would be opening up more native peoples to further evangelization and spreading the Christian gospel and civilization. While this was of course largely unsuccessful, histories of education do well to keep this purpose in mind.

Furthermore, James Burgh, one of the great popularizers of John Locke’s theories of education in the American colonies, published in Boston on the topic “Some Thoughts on Education” in 1749. He emphasized at the beginning that education was of the highest importance for parents to give their children, for “the forming of the rational mind to

¹⁹ “A Letter from John Sergeant to Dr. Benjamin Colman of Boston, Concerning the Education of Indian Children.” (Boston: Rogers & Fowle, 1743).

²⁰ Edward Andrews, *Native Apostles: Black and Indian Missionaries in the British Atlantic World* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2013), 160-170. Andrews looks at the attempted formation of several other schools to educate Native Americans and former (or current) slaves that they might evangelize their own peoples. As noted above, these schools were also born amidst the fervor of revivalism and awakenings in the 1730s and 1740s.

virtue, religion, and happiness is the most glorious work an angel . . . or any created being can be employed in,” whereas “the neglect of an immortal soul is a breach of the most important trust that can be committed by any person.” Burgh emphasized teaching children the things that are most useful to them and not wasting their time. Of greatest use to child, Burgh argued, is the knowledge of Christianity. As his themes shifted, the document became an argument for studying the Christian religion and how it ought to be taught to young children. This was true for young boys; it also applied to young women, for whom “Good nature, Prudence, Virtue, and Religion” are the most important studies.²¹

John Taylor wrote likewise in 1753, in his “The Value of a Child, or, Motives to the Good Education of Children.” He emphasized the importance of reason to human life, and the training of a child to reason—education—brings a parent great rewards. A great part of this is training to virtue, for “Virtue is Truth and Right, the Health, Harmony and Beauty of the Soul, and cannot but yield perpetual Satisfaction to the Mind reflecting upon its own Conduct.” And the obvious corollary, which Taylor included, is the importance of religion. Parents should teach their children religion by talking about heavenly things, to impress upon their children their importance.²²

Perhaps another way to illustrate the centrality of religion in educational thought is to look at the example of those who argued against certain forms of it. Wilson Smith presents the example of William Livingstone and William Smith, Jr. for this purpose.

²¹ James Burgh, “Thoughts on Education, Tending Chiefly to Recommend to the Attention of the Public, some Particulars Relating to that Subject; which are not Generally Considered with the Regard Their Importance Deserves,” (Boston, 1749), 9-57.

²² John Taylor, “The Value of a Child, or, Motives to the Good Education of Children. In a Letter to a Daughter,” (Philadelphia, 1753), 15-30.

They made the case in their newspaper, the *Independent Reflector*, that King's College (later Columbia University) be a non-sectarian institution.²³ Indeed, Smith writes that they argued on a Lockean basis for a version of religious tolerance applied to higher education—an impartiality toward denominational schools. The academic philosophy behind the argument, says Smith, was aimed at promoting a toleration of various Protestant and Calvinist creeds, thus focusing on morality rather than theology. Livingstone and Smith wrote that the “true Use of Education, is to qualify Men for the different Employments of Life, to which it may please God to call them.” They connected the importance of education to the stability of the state, as elaborated by the great classical writers and accepted the formative importance of college studies. Their argument, far from denying the importance of religion in colleges, decries rather the sectarianism that may result from denominational control of an institution. But of religion generally, they wrote:

That religious Worship should be constantly maintained there, I am so far from opposing, that I strongly recommend it, and do not believe any such Kind of Society, can be kept under a regular and due Discipline without it. But instructing the Youth in any particular Systems of Divinity, or recommending and establishing any single Method of Worship or Church Government, I am convinced would be both useless and hurtful.²⁴

Thus the argument against sectarian education critiqued only sectarian education, even while it continued to support religious education.

²³ While Smith points out that these divisions grew out of sectarian rivalries, he fails to note that this controversy grew out of conflicts related to the Great Awakening revivals. Under Rector (later President) Thomas Clap, Yale was for a time strictly a bastion of Old Light orthodoxy. By the 1750s however, Clap had begun forging some alliances with New Lights, but his narrow orthodoxy alienated many, especially the Anglicans behind King's College. See Marsden, *The Soul of the American University*, pp. 53-56.

²⁴ William Livingstone and William Smith, Jr. *The Independent Reflector: or, Weekly Essays on Sundry Important Subjects*, in *Theories of Education in Early America*, ed. Wilson Smith (New York: Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1973), 143-161.

Thomas Clap, rector and eventually president of Yale College during this time, responded to that challenge to sectarian education by writing in defense of the idea that a college be run by one religious group. He reiterated the older and traditional purpose of a colonial college—educating ministers to their vocations—and drew the natural conclusion that a denomination would want some influence over the education of its future clergymen. Clap wrote that “Some indeed, have supposed, that, the only Design of Colleges, was to teach the Arts, and Sciences; and that Religion, is no part, of a College Education.” But, he continued, “it is probable, that there is not a College, to be found upon Earth, upon such a Constitution; without any Regard, to Religion. . . . And indeed, Religion, is a matter, of so great Consequence, and Importance; that, the Knowledge, of the Arts, and Sciences, how excellent soever, in themselves, are comparatively, worth but little without it.” Here indeed was a Christian Enlightenment. In defending Yale, he defended the right of a college to educate future ministers and leaders according to their own denominational creeds.²⁵

A few more examples will suffice to illustrate the continued centrality of religion in mid-eighteenth century educational thought. In 1762, James Hervey’s “A Treatise on the Religious Education of Daughters” was published posthumously. This title embodied its purpose, but the text reveals that Hervey was broadly concerned about the education of girls, especially that they learn religion, but also history, geography, spelling, needlework, music, arithmetic, economy, and natural philosophy. He believed that women should be able to think rationally and know something about the world, but the

²⁵ Thomas Clap. *The Religious Constitution of Colleges* (New London, Connecticut: 1754), in *Theories of Education in Early America*, ed. Wilson Smith (New York: Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1973), 162-170. See footnote 26 above.

chief point, he repeated, is their religious education.²⁶ Likewise, a newspaper article in the *New-York Gazette* in 1767 entitled “On Education” emphasized the importance of early education to train children to good habits. Here again, the discussion of education could not be removed from the discussions about religious faith. While not mentioning the importance of Christian religion to education, the article raised the idea that forces of early habits “binds a Mahometan to the religion of Mahomet, or a Roman Catholic to the flagrant absurdities of that faith.”²⁷ Another newspaper article, published in 1771 and entitled “Thoughts on Education,” argued that teaching children to read from the Bible was a bad practice. While this shows that in 1771, children were taught to read by using the Bible, the article further argued that the vocabulary and ideas in the Bible are above children’s comprehension—and therefore, to protect the holy Scriptures from a “careless indifference” toward it, the Bible should not be used an ordinary schoolbook. Students should still be encouraged to study the Bible, for developing good religion and morals are “the most important part of education,” but not to use it as a schoolbook.²⁸

Furthermore, the statements of college charters, both those formed before the middle of the eighteenth century and those formed in the period under consideration, speak directly to the character of religious education during the time period. Colleges founded earlier than the middle of the eighteenth century, such as Harvard, William and Mary, and Yale, were all founded for the similar purposes of training ministers.²⁹ A

²⁶ James Hervey. “A Treatise on the Religious Education of Daughters.” (Boston: Fowle and Draper, 1762).

²⁷ “On Education.” *New-York Gazette, or Weekly Post-Boy*, November 5, 1767.

²⁸ “Thoughts on Education.” *New-Hampshire Gazette*, December 6, 1771.

²⁹ William and Mary, whose origins are perhaps less well-known than Harvard or Yale was founded for essentially the same religious purposes as the other two. Its charter states that it was founded

related purpose served the colleges founded in the mid-eighteenth century, most of which were formed out of the religious controversies (ie, divisions regarding revivals and revivalism) at that time. As George Marsden pointed out,

The intensity of such mid-eighteenth-century controversies should help us to understand the religious dimension of the founding of the other colonial colleges. Most of these colleges—The College of New Jersey (Princeton, 1746), Brown (1764), Queen’s (Rutgers, 1766), and Dartmouth (1769) were founded by the activist New Light clergy, respectively among Presbyterians, Baptists, Dutch Reformed, and Congregationalists. The two exceptions were King’s (Columbia, 1754) in New York City and the College of Philadelphia (Pennsylvania, 1755), more broadly supported by non-New Light coalitions with Anglican leadership and Presbyterian support.³⁰

So for example, the charter of the College of New Jersey, published in 1746 and again in slightly different form in 1748, brings this difference to the fore. Though always closely associated with Presbyterians in America, the charter protected a liberty of conscience without regard to religious denomination. The language of the original charter states indeed that “those of every Religious Denomination may have free and equal liberty and Advantage of Education in the Said College, any different sentiments in Religion notwithstanding.”³¹

As Marsden noted, the development of King’s College (later Columbia University) in New York illustrates this similar religious commitment of new colleges particularly well. Some debate had preceded its establishment, for as Wilson Smith

“to the end that the Church of Virginia may be furnished with a Seminary of Ministers of the Gospel, and that the Youth may be piously educated in good Letters and Manners, and that the Christian Faith may be propagated amongst the Western Indians, to the Glory of Almighty God.” “Charter of William and Mary College,” (1693), in *Education in the United States: A Documentary History*, ed. Sol Cohen (New York: Random House, 1973), 645-647.

³⁰ Marsden, pp. 56-56.

³¹ “Charter of the College of New Jersey,” in *Education in the United States: A Documentary History*, Vol. 2, ed. Sol Cohen (New York: Random House, 1973), 685-87.

explained, William Livingstone and William Smith, Jr., had opposed sectarian control over the institution. Indeed, its original charter from 1754, “The Charter of the College of New-York in America,” spoke not at all about the religious character of the college. The purpose of the school as laid out in its charter was “for the Education and Instruction of Youth, in the Liberal Arts and Sciences.” This was, however, done largely under the auspices of the Church of England.³² The language of the charter repeats multiple times the focus on educating and instructing youth in liberal arts and sciences, and moreover, it states that no one shall be excluded from the benefits of education there on the basis of religious beliefs. The language was largely similar to the language in the charter of the College of New Jersey. Here also, no denominations were to be excluded.³³

But nonsectarian King’s College, like all the other colleges of its time, retained a strongly Christian religious identity. An article in the *New York Mercury* from June of 1754 by Samuel Johnson, the school’s president, made this abundantly clear. On its religious purpose, he wrote:

And that people may be the better satisfied in sending their children for education to this college, it is to be understood that as to religion, there is no intention to impose on the scholars the peculiar tenets of any particular sect of Christians, but to inculcate upon their tender minds the great principles of Christianity and morality in which true Christians of each denomination are generally agreed. . . . And as to any peculiar tenets, everyone is left to judge freely for himself and to be required only to attend constantly at such places of worship on the Lord’s Day as their parent or guardians shall think fit to order or permit.³⁴

³² Donald G. Tewksbury later denominated it an Episcopal school. Tewksbury, *The Founding of American Colleges and Universities Before the Civil War* (New York: Bureau of Publications, Teachers College, 1932), 33.

³³ “The Charter of the College of New-York in America,” (New York: J. Parker and W. Weyman, 1754).

³⁴ Samuel Johnson, “Advertisement on the Opening of King’s College, New York.” June 3, 1754, in *Education in the United States: A Documentary History* Vol. 2, ed. Sol Cohen (New York: Random House, 1973), 695-96.

The religious purpose of King's College was much like that of any other institution of learning, except that it was no longer acting under the auspices of a single denomination. As Johnson went on to say in this advertisement, "The chief thing aimed at in this college is to teach and engage the children to know God in Jesus Christ and to love and serve Him in all sobriety, godliness, and righteousness of life." From there he explained the value of virtue and good habits and useful knowledge that would "render them creditable to their families and friends, ornaments to their country, and useful to the public weal in their generations." The strict rules of King's College, published in 1755, required students to attend public worship services on the Sabbath day, and required daily attendance at morning and evening prayers which followed the liturgy of the Church of England.³⁵

The "Additional Charter for the College, Academy, and Charity School of Philadelphia" is, likely under the influence of Benjamin Franklin, something of an exception in this case. While the other charters usually spoke directly to the importance of religion in their purpose and founding, this charter said almost nothing about the tie between religion and education. As a charity school, it was by its nature tied to religious sentiments, but the college was less explicitly religious. That said, the authors of the charter wrote in one passage that "We, being desirous to encourage such pious, useful and charitable designs, hoping that the said *Academy*, through the Blessings of *Almighty God*, would prove a Nursery of Wisdom and Virtue, and be the Means of raising up Men, of Dispositions and Qualifications beneficial to the Public." This, of course, is very similar to the language and purposes expressed in other college charters, but the rest of

³⁵ "Rules of King's College," (1755), in *Education in the United States: A Documentary History* Vol. 2, ed. Sol Cohen (New York: Random House, 1973), 696-698.

the document makes clear that the main purpose of the schools—that is, the subjects they would teach—would be learned languages and the liberal arts and sciences. An indirect religious purpose was here implied because the learned languages were thought necessary for doctors, lawyers, and clergy—but never stated as such. The charter spoke of encouraging students to industry, diligence, and progress in the arts and sciences and literature, but not to religion. That made it unique.³⁶

As with the College of New Jersey and King’s College, the charter of Rhode Island College (later Brown University) in 1764 indicated that while religion remained at the center of what colleges were doing, a growing sense of religious tolerance was also present. Though it was founded by the counter-cultural Baptists of the eighteenth century, the reason for the school was in essence the same as other colleges: that “institutions for liberal education are highly beneficial to society, by forming the rising generation to virtue, knowledge, and useful literature; and thus preserving in the community a succession of men duly qualified for discharging the offices of life with usefulness and reputation.” The college was founded for the good of the people and the colony of Rhode Island, and while the charter does not mention the promotion of a certain religion or denomination, the importance still attached to religion can be found in the list of qualifications for members of the board of trustees: twenty-two members must be Baptists, five must be Quakers, four must be Congregationalists, and five must be

³⁶ “Additional Charter of the College, Academy, and Charity-School of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania,” (Philadelphia: Franklin and Hall, 1755).

Episcopalians. Denominational tolerance, but still clearly a Christian—again, Baptist—college.³⁷

The charter of Dartmouth College from 1769 differs pretty significantly from some of the others of that time in that it was more explicitly religious in its focus and intent. This school had its origins in the work of Eleazar Wheelock’s missionary school to the Native Americans, and the charter states that Dartmouth was created to continue this work among Native Americans as well as to supply churches with orthodox pastors and spread learning throughout the colony of New Hampshire. As the charter states, the college was begun for the purpose of “the education and instruction of youths of the Indian tribes in this land, in reading, writing, and all parts of learning, which shall appear necessary and expedient, for civilizing and Christianizing the children of pagans, as well as in all liberal arts and sciences, and also of English youths, and any others.”³⁸

Likewise was Queen’s College in New Jersey, later Rutgers, whose second and surviving charter was published in 1770. This indicated that the purpose of the school was to educate youths “in true Religion and useful Learning.” It was a denominational school begun by Dutch Reformed churches who wanted a college to supply their churches with educated ministers. As in the other colleges of this time, the charter indicates that the subjects to be studied would be “the learned languages and other

³⁷ “Charter of Rhode Island College,” (1764), in *Education in the United States: A Documentary History* Vol. 2, ed. Sol Cohen (New York: Random House, 1973), 704-706. For more on the founding of Rhode Island College, see Thomas Kidd, “‘Becoming Important in the Eye of the Civil Powers’: New Light Baptists, Cultural Respectability, and the Founding of Rhode Island College.” *The Scholarly Vocation and the Baptist Academy: Essays on the Future of Baptist Higher Education*, ed. Roger Ward and David P. Gushee (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2008), 50-67.

³⁸ “Charter of Dartmouth College,” (1769), in *Education in the United States: A Documentary History* Vol. 2, ed. Sol Cohen (New York: Random House, 1973), 707-709. See also Edward Andrews, *Native Apostles: Black and Indian Missionaries in the British Atlantic World*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2013).

branches of useful knowledge” to the end of the “education of youth in learned languages, liberal and useful arts and sciences, and especially in divinity; preparing them for the ministry, and other good offices.” Queen’s College, like the College of New Jersey, King’s College, Rhode Island College, and Dartmouth College, existed for the purpose of training young men in religion and virtue.

Religion stayed in the center of educational thought even while educational thought shifted to include the practical ends of life. Christianity took center stage in educational thoughts and theories, not the sideshow, and this was true for conservative and liberal religious thinkers. The Great Awakening—or the many revivals whose existence constituted a Great Awakening—happened, and an orthodox Christian religion was thriving during these years. It was, after all, for such religious reasons that John Clarke sought to improve the methods of education in small schoolhouses, for these reasons that James Burgh and John Taylor wrote on the education of children. Religious zeal explains debates over the existence of sectarian colleges, and for this reason new colleges continued to open in colonial America.

As was mentioned earlier, however, there was likewise no single dogma of “Enlightenment” education. It was not the sole province of secular thinkers. Rather, the philosophical insights of the Enlightenment—a greater dependence on sense experience and reason chief among them—influenced Christian ideas as much as they influenced political, economic, and scientific theories. In theology, such an influence was seen in the thought of the great American theologian Jonathan Edwards, who, though he may not have understood John Locke and Isaac Newton “in a flash,” in his writings certainly

evinced an indebtedness to some of their ideas.³⁹ In Christian education, the same was also true, and its clearest manifestation was the moral philosophy originating in Scotland with Francis Hutcheson and mediated to American educational institutions through Scottish educators like Francis Alison at the University of Philadelphia and the more famous John Witherspoon at the College of New Jersey. In Witherspoon's work especially, a form of the "pro-Christian Enlightenment" can be found. Comparing Witherspoon's educational philosophy with that of another great colonial educator, Benjamin Franklin, provides for a fuller understanding of Enlightenment influences on American education, religious or not.

³⁹ See Perry Miller, *Jonathan Edwards* (New York: William Sloane Associates, 1949). See also George Marsden's recent comprehensive biography of Edwards, *Jonathan Edwards: A Life* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003).

CHAPTER THREE

The American Enlightenment and Christian Education: A Comparative Analysis of the Educational Ideals of Benjamin Franklin and John Witherspoon

George Whitefield, the great eighteenth century revivalist, once wrote to Benjamin Franklin on the topic of Franklin's proposed school in Philadelphia. In 1749, Franklin had sent Whitefield a copy of his *Proposals Relating to the Education of Youth in Pennsylvania*, outlining his vision for an academy in Philadelphia. Given the current state of educational institutions in the colonies—only four colleges were in existence—Whitefield heartily approved of Franklin's plans. But Whitefield the evangelical Christian disputed one point of Franklin the not-quite-Christian's plan. Though almost all colonial schools existed ultimately to teach young people the basics of Christianity (though indeed with other studies as well), Franklin had limited his discussion of teaching religion to one short line: students should receive instruction in the value of religion, and "the excellency of the CHRISTIAN RELGION above all others." Whitefield was unhappy with so brief a mention of what, to him, was the most important function of a school. He wrote back to Franklin in February of 1750 that "As we are all creatures of a day, as our whole life is but one small point between two eternities, it is reasonable to suppose that the grand end of every Christian institution for forming tender minds should be to convince them of their natural depravity, of the means of recovering out of it, and of the necessity of preparing for the enjoyment of the Supreme Being in a future state."¹

¹ George Whitefield, letter to Benjamin Franklin, February 26, 1750. In *A Select Collection of Letters of the Late Reverend George Whitefield, M.A.* (London: 1772), II, 335-7. Online: <http://founders.archives.gov/documents/Franklin/01-03-02-0186>. Accessed 17 March 2014.

Whitefield's notion of educational institutions was certainly more common at the time, but Franklin's ideal for the University of Pennsylvania, which the academy eventually became, won out in making it a non-sectarian institution.

On the other hand, the recently established College of New Jersey was vigorously promoting orthodox religion within its halls and classrooms. Founded by pro-revivalists (the so-called New Lights or moderate evangelicals) in the 1740s, it eventually grew into one of the most influential institutions of education in the colonies and young United States. Under the leadership of John Witherspoon, who came to America and the college in 1768, education of the sort that would have pleased Whitefield flourished.

These two men, Franklin and Witherspoon, were children of the Enlightenment. Their engagement with Enlightenment thought—marked by a greater reliance on reason, experience, and the senses—reveals that while they may have differed over the role of Christian doctrine in education, their broader views of the purpose of education may not have been as far apart. Franklin focused on an education based on pragmatic principles for an earthly existence; Witherspoon's interpretation of the role of a practical theology in an education for earthly life was scarcely less pragmatic than Franklin's. Indeed, religion remained an important factor in education for both of them, though of course in different ways. As their examples show, the main currents of pre-Revolutionary American educational thought were concerned with the practical affairs of life. Whether explicitly religious, as Witherspoon's educational ideas, or non-sectarian and generally unconcerned with religion, as Franklin's proposals were, each in their own way brought a pragmatic focus to education. Franklin underscored repeatedly the importance of studying English and History because of their usefulness for business and practical utility

in life. Witherspoon's concern for piety and morality—focusing on moral philosophy rather than theology—aimed at the formation of well-educated and virtuous Christian gentlemen. Though neither Franklin nor Witherspoon were profound or original in their ideas, they were both extremely influential in setting a course of American education.

Both men were to a substantial degree representative of late colonial American society. Benjamin Franklin was born early in the eighteenth century (1706) to a family living in Boston, trained as a printer's apprentice, and eventually set up shop for himself in Philadelphia. From there, he grew wealthy enough to pursue scientific inquiries and made himself internationally famous for his experiments with electricity. Franklin was also involved with the leading political questions of his day, and though a loyal British subject all his life, he joined the patriotic cause in the 1770s. He became America's leading diplomat to France and was one of the elder statesmen present at the constitutional convention of 1787. He lived several more years before passing away in April of 1790 at the age of 84.² Thus Franklin lived through most of the major and tumultuous events of that century—the revivals of the Great Awakening, the challenges of the Seven Years' War between Britain and France, the American Revolutionary War, and the crucial early years of the new republic. As his major proposals regarding the establishment of an academy and college in Pennsylvania grew out of the 1740s and 1750s, the recent events of the Great Awakening are particularly important for understanding his vision for education.

² In addition to Franklin's own *Autobiography*, there are several relatively recent one-volume biographies of Benjamin Franklin. See H. W. Brands, *The First American: The Life and Times of Benjamin Franklin* (New York: Doubleday, 2000); Edmund S. Morgan, *Benjamin Franklin* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002); or Gordon S. Wood, *The Americanization of Benjamin Franklin* (New York: Penguin Press, 2004).

The same was true for John Witherspoon. Like many colonial Americans, Witherspoon originally came from Scotland. He was born in 1723, the son of a minister in East Lothian, Scotland. Like his father, Witherspoon pursued a career in ministry and was ordained a Presbyterian pastor. In the Scottish theological controversies between Evangelicals and Moderates, he emerged as a leader of the Evangelical camp, and in the 1760s, after the College of New Jersey had lost yet another president, Witherspoon's prestige led to his invitation to come to New Jersey. He eventually came to the colony and took the helm of the young college, though he had initially declined the offer. Witherspoon strengthened its financial situation and improved the college's curriculum.³ Under his direction, the College of New Jersey grew in size and influence, and Witherspoon became nationally prominent as a signer of the Declaration of Independence and as an educator of many leading politicians, such as James Madison and Aaron Burr. After great involvement in the young governments of the United States, Witherspoon passed away in 1794.⁴ As a prominent religious figure and educator in late colonial and early American society, especially in his influence on men who would go on to found many other colleges and academies across the United States, Witherspoon's educational ideas are worthy of consideration.

Two decades before Witherspoon arrived in Britain's American colonies, Benjamin Franklin was proposing new schools and educational reforms in Philadelphia.

³ See Mark Noll's chapter on Witherspoon in *Princeton and the Republic, 1768-1822: The Search for a Christian Enlightenment in the Era of Samuel Stanhope Smith* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1989), 28-58.

⁴ There are several good biographies of Witherspoon as well; among them are Jeffrey H. Morrison, *John Witherspoon and the Founding of the American Republic* (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2005), and L. Gordon Tait, *The Piety of John Witherspoon: Pew, Pulpit, and Public Forum* (Louisville, KY: Geneva Press, 2001).

One of Franklin's modern interpreters has been John Hardin Best, who edited a collection of Franklin's writings on the topic of education.⁵ Best's twenty-page analysis of Franklin reveals an understanding of him as the epitome of the American Enlightenment. Best viewed Franklin as the experimenter, the scientist, and the practical and humane reformer of education. Indeed, he wrote that

A generalization commonly made of eighteenth-century American thought is that the Puritan ideal of the preceding century was in decay, was being infiltrated and secularized by the ideas of the Enlightenment. Further, this transformation was accomplished in the main by the rising middle class of tradesmen and farmers. This generalization, a sound one no doubt by any standard, is established most securely in the life and work of Benjamin Franklin. Franklin was the epitome of the new middle class, but equally was he the representative intellectually of the combination of a revised Puritan ethic and the secular principles of the Enlightenment.⁶

This analysis, coming from the 1960s, should not be surprising. The dominant historiographical framework of that era looked to a secular Enlightenment explanation for many eighteenth century developments. Best argued that "The educational thought of the Enlightenment made a profound impression on Franklin John Locke was the major influence on Franklin's educational thought."⁷ Religious figures and writers like John Milton, who wrote a treatise on education in 1644, also shaped Franklin's views of the matter. Importantly, said Best, Franklin's understanding of the role and purpose of education was shaped by his own experiences: what he knew of colonial education came "largely from his own early experiences with formal schooling."⁸

⁵ John Hardin Best, "Franklin and the Enlightened Education in America," in *Benjamin Franklin on Education*, ed. John Hardin Best (Bureau of Publications, Teachers College, Columbia University, New York: 1962), 1-21.

⁶ Best, p. 8.

⁷ Best, p. 12-13.

⁸ Best, 15.

Other, later interpretations of Franklin's ideals of education have largely followed these lines. Lorraine Smith Pangle and Thomas L. Pangle, writing in their book *The Learning of Liberty*, argue that Franklin departs from Locke, and "the nature of the departure may be said to be archetypal of the distinctively American path in education."⁹ They explain that Franklin's proposed educational goals aimed at virtue, "which he defines as service to one's fellowman; and virtue so conceived, he insists, encompasses the whole of piety."¹⁰ The traditional religious purposes of education found in most existing schools at that time, was for Franklin no longer central. Pangle and Pangle write that "the cultivation of Puritan religious spirituality, as well as the Quaker spirituality that was more familiar in the existing schools of Philadelphia, ceased to be a goal."¹¹ The Bible disappeared in Franklin's proposed curriculum, and the study of English replaced Latin and Greek. Likewise, the training of oratory for writing in newspapers and communication through print surpassed the oratory of public speaking. The Pangles state that "In Franklin's new vision, journalism, conceived as a high civic calling within the republic, replaces or grows out of the ancient Isocratic oratorical vocation."¹² Finally, the Pangles locate in Franklin's thought an emphasis on history, particularly the history of "the captains of commerce and the Argonauts of scientific inquiry and technological innovation." Franklin elevated the study of commerce and trade over politics and war

⁹ Lorraine Smith Pangle and Thomas Pangle, *The Learning of Liberty: The Educational Ideas of the American Founders* (Lawrence, KA: University Press of Kansas, 1993), 75.

¹⁰ Pangle and Pangle, 78.

¹¹ Pangle and Pangle, 76.

¹² Pangle and Pangle, 82.

while largely ignoring the study of religion.¹³ It was in Franklin's proposals relating to education that they found a transition moment from the ideas of Locke and the later educational ideals of new American republic.

But as Gordon Wood reminds the readers of his biography of the man, Franklin's real goals and motives are often incredibly difficult to discover. Indeed, "the historic Franklin, the Franklin of the eighteenth century, seems to elude us When we actually recover the Franklin of the eighteenth century, he does not seem to fit the image we have created of him."¹⁴ Rather than the most American of the American colonists, Wood contends that Franklin could as easily be conceived as "the least American and the most European of the nation's early leaders."¹⁵ Part of the difficulty in really contextualizing and understanding Franklin comes from his gifted ability to write, especially his talent for assuming different personas. Wood writes of Franklin that "He was a man of many voices and masks who continually mocks himself. . . . No wonder we have difficulty in figuring out who this remarkable man was."¹⁶ In part, Franklin's subtleties grew out of his recognition of the difference between appearance and reality. Wood quotes Franklin on the subject of self-disguise: "'We shall resolved to be what we would seem,' he declared, yet at the same time he seems to have delighted in hiding his innermost thoughts and motives. 'Let all Men know thee,' Poor Richard said, 'but no man know thee thoroughly: Men freely ford that see the shallows.'"¹⁷

¹³ Pangle and Pangle, 86.

¹⁴ Wood, p. 9.

¹⁵ Wood, 9.

¹⁶ Wood, 14.

¹⁷ Quoted in Wood, p. 15

Discovering the man himself might be a separate task from understanding his proposed changes in education. Nevertheless, Franklin's educational proposals and writings must be approached with caution, care, and context. He must be understood through his own words, seen as it were through his own eyes, but not simply taken at his word. The actual implementation of his ideas for the academy and college will deserve attention for the light they shed on Franklin's understanding of education.

Additionally, for understanding both Franklin and Whitefield in the context of the eighteenth century and its changing educational ideals, George Marsden's analysis of changes in curriculum is particularly helpful. Marsden reminds his readers that when looking at the history of American education, "Even major educational ideals that might not seem especially religious, such as scientific standards growing out of the Enlightenment, American republican moral ideals growing out of the Revolution, romantic principles of individual development, or American perceptions of German universities, were mediated through the American Protestant heritage."¹⁸ That is, especially in the first few centuries of American education, all the educational developments that colleges and schools underwent were influenced by an American Protestantism. In the eighteenth century, Marsden says, the most important new science was a way of studying human nature that was compatible with Christianity—moral philosophy. This study of moral philosophy, which purported "to discover a universal set of rationally based moral principles," reinforced a sense of generic Christian morality without drawing on Christian revelation. In Marsden's words, "moral philosophy

¹⁸ George Marsden, *The Soul of the American University: From Protestant Establishment to Established Nonbelief* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 4.

provided a common ground for building a republic of virtue.”¹⁹ In short, establishing and teaching a moral order, understood through the reasoning of moral philosophy, was the key goal of eighteenth century education.²⁰

With all of that as a background, then, Benjamin Franklin’s educational ideas should fall into an understandable organization that sheds light on his understanding of the relationship between religion and education. His two main expositions on the subject, “Proposals Relating to the Education of Youth in Pennsylvania” (1749) and “The Idea of the English School” (1751), most clearly indicate his thoughts on the matter.

Franklin’s “Proposals Relating to the Education of Youth” laid out his plan for establish an academy in Pennsylvania. The second page of the document provided his bibliography; it clearly illustrates his indebtedness to John Milton, John Locke, Francis Hutcheson (the famous professor of moral philosophy at the Scottish University of Glasgow), and others.²¹ Franklin then wrote of the need for education in the colony. Though the colony of Pennsylvania was formed and established by well-educated men of Europe, the youths of the colony lacked that same sound education. So, wrote Franklin, “That we may obtain the Advantages arising from an Increase of Knowledge, and prevent as much as may be the mischievous Consequences that would attend a general Ignorance among us, the following *Hints* are offered towards forming a plan for the Education of the Youth of Pennsylvania.”²²

¹⁹ Marsden, pp. 50-51.

²⁰ Ibid, p. 58.

²¹ Benjamin Franklin, “Proposals Relating to the Education of Youth in Pennsylvania,” (Philadelphia, 1749), 2. Some spellings have been modernized, such as *Pensilvania*, to the usual spelling.

²² Franklin, “Proposals,” 6.

Franklin then described all the basic components of a school. It would need a library, a master, and the materials of study. Befitting his pragmatic outlook on education and the practical limitations of time, energy, and finances within a school, Franklin wrote of the proposed curriculum and studies for the students that “it would be well if they could be taught *every Thing* that is useful, and *every Thing* that is ornamental: But Art is long, and their Time is short. It is therefore propos’d that they learn those Things that are likely to be *most useful* and *well ornamented*.”²³ Those objects of study were most important which were to be most useful to them—learning how to write and to calculate arithmetic; studying English language and grammar as well as good English style; reading history. Franklin indeed dwelt at some length on the benefits of the study of history. He believed that it taught geography, ancient customs, and morality: the “natural Tendency of Reading good History, must be, to fix in the Minds of Youth deep Impressions of the Beauty and Usefulness of Virtue of all Kinds, Publick Spirit, Fortitude, &c.”²⁴ Moreover, among the advantages of studying history was the opportunity it afforded to study religion. Franklin wrote that “*History* will also afford frequent Opportunities of showing the Necessity of a *Publick Religion*, from its Usefulness to the Publick; the Advantage of a Religious Character among private Persons; the Mischiefs of Superstition, &c, and the Excellency of the CHRISTIAN RELIGION above all others antient or modern.”²⁵

²³ Franklin, “Proposals,” 11.

²⁴ Franklin, “Proposals,” 11-21.

²⁵ Franklin, “Proposals,” 22.

It was that passage, of course, to which Whitefield was responding in his letter to Franklin. Whitefield complained that the passage regarding Christianity came too late in the document and was too quickly passed over. Indeed, given the passage's context, Whitefield's concerns were well-founded. Franklin's discourse was at that point on the benefits of studying history. The value of studying Christianity came only through the study of history, and Franklin placed it on the same level as the benefits of learning public virtue, oratory, and the mischief of superstition.²⁶

But Franklin moved forward to elaborate more of the benefits of studying history. It would teach the students good political order: "Thus may the first Principles of sound *Politicks* be fix'd in the Mind of Youth." History, Franklin wrote, would encourage them toward public disputes and logical reasoning. It would motivate them to the study of ancient and modern languages in order to better understand the past. History, modern history, would enable youths better to understand their contemporary society. Practical history—that of farming, planting, arts, and mechanics—would encourage them to the study of those subjects as well.²⁷

Such were, to Franklin, the "*most useful and well ornamented*" studies of the past. Toward the conclusion of the "Proposal," he wrote that "The Idea of what is *true Merit*, should also be often present to Youth, explain'd and impress'd on their Minds, as consisting in an *Inclination* join'd with an *Ability* to serve Mankind, one's country,

²⁶ It is worth noting again Whitefield's comments on it: "As we are all creatures of a day, as our whole life is but one small point between two eternities, it is reasonable to suppose that the grand end of every Christian institution for forming tender minds should be to convince them of their natural depravity, of the means of recovering out of it, and of the necessity of preparing for the enjoyment of the Supreme Being in a future state." Whitefield assumed here that the school would be a "Christian institution for forming tender minds"—an assumption clearly not shared by Franklin.

²⁷ Franklin, "Proposals," 22-28.

Friends and Family, which *Ability* is (with the Blessing of God) to be acquir'd or greatly increas'd by *true Learning*; and should indeed be the great *Aim* and *End* of all Learning."²⁸ There in brief was Franklin's notion of the true purpose, ends, and merit of education. Learning served to join ability and inclination to the service of one's country, one's family, and one's friends. Unlike Whitefield's understanding of education, and unlike the many religiously-inspired institutions of learning already existing in the colonies, Franklin envisioned a pragmatic English academy that aimed at the virtue of public service.

This practical emphasis was communicated more clearly when Franklin unfolded his ideas on education further in his letter to the trustees of the Philadelphia Academy, "The Idea of the English School."²⁹ As he explained, Franklin wanted the students of the English school to learn English grammar, handwriting, and orthography. He thought it desirable that the students compete in spelling in order that they learn to spell correctly, and they should also read in English every day. In their reading, they ought to read with attention, to read a variety of styles, and to understand the contents. This was necessary if they were to read aloud properly.³⁰ From this, followed Franklin, the importance of "Speaking properly and gracefully." He suggested reading speeches from history or parliamentary debates. Such speeches could be memorized and delivered. They could also memorize speeches from plays and drama, as long as they avoided any materials "that could injure the Morals of Youth."³¹ Finally, Franklin underscored the importance

²⁸ Franklin, "Proposals," 30.

²⁹ Benjamin Franklin, "The Idea of the English School," (Philadelphia, 1751).

³⁰ Franklin, "Idea of the English School," 2-4.

³¹ Franklin, "Idea of the English School," 5.

of teaching the students writing, the “next necessary Accomplishment after good Speaking.”³² Throughout the later classes of the proposed school, Franklin returned again and again to the value of good writing. He suggested several books for the practice of good style. Students should practice good prose essays as well as some writing in verse. The best styles, those of Addison’s *Spectator* or writings of Dr. Johnson, made for the most suitable examples of good English style. Continuing with these practices of writing was the study of history, chronology, and geography, “which is necessary to understand the Maps and Globes.”³³ At the end of their studies, Franklin wrote:

Thus instructed, Youth will come out of this School fitted for learning any Business, Calling or Profession, except such wherein Languages are required; and tho’ unacquainted with any antient or foreign Tongue, they will be Masters of their own, which is of more immediate Use; and withal will have attain’d many other valuable Accomplishments; the Time usually spent in acquiring those Languages, often without Success, being here employ’d in laying such a Foundation of Knowledge and Ability, as, properly improv’d, may qualify them to pass thro’ and execute the several Offices of civil Life, with Advantage and Reputation to themselves and Country.³⁴

All of these studies were to be practical; this was what Franklin meant by the most useful and most ornamental of studies.

Franklin’s school was to be an English school, not a classical school. Whereas John Clarke’s program of education for young people focused almost entirely on instruction in Latin and Greek, Franklin’s proposals here consciously and intentionally removed them from the school. This practical approach to education, which recognized the limited amount of time available for studies and the value of studying only what

³² Franklin, “Idea of the English School,” 6.

³³ Franklin, “Idea of the English School,” 6-8.

³⁴ Franklin, “Idea of the English School,” 9.

would be important to their future careers, was Franklin's main concern. Conspicuously absent, of course, is reference to the study of the Bible or of religion in general. Rather than study of the Bible, Franklin suggested Samuel Johnson's *Ethices Elementa* (*Principles of Morality*) in order "to lay a solid Foundation of Virtue and Piety in their Minds."³⁵ This would be more practical in achieving the desired results of making students behave virtuously without the necessity of studying doctrine, which would of course be divisive. Such was, naturally, exactly the eighteenth century pattern of moral philosophy replacing theology, which George Marsden described. This was that current of Enlightenment belief that prioritized practical morality over holding right beliefs.

But in order to popularize the study of moral philosophy, it needed more than simply to be proposed. The small academy of Philadelphia could not by itself reshape American education, even when more fully grown into a college. That shift was in large part due to the influence of Scottish immigrant-teachers and professors. It was the Scots immigrant and educator Francis Alison who took charge of the Philadelphia Academy in 1752. He, together with William Smith, proposed opening a full college along with the academy, and this became the College of Philadelphia (eventually the University of Pennsylvania). Alison, a (Old Light or anti-revivalist) Presbyterian, and Smith, an Anglican, introduced the thought and teachings of the Scottish philosopher Francis Hutcheson to the schools. As an officially non-sectarian institution (administered as it was by members of rivaling denominations), Hutcheson's moral philosophy found a strong place in their curriculum. As Douglas Sloan concluded, "Scottish moral

³⁵ Franklin, "Idea of the English School," 7.

philosophy was to have a decisive impact upon the religious and educational ideals at both the College of New Jersey and the College of Philadelphia.”³⁶

The College of New Jersey was created as a result of the divisions created by the Great Awakening. Pro-revivalist forces had established their own schools, such as the Log College, to educate ministers. The older colleges, Harvard and Yale, remained mostly under the control and direction of anti-revivalists.³⁷ Additionally, many academies were founded in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries by immigrant Presbyterian ministers, and among those founded by radical evangelicals in response to the need for educated clergy were Fagg’s Manor Academy, founded by Samuel Blair, and Nottingham Academy, founded by Samuel Finley.³⁸ The College of New Jersey grew out of this tradition of Scots Presbyterian schools. When the Log College closed in the early 1740s, plans began to open the College of New Jersey. As Sloan writes, “In founding the College of New Jersey the church leaders were not questioning the quality of instruction or discipline in the academies. They were attempting to create one institution which would serve as a pacesetter for the church’s educational standards, and to which they could devote their best resources in leadership and funds.”³⁹

Thus the College of New Jersey opened in 1746 as a consciously Presbyterian school, though its charter at least paid special attention to the liberty of conscience of its

³⁶ Douglas Sloan, *The Scottish Enlightenment and the American College Ideal* (Teachers College Press: Teachers College, Columbia University, 1971), 83-88.

³⁷ For more on this conception of the divisions of the Great Awakening, rather than the older terms “Old Light” and “New Light,” see Thomas Kidd, *The Great Awakening: The Roots of Evangelical Christianity in Colonial America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), xiv.

³⁸ As one example of their importance, Benjamin Rush attended Nottingham Academy from age 7 to 13 before going on to the College of New Jersey. Sloan, 61.

³⁹ Sloan, 59.

students.⁴⁰ The College went through a series of presidents in the 1750s and 1760s (death taking most of them away prematurely), and the passing of President Samuel Finley in 1766 left the presidency vacant once more. The pro-revivalist trustees petitioned the Scotsman and Presbyterian pastor John Witherspoon to come to Princeton, New Jersey, and after deliberating and negotiating for two years, Witherspoon and his wife indeed came.⁴¹

Witherspoon had been educated in Scotland. He matured there as a pastor and earned the respect of many, including some in America, for his involvement in the controversies then at stake in the Scottish Presbyterian circles. When he assumed his post as President of the College of New Jersey in 1768, he deemed it important that he immediately set the college on solid financial footing. Part of that involved a fundraising trip across the middle colonies, New England, and Virginia in the late 1760s and early 1770s. Strengthening the school also involved reforming its curriculum, and Witherspoon patterned it after the curriculums found in the universities of Scotland.⁴² He indicated some of those changes in a letter advertising the College of New Jersey to British colonists in the West Indies, and that was where Witherspoon laid out his understanding of the purpose of education and its benefits.

In that letter, “Address to the Inhabitants of Jamaica and other West-India Island, In Behalf of the College of New-Jersey,” Witherspoon argued both for the importance of education and for the education offered by his school. He wrote of colleges that “Their

⁴⁰ “Charter of the College of New Jersey,” in *Education in the United States: A Documentary History*, Volume 2, ed. Sol Cohen (New York: Random House, 1973), 685-687.

⁴¹ Sloan, 103-4.

⁴² Sloan, 109-112. See also Noll, 28-58.

use in every country; their necessity in a new or rising country; and, particularly the influence of Science, in giving a proper direction and full force to industry or enterprise, are indeed so manifest, that they are either admitted by all, or the exceptions are so few as to be wholly unworthy of regard.”⁴³ Education existed to promote virtue and happiness, the arts and industry, and was “therefore of equal importance in order either to enjoy life with dignity and elegance, or imploy it to the benefit of society, in offices of power or trust.”⁴⁴ The course of instruction at the College of New Jersey, based on reforms made in the preceding years, was that of Latin and Greek the first and second years, with geography, philosophy and mathematics added in the second. In the third year, students would continue language study while focusing primarily on mathematics and natural philosophy, or scientific studies. In the fourth and final year, students would read “the higher classics,” explore more mathematics and science, and take a course of Moral Philosophy.⁴⁵ The grammar school associated with the college, Witherspoon wrote, would also afford boys an opportunity to study Latin and Greek with care in their pre-college years.⁴⁶ Thus Witherspoon summarized his own educational work at the College of New Jersey.

Witherspoon’s understanding of education was both pragmatic and religious—again, a Christian appropriation of the Enlightenment. Like Franklin, Witherspoon

⁴³ John Witherspoon, “Address to the Inhabitants of Jamaica,” (Philadelphia, 1772), Page not numbered. An anonymous pamphlet written later that year to criticize Witherspoon’s arguments in favor of the College of New Jersey reveals the importance attached to this “Address” by his contemporaries in the colonial world. See “Candid Remarks on Dr. Witherspoon’s Address to the Inhabitants of Jamaica and the other West-India Islands,” (Philadelphia, 1772).

⁴⁴ Witherspoon, “Address,” 6.

⁴⁵ Witherspoon, “Address,” 15-16.

⁴⁶ Witherspoon, “Address,” 18.

grounded his concern for education in a concern for a human life lived on earth. As a professor and teacher of moral philosophy, Witherspoon's lectures followed the themes of reconciling faith and reason, the use of an innate moral sense, and an appeal to experience as the test of truth. As Sloan explained, Witherspoon "wanted to provide his students with a rational basis for their faith that would enable them to hold to it with confidence; and he wanted to equip them to meet attacks upon the faith with rational arguments that skeptics would respect."⁴⁷ Indeed, as historians of education have observed, Witherspoon was not an original thinker; rather he synthesized and popularized existing schools of thought, in theology, science, and moral philosophy.⁴⁸

As a teacher of moral philosophy, Witherspoon followed the ideas of Francis Hutcheson. Witherspoon's thought belonged to a category of a Scottish Christian Enlightenment. He believed that an empirical method of discovering knowledge and truth was entirely valid and legitimate. That meant for Witherspoon that questions of utility and practice were always important. For example, as Sloan explains, Witherspoon believed that "The study of moral philosophy could be justified, if necessary, by its polemic usefulness alone."⁴⁹ The human senses and human reason were trustworthy guides in the pursuit of knowledge. Witherspoon wrote "That our senses are to be trusted in the information they give use seems to me a first principle, because they are the foundation of all our reasonings."⁵⁰

⁴⁷ Sloan, 119.

⁴⁸ See Wilson Smith, ed, *Theories of Education in Early America, 1655-1819* (Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc, 1973), 185, and Sloan, 122.

⁴⁹ Sloan, 127.

⁵⁰ Quoted in Sloan, 130. This shows again how in-step Witherspoon was with Enlightenment thought and how out-of-step he was with at least some other Reformed theologians. In contrast to

As a Christian educator, Witherspoon emphasized morality with piety—a moral piety. In his famous “Letters on Education,” which were first published in 1765 and went through multiple re-printings over the next few decades, Witherspoon taught a moral and religious education for children and for their parents. He noted the importance of education in inculcating religious ideas—not a new concept, but a contested proposition at the time—before describing for parents what they might do to educate and raise their children properly.⁵¹ As the letters were intended for parents, the advice is largely to them concerning their own behavior and management of the household. Witherspoon wrote about the importance of selecting good servants as positive influences on children and of being good examples for the servants and the children.⁵² Practical concerns for Witherspoon involved questions of establishing proper authority over children: “He who would preserve his authority over his children should be particularly watchful of his own conduct.”⁵³ Authority’s importance derives from its end, and that is “the glory of God in the eternal happiness and salvation of children. Whoever believes in a future state, whoever has a just sense of the importance of eternity to himself, cannot fail to have a like concern for his offspring.”⁵⁴ But Witherspoon’s concerns were not only with religious education, nor solely with polite education. He brought them together: “I cannot

Witherspoon’s confidence in man’s ability to discern the truth through the senses and reason stand the words of his own church’s Westminster Confession of Faith, which says in Chapter 6, Article 2 that because of the Fall, all mankind is “wholly defiled in all the parts and faculties of soul and body.”

⁵¹ Witherspoon, “Letters on Education” in Wilson Smith, 185-220.

⁵² Witherspoon, “Letters on Education” 191-94.

⁵³ Witherspoon, “Letters on Education” 200.

⁵⁴ Witherspoon, “Letters on Education” 202. Note that Wilson Smith had written in his “Introduction” to this section that Witherspoon’s concern with education wasn’t the old Puritan concern about salvation and religious knowledge. Passages like this one contradict that claim and point again to Smith’s concerns to make these thinkers fit into a secular Enlightenment pattern of progress.

help thinking that true religion is not only consistent with, but necessary to the perfection of true politeness.”⁵⁵ Practical concerns for Witherspoon also regarded explaining to children why a thing is right or true. He wrote that “A thing may be right in itself, but children should be made to see why it is right.”⁵⁶ They should learn religion in that way so they can understand its true importance; parents must show through their own lives the importance of their religious beliefs. Thus their lives would be characterized by a moral piety: with politeness, religious devotion, and genuine understanding of the reasons for their faith.

Such were Witherspoon’s practical suggestions on education for children. From emphasizing the polite and religious purpose of education to making moral philosophy the capstone course of the College of New Jersey’s curriculum, his teachings reveal the importance of moral philosophy to late colonial education. This illustrates exactly what George Marsden has argued about eighteenth century education and the remarkable collapse of Christian education within leading colleges and universities. Where Witherspoon saw the usefulness of teaching morality in conjunction with orthodox religion, moral philosophy relegated explicit religious instruction to other courses and to other schools within the colleges. The growing importance of moral philosophy as a basis for teaching children virtue and good behavior would set the stage for the later educational proposals of the eighteenth century. After the American Revolution, various educational theorists would propose nationwide plans of education that embraced and

⁵⁵ Witherspoon, “Letters on Education” 206.

⁵⁶ Witherspoon, “Letters on Education” 213.

encouraged teaching morality and virtue but left instruction in religion to the churches and schools of divinity.

To summarize, then, much of even the pre-Revolutionary educational thought in America, whether “religious” or “secular,” was concerned with practical affairs of life. As Benjamin Franklin’s writings reveal, and as the various biographers and analysts of this thought concur, Franklin believed in the importance and usefulness of teaching children English and History. Likewise, Witherspoon’s concern for piety and morality aimed at the formation of educated and well-behaved Christian gentlemen. Though neither of them were profoundly original in their educational proposals in America, both were extremely influential in their own generations and gave some direction to the course of American education after the Revolutionary War. Particularly in regard to the role of religion and moral philosophy in American education, the educational proposals of the following decades would draw on a similar foundation to what Franklin and Witherspoon had established.

CHAPTER FOUR

“To Make Them Men, Citizens, and Christians”: Republican Aspirations for a National System of Education, 1779-1800

In the 1830s, the beginnings of state-wide, state-officiated systems of education started to emerge under a second generation of American educational reformers. Under the leadership of luminaries such as Horace Mann in Massachusetts, new schools and school systems arose to meet the needs of the American republic—needs foreseen decades before by the Founding generation.¹ Indeed, many leading educators of that era and even some Founders themselves had proposed reforms to American schooling. Their proposals sought to meet the needs of republican society through education. As early as 1778—in the midst of the Revolutionary War—Thomas Jefferson had proposed in the state of Virginia a “Bill for the More General Diffusion of Knowledge” which would have established a system of schools within the state. Likewise, after the conclusion of the war, the Pennsylvanian Benjamin Rush proposed several times different plans for public schools in his home state. Noah Webster, one of the greatest early educators in the young United States, wrote widely on the topic of education. He sought not only a national system of education to meet the needs of the growing nation, but further, a reform to spelling and the English language that would mark Americans as linguistically independent from Britain. In the heady, early years of the republic, state and national systems of education were proposed by such men as Robert Coram of Delaware, Simeon

¹ Carl Kaestle. *Pillars of the Republic: Common Schools and American Society, 1780-1860* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1983), 62-65.

Doggett in New England, Samuel Harrison Smith of Pennsylvania, and Samuel Knox of Maryland.²

At the same time, new schools were being established throughout the states. New colleges sprang up in all regions of the country. In the South, state universities and religious colleges were founded in Georgia, North and South Carolina, and Virginia.³ The same was true in the middle states and New England as well. Existing within the colonies before the Revolution took place, there were nine colleges, but many more formed within the next twenty years.⁴ Many formed on the frontier, and most were established by religious institutions (churches and denominations). Hampden-Sydney College in Virginia, for example, was founded by Presbyterian interests in the 1780s. The building of church-related colleges continued rapidly, indeed, with American expansion and the growth of denominations such as Methodists and Baptists.⁵

The simultaneous emergence of these new colleges with the many proposed plans for national education raises questions about why such systems of education failed to be implemented until the 1830s and later. Daniel Walker Howe, in his article “Church, State, and Education in the Young American Republic,” answers this question well: the

² See Frederick Rudolph, ed. *Essays on Education in the Early Republic* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1965).

³ See for example Keith Whitescarver, “Creating Citizens for the Republic: Education in Georgia, 1776-1810.” *Journal of the Early Republic* 13, no. 4 (Winter, 1993): 455-479.

⁴ See for example David W. Robson, “College Founding in the New Republic.” *History of Education Quarterly* 23, no. 3 (Autumn, 1983): 323-341. He notes that sixteen new colleges formed in the US between 1776 and 1800.

⁵ See Donald Tewksbury, *The Founding of American Colleges and Universities Before the Civil War* (New York: Bureau of Publications, Teachers College, Columbia University, 1932), 60. Tewksbury stated that this was the “denominational era” in higher education because so many schools were run by churches.

religious motivation for founding schools took the wind out of political motive's sails.⁶ Few politicians thought it important to invest state money in school systems at a time when churches were founding academies and colleges at an incredible pace.

Howe dwells less, however, on the ways in which the nature of the proposed educational systems reveals something about their impracticability. While most of proposed educational systems in the 1780s and 1790s spoke to the challenges they faced in implementation, few took critically into account the serious motives to education—which were primarily and fundamentally religious—but instead sought to harness American patriotism for support. While these republican proposals often engaged with religious ideas, religion was frequently peripheral to their vision of national and state systems of education. Virtue and morality were central to their ideas, but not religion. Instead, informed by secular (particularly of a French variety) Enlightenment ideals, some left religion a place outside of public education rather than at its heart in a way that failed to conform to the beliefs of most Americans.

The systems proposed for promoting education and knowledge in the new United States merit attention because of their varied approaches and shared purposes. The motives they proclaimed for developing nationwide systems of education vary along the same themes, however, and the different ways each major proposal engaged with religious topics deserves particular attention. One of those clear themes was that almost all of these writers accepted a similar understanding of the function of education in a republic. They all agreed with Jefferson that virtue sustained republican governments, that schools could teach virtue and morality, and that a national or statewide system of

⁶ Daniel Walker Howe, "Church, State, and Education in the Young American Republic." *Journal of the Early Republic* 22, no. 1 (Spring, 2002): 1-24.

education could inculcate the virtue needed in the new American republic. Likewise, these writers shared a desire for a uniform system of education. More problematically, however, most of these writers were unclear in their definitions of religion, morality, and virtue. Though they all spoke highly of morality, what precisely did they mean by the term? Perhaps it was an intentional ambiguity that allowed for religious and nonreligious support of their plans, or perhaps it was an unintentional ambiguity stemming from the same problem George Marsden identified with the study of moral philosophy.⁷

First note, however, that the sources used here might be questionable as far as how representative they are of American educational thought. While many historians of education have relied on them—notably Oscar O. Hansen in *Liberalism and American Education in the Eighteenth Century* and others such as Thomas and Lorraine Smith Pangle in *The Learning of Liberty: The Educational Ideas of the American Founders*—some have questioned the focus on these figures on the basis of their failure to achieve any significant results. Siobhan Moroney’s historiographical essay on early republican educational thought raises exactly this problem. Moroney asks why the “major essays” on republicanism and education from the 1780s through 1800s remain firmly entrenched as representative of their time. Moroney’s conclusion was that “we have unwittingly adopted a non-representative sample, even after our discipline’s many biases have been pointed out. . . . Once we pull those philosophies into the foreground, our portrait of the early republic will be significantly different from what it is now.”⁸ This challenge to re-

⁷ See George Marsden, *The Soul of the American University* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994).

⁸ Siobhan Moroney. “Birth of a Canon: The Historiography of Early Republican Educational Thought.” *History of Education Quarterly* 39, no. 4 (Winter, 1999): 491.

evaluate current historiography in the history of education, directed at the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, must be taken into account. While these sources may not be representative of all American thought, or of American thought generally, they do appear to speak for a large number of educated republican elites.⁹ Thus these essays must be understood as representative mainly of an elite class of Americans in the 1780s and 1790s. Jefferson, Rush, Webster, and the American Philosophical Society may not represent the whole spectrum of American thought on education, but they certainly spoke for an influential portion of elite American citizens.

Among Thomas Jefferson's greatest accomplishments, he thought, was the establishment of the University of Virginia. In the year 1778, when he proposed a "Bill for the More General Diffusion of Knowledge," however, that remained decades away. The first section of the bill set forth the connections Jefferson and others of his generation drew between liberty, good government, and widespread education. He famously wrote:

Whereas it appeareth that however certain forms of government are better calculated than others to protect individuals in the free exercise of their natural rights, and are at the same time themselves better guarded against degeneracy, yet experience hath shewn, that even under the best forms, those entrusted with power have, in time, and by slow operations, perverted it into tyranny; and it is believed that the most effectual means of preventing this would be, to illuminate, as far as practicable, the minds of the people at large, and more especially to give them knowledge of those facts, which history exhibiteth, that, possessed thereby of the experience of other ages and countries, they may be enabled to know ambition under all its shapes, and prompt to exert their natural powers to defeat its purposes.¹⁰

⁹ By "republican," I mean those who believed in republican government. This encompasses Federalists like Noah Webster, but especially Jeffersonians.

¹⁰ Thomas Jefferson, "A Bill for the More General Diffusion of Knowledge" (1779), in *Education in the United States: A Documentary History*, vol. 2, ed. Sol Cohen (New York: Random House, 1973), 739-40.

This was precisely his belief, and that of others. They called for a liberal education in order to prepare those who had talent to “guard the sacred deposit of the rights and liberties of their fellow citizens” from would-be tyrants in government.¹¹ This theme continued to be echoed throughout these years of the young republic.

A prerequisite of citizenship was then the ability to be educated. On that score, Jefferson’s comments on the mental ability of the African slaves in America seem relevant. Jefferson described his perceptions of the limits of the black intellect in his book *Notes on the State of Virginia*. In the section wherein he proposes separating the freed blacks from their former masters, he described what he believed were the “physical and moral” reasons for their separation. After his description of their differences from white Americans, Jefferson concluded that “In general, their existence appears to participate more of sensation than reflection.” Additionally, in mental abilities, wrote Jefferson, “it appears to me that in memory they are equal to the whites; in reason much inferior.”¹² Based on Jefferson’s argument here, the unfortunate implications for African American citizenship in the new American republics seemed obvious: a race which could not be educated to preserve liberty had little place in Jefferson’s proposed schools, and still less a role in civic society.

Another voice adding to the call for widespread education through a statewide system of schools was that of Benjamin Rush. In 1786, he penned *A Plan for the Establishment of Public Schools and the Diffusion of Knowledge in Pennsylvania*. Rush’s

¹¹ See Gordon Wood, *Empire of Liberty: A History of the Early Republic, 1789-1815* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 471-73.

¹² Thomas Jefferson, *Notes on the State of Virginia with an Appendix*, 8th ed. (Boston: David Carlisle, 1801), 206.

approach to education brought together a number of motives. Like Jefferson, he believed that education promoted just laws and good government, but he also acknowledged that education was good for religion.¹³ Rush outlined a plan for Pennsylvania of one state university, four state colleges, an academy for every county, and a free school in every township. In the attached essay, “Thoughts upon the Mode of Education Proper in a Republic,” Rush explained how the changes in government wrought by the Revolution had altered the nature of education in the United States: “The form of government we have assumed has created a new class of duties to every American. It becomes us, therefore, to examine our former habits upon this subject, and in laying the foundation for nurseries of wise and good men, to adapt our modes of teaching to the peculiar form of our government.”¹⁴ Concerning religion and education, Rush had much to say. For him, more than for others, religion was central to education. His views reflect an understanding of education more agreeable to the religious leaders in America, and he had played an important role in recruiting John Witherspoon to come to New Jersey. This makes a good deal of sense, for Rush had been educated at the College of New Jersey, a Presbyterian school, before pursuing further studies in Scotland. Thus Rush believed that religion was necessary—absolutely necessary—for education in a republic. He wrote that “the only foundation for a useful education in a republic is to be laid in RELIGION. Without this, there can be no virtue, and without virtue there can be no liberty, and liberty

¹³ Benjamin Rush, *A Plan for the Establishment of Public Schools and the Diffusion of Knowledge in Pennsylvania; to Which are Added, Thoughts upon the Mode of Education, Proper in a Republic. Addressed to the Legislature and Citizens of the State* (Philadelphia, 1786), In *Essays on Education in the Early Republic*, ed. Frederick Rudolph (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University, 1965), 3-40.

¹⁴ Rush, 9.

is the object and life of all republican governments.”¹⁵ Almost any faith could work in this role, he said, for so important was religion in sustaining republican government that he would rather have the doctrines of Islam or Buddhism taught than to have no religion at all. It was, however, of Christianity that he spoke, for “A Christian cannot fail of being a republican A Christian, I say again, cannot fail of being a republican, for every precept of the Gospel inculcates those degrees of humility, self-denial, and brotherly kindness which are directly opposed to the pride of monarchy and the pageantry of a court.”¹⁶ Within the proposed schools, then, Rush said it mattered little as to which Christian denomination the school followed as long as they adopted one. Each child should be raised within the tenets of a particular sect, though according to the consciences of their parents: “Far be it from me to recommend the doctrines or modes of worship of any one denomination of Christians. I only recommend to the persons entrusted with the education of youth to inculcate upon them a strict conformity to that mode of worship which is most agreeable to their consciences or the inclinations of their parents.”¹⁷

Moreover, wrote Rush, the Bible should be taught in schools. It occupied a central place in his ideal republican education. In the educational thought of the late eighteenth century, the role of the Bible in schools was disputed. Some had previously written against the use of Bible in schools on the grounds that using the Bible as a school text trained children to treat the Holy Scriptures with irreverence.¹⁸ This would remain a

¹⁵ Rush, 10.

¹⁶ Rush, 11.

¹⁷ Rush, 12.

common argument for at least several decades (Noah Webster made a similar argument in 1790, and Samuel Knox made it at least as late as 1808), but Benjamin Rush denied their claim. He argued instead that their case against overfamiliarity with the Bible applied equally against the frequency of public worship—which is to say, frequent worship on Sabbath days did not diminish its importance, and neither would frequent readings of the Bible.¹⁹

If Benjamin Rush influenced American educational thought, so also did Noah Webster, and likely to a greater degree. Webster disagreed with Rush on the use of the Bible as a schoolbook, but he agreed with Rush in a much larger sense on the necessity of developing a system to educate American children. In the *American Magazine*, Webster promoted his ideas of a system of education for the United States which would teach young people the principles of liberty, virtue, and attachment to their country.²⁰ Moreover, Webster believed in the need to reform the American language to fit the character of the new nation, and thus his three volume *Grammatical Institute of the English Language* (which was composed of a speller, a grammar, and a reader, published in 1783, '84, and '85, respectively) set out to teach schoolchildren moral lessons as they

¹⁸ Such was the case, for example, in the article “Thoughts on Education” in the *New-Hampshire Gazette* from December 6, 1771, which stated that “A short history of the Bible would be a very proper book for a school, but the Bible itself is not calculated at all for that purpose; for the language, and the ideas it conveys are above the capacity of children to understand; and therefore, for the reasons above mentioned, not suitable to instruct them in art of reading.” It further argued that using the Bible in schools leads children to think of it as they do of other schoolbooks, and they treat the holy Scriptures “with careless indifference.”

¹⁹ Rush, 13.

²⁰ Wayne J. Urban and Jennings L. Wagoner, Jr, *American Education: A History*, 4th ed. (New York: Routledge, 2009), 90-91.

learned newer, American spellings of English words.²¹ In 1790, Webster laid out his goals for American education in an essay *On the Education of Youth in America*.²²

Noah Webster sought to reform a whole generation of American schoolchildren through education. He wrote that “The only practicable method to reform mankind is to begin with children, to banish, if possible, from their company every low-bred, drunken, immoral character. . . . The great art of correcting mankind, therefore, consists in prepossessing the mind with good principles.” He continued by stating that society thus required the careful education of children: “Education should therefore be the first care of a legislature, not merely the institution of schools but the furnishing of them with the best men for teachers.”²³ So it was that Webster proposed a system of schools for every small district of the country.

As Webster began his essay, he wrote that something new on education in America needed to be said because of the new conditions of the country. This was because

our national character is not yet formed; and it is an object of vast magnitude that systems of education should be adopted and pursued which may not only diffuse a knowledge of the sciences but may implant in the minds of the American youth the principles of virtue and of liberty and inspire them with just and liberal ideas of government and with an inviolable attachment to their own country.²⁴

²¹ Urban and Wagoner, 90. Webster’s famous dictionary, which aimed at accomplishing that same goal, would not be published until 1828

²² Noah Webster, *On the Education of Youth in America* (Boston, 1790) In *Essays on Education in the Early Republic*, ed. Frederick Rudolph (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University, 1965),41-77.

²³ Webster, 63-64.

²⁴ Webster, 45.

Echoing Franklin, Webster argued that Americans should use their short time in school to study what is most important, what is most useful to them in life. This meant less time on the ancient languages—not because they were bad or unfit for America, but because they belonged to the learned professions and not the common business of American life.²⁵

Instead, Webster, wrote, “There are some arts and sciences which are necessary for every man. Every man should be able to speak and write his native tongue with correctness, and have some knowledge of mathematics.”²⁶ The proper use of the Bible in schools, wrote Webster, was akin to that of dead languages. If the Bible properly understood taught doctrines and systems of religion, was it not wrong to use it as a schoolbook in teaching children to read? Use it for its correct purpose, he argued: “My wish is not to see the Bible excluded from schools but to see it used as a system of religion and morality.”²⁷

Webster set great stock in the ability of schools to promote morality. Indeed, the promotion of morality factored into the geographic location of a good college. Good schools belong in the country where the students would be kept far from the corrupting vices of city life. True, this might leave their manners unpolished, but such is necessary to preserve their morals. Manners may come later in life; youth is the time to learn morality and acquire knowledge.²⁸ Furthermore, the teachers in schools ought to be good examples of virtue and knowledge. This, he wrote, was even more important than that preachers be of good character:

The education of youth, an employment of more consequence than making laws and preaching the gospel, because it lays the foundation on which both law and

²⁵ Webster, 46-47.

²⁶ Webster, 55.

²⁷ Webster, 51.

²⁸ Webster, 53.

gospel rest for success, this education is sunk to a level with the most menial services. In most instances we find the higher seminaries of learning entrusted to men of good characters and possessed of the moral virtues of social affections. But many of our inferior schools, which, so far as the heart is concerned, are as important as colleges, are kept by men of no breeding, and many of them, by men infamous for the most detestable vices.²⁹

As an additional means of training the young in morality, Webster added two short catechisms to his spellers. The first, the “Federal Catechism,” was added in 1790 to promote understanding of the new US Constitution and attachment to the government of the United States. The second, “A Moral Catechism, or Lessons for Saturday,” promoted a generic Protestant morality and virtue that he believed was necessary for sustaining the republic. It was added to the speller in 1794.³⁰ Its first question, for example, asked “What is moral virtue?” The proper answer was, “It is an honest upright conduct in all our dealings with men.” Other questions asked where directions for moral behavior are to be found (Answer: In the Bible, mainly in the Sermon on the Mount) and of the nature of individual virtues and contrary vices.³¹

An essay by Robert Coram, a schoolmaster in Delaware and editor of the *Delaware Gazette*, represents a more extreme wing of republican educational thought. Coram’s *Political Inquiries* form a unique part of the Siobhan Moroney’s “canon” of republican educational theorists; he wrote extensively about the origins of government and civil society before presenting his thoughts on education. A more or less Rousseauian

²⁹ Webster, 59.

³⁰ Noah Webster, *The American Spelling Book*, c. 1800. Online: <http://www.merrycoz.org/books/spelling/SPELLER.HTM> . Accessed November 29, 2013.

³¹ Webster, *American Spelling Book*, 138-48.

understanding of government as a civil contract lay at the heart of his proposed system of education, for as he wrote:

If civil society therefore deprives a man of his natural means of subsistence, it should find him other means; otherwise civil society is not a contract, but a self-robbery. . . . Society should then furnish the people with means of subsistence, and those means should be an inherent quality in the nature of government, universal, permanent, and uniform, because their natural means were so. The means I allude to are the means of acquiring knowledge, as it is by the knowledge of some art or science that man is to provide for subsistence in civil society. . . . that is, the education of children should be provided for in the constitution of every state.³²

Thus, in a nutshell, the purpose of education was to supply persons with the means of subsistence which they surrendered when they entered into society, and the duty of providing education fell to the government. Though Coram praised Webster as “the only American author . . . who has taken up the subject of education upon that liberal and equitable scale which it justly deserves,” he disagreed about the role of religion in education.³³ A child’s schooling ought to prepare him for a trade and teach him his obligations to society. Religion has no part in that: “No modes of faith, systems of manners, or foreign or dead languages should be taught in those schools. As none of them are necessary to obtain a knowledge of the obligations of society, the government is not bound to instruct citizens in any thing of the kind.”³⁴

Simeon Doggett, however, spoke for a different current of republican thought. Doggett, a Unitarian minister and graduate of the Baptist-founded Rhode Island College,

³² Robert Coram, *Political Inquiries: to Which is Added, a Plan for the General Establishment of Schools Throughout the United States* (Wilmington, Delaware, 1791), in *Essays on Education in the Early Republic*, ed. Frederick Rudolph (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University, 1965), 113.

³³ Coram, 125.

³⁴ Coram, 141. Coram did acknowledge that religious motives may encourage education in some respects, but for him, the government of the United States was founded upon a secular basis that did not allow for education in doctrine within state-supported schools. Coram, 137.

became principal of Bristol Academy in New Bedford, Massachusetts, from 1796 to 1813. At the opening of the Academy, he delivered *A Discourse on Education* to explain the purpose and function of secondary schools.³⁵ He believed education was the key to reforming society and bringing greater civilization in America. The conclusion of his *Discourse* reveals his confidence in education's power to reform: "In short, it seems not too much to say that almost all the vices and evils of life may be traced back either to the want of an education or an erroneous one."³⁶ The implication, of course, was that a good education would correct and eliminate those vices and evils from civilized life.

Doggett was not an original thinker in matters of education. Much of what he said can be found in the writings of others at the time, and for that reason, it seems that much of what he had to say could be taken as representative, at least in representing a group of educated New England clergy. His particular importance, indeed, was his explanation of the relationship between religion and education—and perhaps in drawing those connections, he spoke for a larger number of Unitarian thinkers. Not surprisingly, as a clergyman, he disagreed with Robert Coram about the role of religion in schools. Indeed, Doggett opened his remarks in stating that a school was "an institution which, by the grace of God, we would sacredly consecrate to literature, virtue, and the true dignity of man." To this end, the two essential purposes of secondary education were "literature and morality: by the former to inform and direct the understanding; by the latter to meliorate the heart, to conform the affections, will, and conduct to the rules of rectitude or will of

³⁵ Simeon Doggett, *A Discourse on Education, Delivered at the Dedication and Opening of Bristol Academy, the 18th Day of July, A.D. 1796*, In *Essays on Education in the Early Republic*, ed. Frederick Rudolph (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University, 1965), 147-165.

³⁶ Doggett, 164.

our Maker and great Moral Governor.”³⁷ More or less in agreement with Noah Webster, he believed that education spoke directly to the morality of the pupils.

But as a Unitarian, Doggett’s explanation of the religious duties of school tended outside the traditional bounds of orthodox Christianity. The benefits of education, as he explained them, were immense. Education could lift men out of a state of degradation and into a happy state of civilization: “How infinitely different is the character of him whom a well-conducted education and due attention and the grace of God have brought upon the stage of action. . . . Freed from prejudice, his faith, founded on evidence, is firm as the everlasting mountains. Flowing from conviction, his morality is steady as the sun in his course.”³⁸ Doggett drew also the familiar connection between ignorance—the lack or absence of education—and tyrannical government as well as the natural alliance of literature and liberty.

Doggett drew a stronger, clearer connection between religion and education than previous republican educators had. He explained that “the continuation and propagation of [Christianity] in the world depends, under Providence, almost entirely on education. . . . Obvious it is then that education, and most probably clergy, are necessary to perpetuate the evidences of our holy religion and to interpret those ancient writings in which this religion is contained.”³⁹ Like many others, he observed that education should begin early

³⁷ Doggett, 149-150.

³⁸ Doggett, pp. 154-55. This comes almost on the heels of the statement that “And, what is more than all, that the human race might be raised to this invisible height of perfection, the blessed Emmanuel, the only Son and image of God, left his throne in heaven for a humble residence on earth, assumed humanity, and even died to disembarass us from those depravities which might sully our glory.” P. 153. Apparently the Son of God died to disembarass mankind of its depravities. This is why I suggest that Doggett’s remarks transverse the bounds of orthodoxy.

³⁹ Doggett, 157.

life, and that mothers, those who tend to their infant and young children most closely, consequently deserve a good education. “Has the mother been well-educated, is the tender parent a good preceptress, the fortunate child is at the best school in the universe while in its mother’s lap.”⁴⁰ This was the idea of republican motherhood, explored later.⁴¹ Doggett emphasized the abilities and importance of women to reform society to an extreme, however, in arguing that women could force men to refine their behavior in order to win a lady’s favor. He wrote, “Permit me, then, ladies, to say, on you it very much rests to fix the boundaries of human improvement. The Creator hath put it in your power to reform the world.”⁴²

Indeed, another popular idea at this time was that of republican motherhood (though it was not termed such until much later). Though most of these republican theorists of education were primarily concerned with the education of the men who would be citizens and leaders of the republic, some, such as Benjamin Rush, gave their attention to the education of women. The basic idea was for young women to be educated well enough to promote the republican values and beliefs so that, later in life as mothers, they could tutor their young children in republicanism at an early and impressionable age. As Rush wrote, “Besides, the *first* impressions upon the minds of children are generally derived from the women. Of how much consequence, therefore, is it in a republic that

⁴⁰ Doggett, 158.

⁴¹ For more on republican motherhood, see Jacqueline S. Reinier, “Rearing the Republican Child: Attitudes and Practices in Post-Revolutionary Philadelphia.” *William and Mary Quarterly*, Third Series, 39, no. 1, The Family in Early American History and Culture (Jan., 1982): 150-163.

⁴² Doggett, 159.

they should think justly upon the great subjects of liberty and government!”⁴³ To do this would require better education and educational opportunities for young women.⁴⁴

In 1795, while the passion for reforming education was at its height, the American Philosophical Society (APS) sponsored an essay contest on the topic of education. They asked writers to “Write an essay on a system of liberal education, and literary instruction, adapted to the genius of the government, and best calculated to promote the general welfare of the United States, comprehending, also, a plan for instituting and conducting public schools in this country on principles of the most extensive utility.”⁴⁵ While only seven total contestants wrote in to the competition, the contest was not decided until late in 1797—after the deadline to submit essays had been extended significantly.⁴⁶ The two co-winners of the contest were Samuel Harrison Smith and Samuel Knox.

Samuel Harrison Smith, a 1787 graduate of the University of Pennsylvania, was a journalist and a Jeffersonian. In 1796, he began editing a newspaper in Philadelphia called the *National Intelligencer*, which later became an official publisher for the Jefferson administration. He also co-won the APS essay contest in 1797, and that essay, *Remarks on Education: Illustrating the Close Connection Between Virtue and Wisdom*.

⁴³ Rush, 22.

⁴⁴ See Linda K. Kerber, “The Republican Mother: Women and the Enlightenment—An American Perspective,” in *Toward an Intellectual History of Women: Essays by Linda K. Kerber*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 41-62. See also Margaret A. Nash, *Women’s Education in the United States, 1780-1840* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005).

⁴⁵ Benjamin Justice, “The Great Contest: The American Philosophical Society Education Prize of 1795 and the Problem of American Education.” *American Journal of Education* 114, no. 2 (February 2008): 191-213.

⁴⁶ Justice asks some critically important questions about the nature of the contest and the question that it posed to contestants. He points out that the contest itself, as much as the responses it received, reflected the beliefs of the APS at the time, “and it revealed a naïve optimism that one single or ‘best’ system could serve the nation as a whole, helping to unify the vast and diverse United States.” Justice, 195.

To Which Is Annexed a System of Liberal Education, was published in Philadelphia in 1798.⁴⁷

Smith upheld the understanding that virtue was necessary to the support of the American republic. These were the theoretical underpinnings of his system of education. He wrote that “The two great objects of a correct education are to make men virtuous and wise.” Since virtue was not instinctive, a necessary function of education was to teach men virtue. In this, Smith was more or less balanced—education would not entirely reform either man or society, but it could do great good in both regards. He explained:

Nature is neither so liberal nor education so omnipotent as the rival systems affirm; that man is indebted to both; that certain passions are born with him which he cannot exterminate but may control; that a varied capacity is imparted to him which by education he can weaken or improve; but that still the traces of nature are visible in his thoughts and actions; and that her voice never ceases to be heard amidst all the refinements of art.⁴⁸

Like many others at this time, Smith drew the connection between virtue and knowledge further. Disseminating knowledge and creating some virtue in people were related tasks because, in part, “the duties of men are precisely co-extensive with their knowledge.”⁴⁹ The knowledge of a duty which they ought to perform creates an obligation then to perform it. And, of course, virtuous living leads to, or at least contributes to, a happy life. Thus there was for Smith a natural connection of knowledge to happiness, and “That man seems, on the whole, to be the most happy, who, possessed of a large stock of ideas, is in

⁴⁷ Samuel Harrison Smith, *Remarks on Education; Illustrating the Close Connection Between Virtue and Wisdom. To Which is Annexed a System of Liberal Education*. In *Essays on Education in the Early Republic*, ed. Frederick Rudolph (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University, 1965), 167-203.

⁴⁸ Smith, 170-173.

⁴⁹ Smith, 178.

the constant habit of increasing them and whom every hour of his existence renders more informed.”⁵⁰

These ideas, wrote Smith, were especially relevant in the United States. He explained the several reasons that “The diffusion of knowledge, co-extensive with that of virtue, would seem to apply with close precision to a republican system of education;” those reasons being the following:

1. An enlightened nation is always most tenacious of its rights.
2. It is not in the interest of such a society to perpetuate error, as it undoubtedly is the interest of many societies differently organized.
3. In a republic the sources of happiness are open to all without injuring any.
4. If happiness be made at all to depend on the improvement of the mind and the collision of mind with mind, the happiness of an individual will greatly depend upon the general diffusion of knowledge and a capacity to think and speak correctly.
5. Under a republic, duly constructed, man feels as strong a bias to improvement as under a despotism he feels an impulse to ignorance and depression.⁵¹

In short, everyone needs to be educated, but a latitude should be allowed to each person according to their capacities and temperament for learning. The subjects of their studies should be useful, true, and helpful to them in their future professions. Education should be conducted publicly (meaning academies and in schools, not privately in individual homes) in order to prevent parents from leading their children into error. Smith also argued for the greater economy of educating children together in groups. He proposed a multi-tiered system of education, similar to that proposed by Jefferson or Rush, with a national university at the top of the system. The promise of his plan, were it followed closely, he explained, would be to render citizens enlightened and free, to preserve safely

⁵⁰ Smith, 181-84.

⁵¹ Smith, 188-89.

the political principles of the United States, and to make the country a model for the nations of the world to emulate.⁵²

The other serious contender for and consequent co-winner of the APS prize money was Samuel Knox. Knox was born in Ireland in 1756 and educated at the University of Glasgow, but he immigrated to the United States in 1795 and settled in Maryland. A clergyman—Presbyterian—and an educator, he became the principal of an academy in Frederick, Maryland. His winning essay on education was published in Philadelphia in 1799.⁵³ As a plan for the systematic education of the youth in America, Knox's essay best explained at each level of education what the schoolmasters ought to teach and what the curriculum ought to be. It was undoubtedly the most comprehensive plan of liberal education envisioned for the young republic.

Knox's introductory address to his critics in Maryland laid out the rationale for his plan. He explained that "In proportion, then, as our government is superior in its nature and constitution, in its principles and practice" to those governments which kept their peoples in tyranny and ignorance, so also that government should strive to support the "most general means of diffusing and promoting knowledge." His particular concern was the lack of good schools in Maryland. His own state suffered too much from the spirit of sectarianism in education, but "It should, however, become a free and enlightened people as much as possible to separate the pursuits of science and literary

⁵² Smith, 190-222.

⁵³ See Rudolph, 271. Samuel Knox, *An Essay on the Best System of Liberal Education, Adapted to the Genius of the Government of the United States. Comprehending also, an Uniform General Plan for Instituting and Conducting Public Schools, in This Country, on Principles of the Most Extensive Utility. To Which is Prefixed, an Address to the Legislature of Maryland on That Subject*, in *Essays on Education in the Early Republic*, ed. Frederick Rudolph (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University, 1965), 271-372.

knowledge from that narrow restriction and contracted influence of peculiar religious opinions or ecclesiastical policies, by which they have been too long and too generally obstructed.”⁵⁴ Thus he envisioned a system of schools which preserved a freedom of conscience in accordance with the US Constitution 1787.

Before laying out for his readers in the text of the actual *Essay* what a comprehensive system of liberal education for the United States should look like, Knox defined what he meant by education: “Education is the training up of the human mind by the acquisition of sciences calculated to extend its knowledge and promote its improvement.” The human mind was designed for improvement, and therefore, “It is then the design of a liberal course of education to call forth all the latent powers of the human mind, to give exertion to natural genius, to direct the powers of taste and criticism, and to refine and polish, as well as to exercise, strengthen, and direct the whole economy of the mental system.”⁵⁵ Indeed, Knox explained that patriotic sentiments—a “just sense” of the nation’s “own dignity and importance”—directed them toward the establishment of a system of education.

The system Knox proposed was that familiar idea of a multi-tiered system of schools, but he outlined it in far greater detail than previous writers had. This system consisted of local schools for the youngest children, county academies for those who excelled at the early level, state colleges for those who excelled at the county level, and a national university for the best and brightest of the state colleges. Public grammar schools—local parish schools, he called them—would educate almost all (free, white,

⁵⁴ Knox, 273-279.

⁵⁵ Knox, 298-300.

male) children in the proper reading, writing, and speaking of the English language. They would also teach pupils practical mathematics, some history, and some geography. Their schoolbooks and curriculum, in order to have a truly beneficial influence on the whole nation, would necessarily be uniform from school to school.⁵⁶ The ideal schoolmaster would be a married man of good morals to teach the young boys (“it should almost be indispensable that the headmaster of every school be a married man”); his wife could then instruct the girls of the school in their studies.⁵⁷

At the level of county academies, Knox proposed the students begin their studies of Latin and Greek while they also continue their studies of mathematics. Also at this stage, students could for recreation pursue valuable practical exercises in swimming and “the manual military exercise with all the marchings and maneuvers in the practice of that art.”⁵⁸ At the state colleges, students would continue their learning of Greek and Latin, some French, and practical mathematics. They would study surveying, navigation, and “gunnery,” and they would also cover rhetoric, logic, and moral philosophy. Natural philosophy belonged at the end of their studies.⁵⁹ At the highest level, the national university, scholars would focus on all subjects, but especially on the “useful sciences.” Students there would not study divinity and consequently would not take divinity degrees; they would earn either Master of Arts or Doctor of Physics or Laws degrees instead.⁶⁰

⁵⁶ Knox, 318-330.

⁵⁷ Knox, 327.

⁵⁸ Knox, 340-49.

⁵⁹ Knox, 351-55.

⁶⁰ Knox, 357-366.

This last point raises Knox’s account of the role of religion in the system of education. Though he celebrated the constitutional protection of the right of conscience, Knox repeatedly advocated for moral instruction in schools. Indeed, this often included the study of theology: “their theological studies should be conducted in such a manner and in such a situation as would best furnish them only with examples and habits of real virtue and piety.”⁶¹ Elsewhere he explained the need at the primary level for young students to learn morality and the principles of religion. It would be no infringement of the right to free conscience for students to begin and end their days with prayers, and it would “highly advantageous to youth, and in no respect interfere with the different religious sentiments of the community, to make use of a well-digested moral catechism.”⁶² Such would include natural theology—proofs of God’s existence from nature—with a study of ethics, nature, and virtue and vice. At the highest level of the system, students of the national university ought to attend Sabbath day services provided by the university. Two chaplains of different denominations, prepared in schools of divinity separate from the university, would conduct services.⁶³

All of this reveals much about republican educational thought in the young American republic. For one, it shows the widespread acceptance of a basic theory of education in a republic. From Jefferson’s articulation of the importance of education in young Virginia to the national plans proposed by Smith and Knox, republican theorists were in fundamental agreement about the necessity of education to preserve the liberty of

⁶¹ Knox, 316.

⁶² Knox, 332.

⁶³ Knox, 365.

the youthful United States. The vigor and widespread acceptance of this theory is shown by pronouncements such as George Washington's "Farewell Address" in 1796, in which he instructed his fellow citizens to "Promote then as an object of primary importance, Institutions for the general diffusion of knowledge. In proportion as the structure of a government gives force to public opinion, it is essential that public opinion should be enlightened."⁶⁴ The lasting force of this idea eventually gave impetus to the later school reformers, such as Mann.

Likewise, these republican theorists of education show the importance of religion to education. Some (such as Coram) revealed it through their repudiation of religion's place in education; others (such as Webster or Knox) through their careful acceptance of a general morality; and still others (such as Rush) by a hearty embrace of religion in education. Regardless of their particular ideas about the relation between religion and public education, their many essays about it makes clear its importance to their conception of republican schooling.

Additionally, these educational proposals reveal a widespread desire for a uniform system of education. While many refer to statewide plans—such as proposed by Jefferson and Rush—others envisioned uniform systems of education for the entire nation. This, after all, was the question at the heart of the APS essay contest of 1795. But it failed to come into existence in any meaningful way, even at a state level, for decades. Related to the goal of a systematic education for US citizens was the hope held out by many to establish a national university. While much talked about and hoped for by leading politicians and educators, it never came to be. The closest achievement was that of

⁶⁴ George Washington. "Farewell Address," (1796), in *The American Republic: Primary Sources*, ed. Bruce Frohnen (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 2002), 76-77.

establishing several new state universities, such as the University of Georgia in 1785 or, some years later, Jefferson's much-longed for University of Virginia.

Lastly, there seemed to be a conflation of religion and morality and virtue among these writers. One person talked of schools promoting religion; others wrote of promoting virtue; and others spoke of promoting morality, which seemed to include both. Clearly, they did not all mean the same thing. George Marsden explained this in *The Soul of the American University* as having to do with the replacement of moral philosophy over theology as the queen of the sciences.⁶⁵ This new, Enlightenment idea of being able to reason to a universally-applicable morality was among the highest goals of academic thought, and it allowed for the pious and impious both to pursue a mutually agreeable idea of virtue and morality without disagreeing about religion. Yet the role of religion in moral philosophy was not always clear, and we turn to views of virtue and morality in the next chapter.

⁶⁵ George Marsden writes of colonial education in the 18th century that the study of nature became influential, but "the more immediately revolutionary force was the introduction of a new concept of moral philosophy." He elaborates the dominant role of moral philosophy in American colleges at length in "Chapter Two: The New Queen of the Sciences and the New Republic," 48-67.

CHAPTER FIVE

Religion and Republican Virtue in Educational Thought in the Early Republic, 1800-1819

By the year 1800, how much had changed in American education? What ultimately resulted from the events of the Great Awakening, the establishment of religiously-oriented colonial colleges, the American Revolution, and all the republican educational theorizing? This time period, the early years after the turn of the century, is among the most-neglected fields in the history of education, for it falls between the American Founding and the development of public schools. Perhaps it has largely been ignored because they developed seemingly few innovations in educational thought.¹

The traditional purpose of education was of course to promote piety. As has been amply illustrated, this was especially so in a North American context where almost all of the colonial colleges were founded to train pastors and teach orthodox Christian doctrines. The charter for the College of William and Mary, for example, stated that it was founded “to the end that the Church of Virginia may be furnished with a Seminary of Ministers of the Gospel, and that the Youth may be piously educated in good Letters and Manners, and that the Christian Faith may be propagated amongst the Western Indians, to the Glory of Almighty God.”² This continued to be the case many years later in schools

¹ See for example the complete absence of this time period in Wayne J. Urban and Jennings L. Wagoner, Jr. *American Education: A History*, 4th ed. (New York: Routledge, 2009).

² “Charter of the College of William and Mary” (1693), in *Education in the United States: A Documentary History*, Vol. 1, ed. Sol Cohen (New York: Random House, 1974): 645-47.

founded immediately prior to the Revolution, as for example in the charter of Dartmouth College.³

But ideas about education did not remain static across the eighteenth century, and new theories of government and politics as well as changing conditions in society brought about novel ideas and applications of educational thought. Benjamin Franklin and Thomas Jefferson led the way for this in North America. Leading thinkers were asking, how could the ideas that inspired the Revolution be applied to an independent, New World context? How could the truths of the Declaration of Independence and the freedoms of the Constitutions better be spread, applied, enjoyed, and protected? A republican government demanded that its citizens be both virtuous and enlightened, or so it was believed.

Gordon S. Wood provides probably the best and clearest brief exposition of republican educational thoughts in his study of the era in *Empire of Liberty*. Americans of the 1780s and 1790s believed that “[i]f Americans were to sustain their republican experiment and remain a free and independent people, they must be taught not just their rights but also their duties as citizens. They must be educated in their moral obligations to the community.” These republican educational theorists believed that “[i]n a republic that depended on the intelligence and virtue of all citizens, the diffusion of knowledge had to be widespread.” Thus did Jefferson, along with such others as Benjamin Rush, Samuel Harrison Smith, Samuel Knox, and Noah Webster begin writing in favor of comprehensive educational reforms that would enable Americans to live fruitfully as

³ “Charter of Dartmouth College,” (1769), in *Education in the United States: A Documentary History* Vol. 2, ed. Sol Cohen (New York: Random Houses, 1974): 707-709.

citizens in a republic. As Wood notes, however, “few of these elaborate educational plans came to fruition.”⁴

Thus in the year 1800 and following, the two main currents of American educational thought, religion and republican virtue, continued in a mixed form. The traditional purpose of schools—to inculcate piety—remained generally at the center of educational endeavors, though many others continued seeking to apply republican reforms. This chapter argues for continued efforts to synthesize both purposes in the years from 1800 to 1819. The republican theories sought knowledge and virtue for the sake of sustaining the republican experiment in self-government; traditional theories of education sought to teach children to be pious in preparation for this life and the next. A survey of the sources on educational thought between 1800 and 1819 indicates this double purpose most clearly. George Marsden has explained this synthesis by focusing on the growing importance and influence of moral philosophy, and I add, however, that a large part of the popular success of moral philosophy was due to the conflation of the terms “religion,” “virtue,” and “morality.” The generally Protestant world of early America embraced each without carefully considering what pastors, politicians, or public writers meant by those terms. Rather than seeing a potential for conflict between Protestant religion and republican morality, for example, they embraced both as being essentially the same. Thus the educational theories of the early republic were held together by a consensus on the broad meaning of both religion and virtue. For the

⁴ Gordon S. Wood, *Empire of Liberty: A History of the Early Republic, 1789-1815* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 471-73. Daniel Walker Howe helps explain why their educational proposals failed to produce significant results in his article “Church, State, and Education in the Young American Republic,” *Journal of the Early Republic* 22, no. 1 (Spring 2002): 1-24.

purposes of education, in a world that broadly accepted Protestantism, they were often believed to be mutually reinforcing and even synonymous.

In the year 1800 for example, a pastor named John Willard preached a sermon in Connecticut entitled “The Pious Education of Children—the Great Duty of Parents.”⁵ Such sermons were common in this era, as they had been in previous centuries, but Willard’s language revealed the combination of new currents of thought in his understanding of the religious purposes of education. His text was Deuteronomy 6:6-7—the injunction to the Hebrews to teach their children the law of God—and he enjoined parents to apply this to their own lives. The duty of the law was the worship of God according to His commandments. Willard summarized his primary point to say “That it is the duty of parents to be diligent, and in serious earnest, in giving their children a virtuous and religious education, ‘that it may be well with them,’ for time and eternity.”⁶ A *virtuous* and *religious* education—the two went together naturally. He later explained both of these. A religious education meant teaching them the traditional tenets of evangelical Christianity; a virtuous education required that children be taught “to observe visible christian morality, as enjoined in the holy Scriptures.” These virtues include modesty, habits of industry, sincerity, justice, honesty, charity, pity, tenderness, sobriety, and temperance.

Willard also described the means of instructing children. First of all, parents should live as good examples of virtue and religion and should limit the company their children keep only to other examples of good behavior. Furthermore, the motive to

⁵ John Willard, “The Pious Education of Children—the Great Duty of Parents,” (July 27, 1800).

⁶ Willard, 4.

discharge this duty faithfully stemmed from desires for happiness in this life—not only to the duty owed God, but the earthly benefits of raising virtuous children. In this Willard showed a concern for the United States, for he wrote:

Be persuaded religiously to educate your children, seeing the public welfare depends so much upon it. Children, in great measure, compose families, and families constitute communities and nations. Would we therefore find or promote, those virtues that exalt a nation, we must look for them in families . . . we must cultivate them in our children --- we must cherish them in our schools.⁷

Clearly for Willard, religious education combined with virtuous education for the good of individual persons and society. His concern shifted in this section from the religious purpose of education to the political benefits of a religious education, saying that “As families in general, are either virtuous or vicious; so will be the character of the bodies politic. We may therefore with propriety ask, whether those who neglect this important duty, can be the friends of virtue, piety, or their country?”⁸ He added:

In this view of the case, parents should remember that they educate their children for the public; and that as they proceed from them, having either good or bad habits and principles; so they will prove, either blessings, or a nuisance to the community. For these reasons, parents cannot in any method be more beneficial to the public, than by giving their children a religious education.⁹

To John Willard in the year 1800, the duty to educate children sprang equally from arguments for promoting Christianity and the public welfare. More clearly perhaps than most, Willard articulated a vision of education that brought together religious and republican motives.

⁷ Willard, 18.

⁸ Willard, 19

⁹ Willard, 19.

A similar story can be told through the example of David Bailie Warden, a pastor with the Reformed Dutch Protestant Church who preached in New York a “Sermon on the Advantages of Education” in 1802. His text was the familiar verse from Proverbs 22:6, “Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it.” This sermon, like Willard’s, illustrated the dual-purpose of education for piety and virtue. While the first part of the sermon is largely traditional and familiar—restraining the passions, the importance of starting education while the child is young, the general importance of education—Warden touched on several interesting topics. One of these is his contention that men and women have equally rational minds, for the mental difference between them is only in their education. Moreover, when speaking about the benefits of education to a person in this life, Warden noted that “to see a son or a daughter, a pattern of virtue, an ornament to society, is a happiness which is only surpassed by the joys of Heaven.”¹⁰ Warden later addressed the subject of “the advantages of education with regard to society.” Here he opens with references to ancient and classical history, when it was “settled opinion, that nothing but education can teach men to be fit actors on the stage of life.” Drawing on the examples of the Spartans, other Greeks, and Romans, and then upon the words of George Washington, Warden said that “it is the opinion of all wise men that a nation to become virtuous must be enlightened.”¹¹ Warden took his argument no further, however, than to say that the value of education to

¹⁰ David Bailie Warden, “A Sermon on the Advantages of Education Preached in the Reformed Dutch Protestant Church,” (Kingston, NY: 1802), 10.

¹¹ Warden, 15.

society is mainly in advancing science and in bringing people out from under the yoke of their passions and prejudices.

Yet again, another example of the continued blending of piety and republican virtue in educational thought—even if largely emphasizing piety—was in David Barnes’s “Discourse on Education.” Though first given in England in 1796, its republication in Boston in 1803 merits attention here. Barnes was a preacher, and his text was also Proverbs 22:6. Rephrasing the language of the verse, he raised the question, “Which way should a child go?” Then, laying out the goals of his sermon, he stated that “We shall then turn our attention to morality, religion and piety; and recommend them as absolutely necessary to the usefulness and felicity of life.”¹² Barnes began with the importance of teaching children rudimentary skills of reading, arithmetic (which he says are important to both males and females), geography, and other studies, and he noted the growth of new schools in America as a good thing for the republic. Changing gears, Barnes examined the importance of education to develop good morals: “Not only the minds, but the morals of youth demand the most diligent attention.” While learning is good, a learned man without good morals “is considered as a dangerous monster, that ought to be hunted out of society.”¹³ And from where does morality originate? Barnes wrote, “while I recommend Christian morality, I do not mean that it should supersede the necessity of piety and religion. Far from it, I am ready to affirm, that all sound morality is founded on the belief of the Deity. Without piety, morality would degenerate into art, craft, and

¹² David Barnes, “A Discourse on Education,” (Boston: 1803), 5.

¹³ Barnes, 12.

cunning.”¹⁴ On the broader level of the whole society, Barnes believed religion was a necessary support to the nation—and not just religion, but Christianity. He writes, “Since mankind will have a religion of some kind or other, and Christianity is the only one that will stand the test of a free and critical examination, and since the more it has hitherto been tried, the better it appears, we have every reason to think it will finally prevail. We therefore can be under no concern about teaching our children to believe and practice it.”¹⁵ Barnes underscored several times the immense importance of teaching children to read good books, especially the Bible. Though not a clearly articulated synthesis of piety and republican virtue, Barnes reveals a rhetorical shift toward thinking of education in its value to the public.¹⁶

Others, however, were still inclined more to emphasize the centrality of religion to educational activities. This was especially true for the education of women during this time period, and such was the case in explaining the popularity of Hannah More’s book on female education.¹⁷ In 1801, her book *Strictures on the Modern System of Female Education* was published in Hartford. Though British in origin—first published in London in 1799—it was republished several times in the United States. Indeed, already by 1802 a third American edition was released, and it was reprinted several more times in

¹⁴ Barnes, 14.

¹⁵ Barnes, 17.

¹⁷ Hannah More (1745-1833) was a well-known British evangelical Christian who wrote on moral reform and religious subjects. As a philanthropist, she helped begin several schools during her lifetime. Among her many biographies, see Patricia Demers, *The World of Hannah More* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1996), or Charles Howard Ford, *Hannah More: A Critical Biography* (New York: Peter Lang, 1996), or Anne Stott, *Hannah More: The First Victorian* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

the next decade in America.¹⁸ As the “Extract from the British Critic” explained, the focus of the book was religious, “The first principle inculcated in these Strictures is the necessity of making religion the foundation of every mode of education; a principle which none but the philosophers of the French school will presume to controvert.”¹⁹ More’s subject was female education, and of the twenty chapters in the book, fully one third of them concern religious education—on prayer, “Leading Doctrines of Christianity,” and “On the Religious and Moral Use of History and Geography.” Though More was a British writer, her popularity in the United States can probably be explained in part due to the compatibility of her ideas with those of the idea of Republican Motherhood. As explained in a previous chapter, there was current during this era a belief that women deserved a better education in order to teach republican beliefs to their children.

Elizabeth Hamilton was another British writer whose works were published in the United States.²⁰ Her *Letters on the Elementary Principles of Education* were first printed in two volumes in Alexandria based on their second London edition. Hamilton explained that she was writing for women, mostly for mothers, who did not have time to read everything that has been written on the topic of education, and she wrote that the society

¹⁸ At least one more edition was printed in 1809.

¹⁹ [British Critic?], in Hannah More, *Strictures on the Modern System of Female Education, With A View to the Principles and Conduct Among Women of Rank and Fortune*, 2 Volumes, 3rd edition (Hartford: 1801), 2.

²⁰ Elizabeth Hamilton, like Hannah More, was a British writer in the latter half of the eighteenth century and early part of the 19th century. Her other works include “Letters on Education” (1801), “Essays on the Human Mind” (1796), and “Hints addressed to the Patrons and Directors of Schools” (1815). See “Elizabeth Hamilton.” From *The Literary Encyclopedia*. Online: <http://www.litencyc.com/php/speople.php?rec=true&UID=1957>. Accessed 3 February 2014.

with the wisest and most virtuous people was the happiest. The well-being of society is connected closely with the state of its education, for as she wrote, “that the wisdom and virtue of individuals will be in a great measure in proportion to the pains bestowed on their education, is equally evident; wherever, therefore, education becomes an object of universal interest and attention, we may safely pronounce society to be in a state of progressive improvement.”²¹ As with Barnes, her thought on education, as well as its continued popularity, indicate at least some attention to the society-wide benefits of good education.

Female writers were not the only educators to think primarily in traditionally religious terms. Thomas Worcester, another New England pastor, preached two sermons in 1804 on the religious education of children, and Worcester ultimately made a more religiously-focused case for the education of children. His focus was almost exclusively on education in the doctrines and practices of Christianity, and his concerns for public welfare were almost nonexistent. But in his second sermon, he made some mention of the immediate practical benefits of a religious education to this life. His first sermon took for its text the first part of Ephesians 6:4 and what this meant for raising children.²² In sum, he said that it meant for fathers not to require unreasonable things of children, not to blame them unjustly, punish them hastily or angrily, to be discouraging, or to deny their reasonable desires, at least not arbitrarily, because provoking them to wrath undermines

²¹ Elizabeth Hamilton. *Letters on the Elementary Principles of Education*, 2 volumes (Alexandria: 1803). As with Hannah More’s books, Elizabeth Hamilton’s works would go on to be printed multiple times in the United States.

²² Ephesians 6:4, which says, “And, ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.” (King James Version)

parental authority, increases their evil propensities, hinders serious instruction.²³

Worcester's second sermon, based on the second half of Ephesians 6:4, explored the meaning of bringing children "up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord." This concerned their religious education; it means for parents that "As soon as your children are capable of learning, begin to teach them the first principles of religion." Children should be taught in words and concepts that they can comprehend about the doctrines of Christianity, and they should also be taught to learn from good books. Worcester wrote:

Be careful to assist them in useful books. Not only learn them to read, but take pains that they may love books and read understandingly. Provide for them books suited to their years and capacities Take care however to prevent their reading any thing calculated to corrupt their minds, inflame their passions, or deprave their morals. Get no such books for them, nor allow them to read or hear any such.²⁴

Worcester further acknowledged the great benefits of a religious education to this life on earth; he believed one of the purposes of education was to prepare young people for the world and the dangers of life. Moreover, a religious education suits them advantageously for life: "Think again for what distinguished, for what extensive usefulness many have been prepared, by a religious education."²⁵ Nowhere, however, did he contend for an education to suit young people for life in a republican society.

Outside the realm of Christianity and education, the combination of education with religion and public virtues was visible even in Jewish communities. Several documents concerning Jewish religious education reveal the interaction between Jewish

²³ Thomas Worcester, "Two Sermons on the Government and Religious Education of Children," (Concord: 1804), 1-15.

²⁴ Worcester, 19.

²⁵ Worcester, 28. Worcester would later write a catechism, "A Scripture Catechism to Aid the Religious Instruction of Children," published in 1812.

religious education and the new republic as well. In 1804, the board of trustees of the Shearith Israel congregation wrote a statement, “On the Purpose of Jewish Education.” They made it clear that religion remained at the center of Jewish education even while emphasizing the importance of virtue: “In order to make your Children truly Virtuous, You must rear them in the strict principles of our Holy religion, and this cannot be efficiently done without them understanding what they are saying when addressing the deity.”²⁶ As with Christianity, virtue was understood to derive from holy religion. The statement continued to say that education is extremely important for this life, for it is “the first thing which ought to be pursued in life, in order to constitute us as rational.”²⁷ A letter from a Jewish student at Harvard in 1815, however, showed that for Jewish students, the increasing religious tolerance at some colleges and universities made them more appealing. Nathan Nathans wrote that he initially perceived some trouble for himself at Harvard: “I think there will be some difficulty about my religion at Cambridge, as I understand they are very strict; I think that it will be much better for me, to be prepared for the University at Philada [Philadelphia] as it will be much more agreeable to myself & family.”²⁸ His tutor, Samuel Howe, reported several months later, however, that Nathans’s concerns had been unfounded. An accommodation to his religious practices had been made, and everyone’s morals were improving. He wrote:

I had feared lest there might be some difficulty on account of the peculiarities of his religious sentiment, & the regulations of my School relative to the observance

²⁶ “Board of Trustees of Shearith Israel Congregation on the Purpose of Jewish Education,” (1804), in *Education in the United States: A Documentary History*, Vol. 2, ed. Sol Cohen (New York: Random House, 1974), 1182.

²⁷ “Board of Trustees,” 1182.

²⁸ Nathan Nathans, “Letter to His Guardian,” (May 21, 1815), in *Education in the United States: A Documentary History* Vol. 2, ed. Sol Cohen (New York: Random House, 1974), 1183.

of the Christian Sabbath; but I am happy to say there is none. He is permitted to the observance of his own Sabbath; & of his own accord, without any requisition from me he has regularly [sic] attended with the other young gentlemen under my care at the Church in which I preach, on our Sabbath. The moral & religious instruction which the young gentlemen who are with me receive on the Sabbath has a very beneficial influence on their conduct & their attention to their studies thro the week . . .²⁹

Religious toleration and good morals were the important thing. Observing the Sabbath day and inculcating true Christian piety, while not ignored, had become secondary to the importance of good behavior in conduct and study.

That was in 1815 at Harvard. In 1805, at least for much of New England, education remained focused on religious instruction—in Christianity—and on its benefits to a republican society. An “Essay on the Subject of Education” published in Litchfield County, Connecticut, reiterated the point that education was extremely important for young children, and that parents and pastors need to do more to instruct their children in religious knowledge. According to the authors (the “Essay” was written by a committee), education was made necessary by the Fall, by which “man has been doomed to a state of discipline, and necessarily made for restraints, not for indulgence and licentiousness.” This in turn required that “the subjugation of the passions, the government of the temper, the direction of the affections, and the cultivation of the faculties, must be early attended to by parents, and instructors, as a duty of the first importance.”³⁰ Religious education would serve to restrain man’s wickedness. Instruction in religion taught a person self-restraint from the immoral passions which would keep them from their duties and undo

²⁹ Samuel B. Howe, “Letter to William Meredith Esqr,” (December 14, 1815), in *Education in the United States: A Documentary History*, Vol. 2, ed. Sol Cohen (New York: Random House, 1974), 1183.

³⁰ “Essay on the Subject of Education, Together with a Few Propositions of a Practical Nature to be Adopted by our Respective Churches, for the Purpose of Promoting Moral and Religious Knowledge Among the Rising Generation,” (1805), 4.

their happiness: “The restraints that a good Education imposes on the mind, have a powerful tendency to guide us in the paths of duty.”³¹ Therefore children should be taught early in life through sound discipline. They should be checked in their impulsive behavior, and “in order to attach the young mind to virtuous pursuits, the road to virtue must be strewn with flowers; and, on the other hand, the path of vice must be made dark and unpleasant; which in fact, represents both in their true colours.”³²

This essay then unpacked the practical implications of these ideas. First, based on the proposition that “habits are every thing in an education,” parents and instructors ought to encourage children to develop good habits. Reason alone will not make a person virtuous or moral, nor will a religious education alone, but “they will, in their operation, be powerful incentives to render a person modest, prudent, and moral in society.”³³ The corresponding religious duty was for parents to encourage regular religious practices, and like the idea of republican motherhood, mothers must themselves be well-instructed in religious knowledge that they may teach their children well. Regarding the republic, this essay naturally took notice of the changed society in America. In a pretty clear synthesis of the two great motives to education, the authors wrote thus:

In the present eventful period in the history of the world, and more especially in that of our own country, too much care and pains cannot be taken to promote the cause of virtue, to interest the affections of the youths, our rising hopes, on the side of order; for the labor of the licentious has been employed to introduce false principles, adapted to corrupted inclinations and profligate habits; and by falsehood, boldness, ridicule and Blasphemy, it has been exerted to sweep away

³¹ “Essay on the Subject of Education,” 5.

³² “Essay on the Subject of Education,” 10.

³³ “Essay on the Subject of Education,” 12-13.

the bounds set by the Almighty, to the passions, the appetites, and the lusts of men.³⁴

Among the religious duties of which parents ought to instruct their children, first comes due obedience to parents—the Fifth Commandment. Having established that, the authors move to the importance of remembering the Sabbath day to keep it holy—the Fourth Commandment. Children should be taught to like and appreciate the Sabbath day. As they moved toward their conclusion, the authors of this essay asked whether anything can be done to reform society and promote morality. The rising generation, they believed, would be most of them corrupt; they would be Sabbath-breakers and would forget the Bible. The solution was to catechize children in religious knowledge and to have good teachers for them who would believe in the Bible, have good morals themselves, and would practice principles worthy of imitation.³⁵

Perhaps the greatest synthesizer of these two purposes of education was the Presbyterian pastor and republican educational theorist Samuel Knox. In addition to his prize-winning essay on education from the 1790s, he later wrote “A Discourse on the Present State of Education in Maryland.” Knox, an immigrant to Maryland from Scotland, was one of the two co-winners of the American Philosophical Society’s essay contest in 1797 on adapting American education to the system of American government. At the time of writing this essay—1808—Knox was the principal of an academy in Maryland.

³⁴ “Essay on the Subject of Education,” 19.

³⁵ “Essay on the Subject of Education,” 20-26.

In this discourse, Knox began with religious motives for education but blended religious and republican arguments throughout. Indeed, Knox showed how even the leading exponents of an education for the sake of republican society and virtue appealed to the religious need for education as well. Knox began, as any good minister of his era would, with a quote from Scripture—Proverbs 22:6. He explained that “The proper education of Youth is the command of God; the dictate of nature; and the best foundation for the just observance of those Laws which are necessary for the well being of society.”³⁶ With the goal of proving the importance of public education for the state of Maryland, Knox began with education as the command of God and a dictate of nature. His third point, that “the proper Education of Youth, is the best foundation for the observance of those laws which are necessary for the well-being or happiness of society,” was his main focus.³⁷ Teaching habits and morals and good discipline are necessary for the enforcement of all laws, human or divine. As in the free states of antiquity where education fell to the legislators, he argued, “on the state of the public instruction of youth must, in a great measure, depend, the prosperity, freedom and happiness of any society.”³⁸ Education in Maryland was far too limited. The sons of the rich and the poor both needed a good education, and in fact it was the tastes of the poorer folk which, “as relates to real usefulness, or the virtuous and prudent conduct of life, adapted to our republican habits,” had the best judgment of a good education.³⁹ He called therefore for

³⁶ Samuel Knox, “A Discourse on the Present State of Education in Maryland,” (1808). Page not numbered.

³⁷ Knox, 5

³⁸ Knox, 7.

³⁹ Knox, 11.

public support of education to enable to the poor to go to school—both for more schools and for better roads so they could actually travel to their schools. His discourse began its conclusion with the reminder that:

The invaluable blessings of civil and religious liberty which we enjoy are interesting, in nothing that concerns our happiness, so much, as in the proper training up of our youth in those principles which have given us existence as a nation—A nation in which, I trust the inestimable blessings of moral and religious instruction, shall spread and prosper more and more.⁴⁰

The discourse concluded with religious motives to education again firmly in view. Knox stated that “Every Christian, of every denomination, who venerates the divine principles of our common religion, will cherish the hallowed purity of public education . . .”⁴¹ To improve education in Maryland, Knox sought to harness the religious motives to education behind his plans for the public support of a generic Protestantism in schools.

Knox was not alone in his efforts, either philosophically or geographically. The efforts of DeWitt Clinton, a leading politician and later governor of New York, to reform education in his state likewise reveal the dual purposes of education for the purposes promoting piety and republican virtue.⁴² He supported the implementation of the Lancasterian system of education in New York City—a cost-effective system of schooling proposed by the Englishman Joseph Lancaster by which one schoolmaster administered school while older students tutored younger students—and was apparently

⁴⁰ Knox, 26.

⁴¹ Knox, 26.

⁴² DeWitt Clinton is probably the most famous of the writers discussed in this chapter. He was a US Senator from New York as well as governor of the state. In that capacity, he promoted internal improvements such as the construction of the Erie Canal. It is in this context as a promoter of domestic growth that his program of education deserves to be understood. See Daniel Walker Howe, *What Hath God Wrought: The Transformation of America, 1815-1848* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), pp. 216-300 for discussions of his political career in the context of the era.

quite successful.⁴³ In an 1805 address, he explained his desire to open a system of free schools for the poor children, for those who were not provided for by church schools or charity schools. As he explained, “Children thus brought up in ignorance, and amidst the contagion of bad example, are in imminent danger of ruin; and too many of them, it is to be feared, instead of being useful members of the community, will become the burden and pests of Society. Early instruction and fixed habits of industry, decency, and order, are the surest safeguards of virtuous conduct.”⁴⁴ Indeed, one of the primary purposes of the proposed school would be teaching these children good morals. Since they were to come from the lowest classes of society, a station in life where no one looked after their good behavior, this would be a special focus of the school. Clinton wrote that “Care will be exercised in the selection of teachers, and, besides the elements of learning usually taught in the schools, strict attention will be bestowed on the morals of the Children.”⁴⁵ This moreover contained a clearly religious purpose, though that of a general Protestant nature, for “In this, as in the Common School, it will be a primary object, without

⁴³ The Lancasterian or monitorial schooling system was named for the Englishman Joseph Lancaster. It was a method of educating large numbers of children at a low cost—something that appealed to many legislators and promoters of education at this time. The idea was for one schoolmaster to teach and supervise, and then the older students would act as teacher/mentors for the younger pupils. In this way, only one person needed to be paid while hundreds of students received a rudimentary education. Wilson Smith notes that in New York, the Lancasterian method was used from 1806 to 1853, “in which time it virtually monopolized school instruction and became educational dogma.” Wilson Smith, ed., *Theories of Education in Early America, 1655-1819* (New York: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1973), 346.

⁴⁴ DeWitt Clinton, “To the Public. Address of the Trustees of the Society for Establishing a Free School in the City of New York, for the Education of such Poor Children as do not Belong to, or are not Provided by any Religious Society,” (*New-York Evening Post*, May 21, 1805), p. 3, in *Theories of Education in Early America, 1655-1819*, ed. Wilson Smith (New York: Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1973): 340-344.

⁴⁵ Clinton, 343.

observing the peculiar forms of any religious Society, to inculcate the sublime truths of religion and morality, contained in the Holy Scriptures.”⁴⁶

Four years later Clinton again publicly defended the advantages of the Lancasterian Plan of education. He began his defense by critiquing the European model of education, which had limited education only to the wealthy. Clinton, as a political leader in New York, wanted to open up education for the rising democracy of the nation. Bringing together government, religion, and education in one statement, he wrote that “Ignorance is the cause as well as the effect of bad governments, and without the cultivation of our rational powers, we can entertain no just ideas of the obligations of morality or the excellences of religion.”⁴⁷ The problem of sectarian schools was their limitedness as well, for only those belonging to their denominations, or who were willing and able to pay, would attend such schools. The Lancasterian model, by way of contrast, provided education in reading, writing, arithmetic, and Bible reading for more children and at a lower cost. This indeed was to be the typical Protestant school of the nineteenth century.

Maria Anne Campbell’s “Thoughts on Female Education” also helps provide some insight into the combination of religious education with republican virtue. Indeed, it illustrates the sustained ideal of republican motherhood in the year 1812. Her critique was of the current modes of educating girls, which focused overly much on external accomplishments and not on real development of virtue. The Spartans took care to

⁴⁶ Clinton, 343.

⁴⁷ DeWitt Clinton. “De Witt Clinton Champions the Lancasterian Plan,” in *Theories of Education in Early America, 1655-1819*, ed. Wilson Smith (New York: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1973): 345-60.

educate their children in their republic, she said, and the daughters of Americans likewise deserved an education to preserve the “morals of society.”⁴⁸ Real education addressed the head and the heart; it addressed the passions and sought to eliminate vice and the love of vice early in life. A number of practical adjustments could be made to help in this—not permitting children to play with the children of servants because their morals are generally worse, not sending girls to school just to get them out of the home for a time, not allowing children “the uncontrolled use of pocket-money,” and other such actions that would allow for or encourage vice.⁴⁹ Campbell emphasized instead that girls should read and reflect to strengthen their minds. They should study history, geography, and astronomy as well as needlework, painting, and music. Furthermore, girls should read good novels, those which “tend to form their minds and morals, and make them acquainted with God and with themselves.”⁵⁰ With these in place, the morals of society will better be taken care of, for women as mothers will better be able to teach their children the virtues and morals required for a happy life in society.

James Mott’s 1816 “Observations on the Education of Children” furthered these ideas.⁵¹ He assumed that one goal of education is teaching children to be pious, but he also argued that the chief aim of education is instructing children in “sentiments that are

⁴⁸ Maria Anne Campbell, “Thoughts on Female Education,” (Albany, NY: Websters and Skinners, 1812), 4.

⁴⁹ Campbell, 8-13.

⁵⁰ Campbell, 17-22.

⁵¹ James Mott was a Quaker born and raised in New York, though he lived most of his life in Philadelphia. He taught for a short time at a school in New York, but he was most famous as an abolitionist. He was also involved in early women’s rights activities; his wife Lucretia was a main speaker at the Seneca Falls Convention of 1848. See Anna Davis Hallowell, ed, *James and Lucretia Mott: Life and Letters* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, and Company, 1884).

friendly to virtue and happiness.”⁵² Mott, like every other person commenting on education, noted its great importance. He argued that the earliest and first business of education should be mastering the child’s will, by which he meant restraining the inordinate selfishness of every young child. Indeed, “Persevering, yet gentle firmness, begun in infancy, establishes proper discipline, procures obedience, and prevents almost all punishment.”⁵³ But he cautioned readers against stifling a child’s inquisitiveness, and he repeated a warning to steer between the extremes of indulgence and severity. For him, this meant that Solomon’s proverb about not sparing the rod should be read “to enjoin an early and careful restraint on every bad propensity. It is instruction, not arbitrary punishment that must aid children in governing their own inclinations and emotions.”⁵⁴ Thus after teaching children to curb their “wrong propensities,” the duty of education is to inculcate in them good virtues. Among other things, this includes the duty to “accustom children to industry.” Parents have the duty of living as good examples of virtue, discipline, industry, and piety before their children. This includes showing them through daily actions the importance of Scripture, for “if we wish to inspire them with the love of the Scriptures, let them see that other books are read and dismissed, and the bible alone remains the constant companion of our serious hours, the subject of our daily meditation; they will associate the idea of superior excellence with the bible, before they

⁵² James Mott, “Observations on the Education of Children and Hints to Young People on the Duties of Civil Life,” (New York, 1816), 14. The “Observations” and “Hints” are two separate essays printed in one document.

⁵³ Mott, 3.

⁵⁴ Mott, 5.

are able to read it.”⁵⁵ Indeed, the sentiments “friendly to virtue and happiness” are precisely those of “goodness and piety.” Children ought to be taught correct impressions about God from their earliest years. A love of God plus right principles of belief taught at a young age and reinforced by the sound example of their parents would yield good behavior later in life.

This is the theory of education in this time period that almost all writers on education assumed, and this helps explain why earlier religious writings were still being printed—they contributed to the piety and goodness that bring about virtue and happiness. On this issue of older educational works begin reprinted, much could be said. These essays and books on the religious education of children from early in the eighteenth century made numerous reappearances throughout the early nineteenth century. Among others, Isaac Watts’s *The Improvement of the Mind, To Which is Added, a Discourse on the Education of Children and Youth* was first published in London in 1751 but made multiple reappearances between 1800 and 1819.⁵⁶ Other leading eighteenth century educators such as John Witherspoon were also reprinted. His *Letters on Education* remained popular, being printed five times between 1775 and 1822.⁵⁷ Religion remained a central focus of American education.

But added to and mixed with that understanding of piety was a republican emphasis on virtue and morality. The influence of such republican educational theorists as Noah Webster, Benjamin Rush, and Thomas Jefferson was not quickly forgotten.

⁵⁵ Mott, 14

⁵⁶ Wilson Smith remarks that it was printed 12 times between 1793 and 1849. Smith, 98.

⁵⁷ Smith, 185.

Thomas Jefferson, for example, concluded his two terms as president and resumed his life-long efforts in promoting education in the state of Virginia. In a letter to John Adams in 1814, Jefferson wrote that “When sobered by experience, I hope our successors will turn their attention to the advantages of education I hope the necessity will, at length, be seen of establishing institutions here, as in Europe, where every branch of science, useful at this day, may be taught at its highest degree.”⁵⁸ His grand achievement in this domain, and an accomplishment of which he was most proud, was establishing the University of Virginia.⁵⁹

In spite of Jefferson’s eventual achievements with the University of Virginia, it is interesting to note, as Daniel Walker Howe has ably shown, most colleges founded during this era aimed at promoting sectarian religion. This remained the case for decades after the Revolution, even up to the beginning of the Civil War. Howe indeed concludes that “In many ways, education in the early republic seemed to owe more to the principles of the Reformation than to those of the Enlightenment.”⁶⁰ The synthesis of religious education with the moralistic education thought necessary to sustain republican government and society would hold for most of the nineteenth century.

⁵⁸ Thomas Jefferson, “Letter to John Adams,” (July, 1814), in *Education in the United States: A Documentary History* Vol. 3, ed. Sol Cohen (New York: Random House, 1974): 1483-85.

⁵⁹ The famous Rockfish Gap Report of 1818 outlined what the goals of the University. It was specifically and intentionally not a religious institution. The Report stated that “In conformity with the principles of our Constitution, which places all sects of religion on an equal footing . . . we have proposed no professor of divinity.” In *Education in the United States: A Documentary History* Vol. 3, ed. Sol Cohen (New York: Random House, 1974): 1485-91.

⁶⁰ Daniel Walker Howe, “Church, State, and Education in the Young American Republic,” *Journal of the Early Republic* 22, no. 1 (Spring 2002), 23.

CHAPTER SIX

Conclusion

The chief end of this study has been to illustrate the currents of religion and Enlightenment republicanism that flowed through American educational thought from the 1740s and 1750s into the 1810s. From the clearly religious foundations of the colonial academies and colleges to the mixed religious and republican purposes of those same institutions in the new republic, some aspects of educational thought changed a great deal while others stayed more or less the same. One of the greatest changes, of course, was the shift in emphasis to public virtue and public good as one of the primary purposes of education. It was mixed in with and added on top of the religious motives to founding schools and educating young people. Though the synthesis seemed quite strong during this time period, one case in 1819 foreshadowed some of the incompatibility between them.

That case, *Dartmouth College v. Woodward*, indicates some of the tension between Christianity and a morality of public virtue and the common good.¹ *Dartmouth* was decided by the Supreme Court in 1819. Though it mainly hinged on questions of private contract law and the application of certain clauses of the US Constitution, much of it also reflected on the relationship between education, religion, and public considerations of the state. The legislature of the state of New Hampshire had passed multiple bills in the preceding years to the effect that the current president and board of

¹ *Trustees of Dartmouth College v. Woodward*, February 2, 1819. Online: <http://caselaw.lp.findlaw.com/scripts/getcase.pl?court=US&vol=17&invol=518>. Accessed 4 February, 2014.

trustees of Dartmouth would no longer run the school; rather state-appointed trustees would assume that task. The state leaders believed that Dartmouth College existed for the public good and that as such it fell within the province of the legislature to direct its actions. Daniel Webster, an alumnus of Dartmouth and later a famous senator from Massachusetts, argued against that belief on behalf of his alma mater's self-rule. He claimed that it was a private institution, funded by the donations of private individuals for the purposes of promoting Christianity among the Indians and learning generally among the English speaking residents of the region. Even though these functions served the public good, they did not thereby surrender themselves to the control of the public. Arguing on behalf of the state, secretary of the state-appointed trustees William H. Woodward claimed that the charter made Dartmouth a public institution and subject to the direct control of the state.

In the end, the Court agreed with Webster that serving a public good and belonging to the public were distinctly different ideas. Chief Justice John Marshall wrote for the majority of the justices that "the objects of the contributors, and the incorporating act, were the same; the promotion of Christianity, and of education generally, not the interests of New Hampshire particularly."² Promoting specific educational ends was not identical to promoting the public good. As a private contract protected from state interference by the federal Constitution of 1787, Dartmouth's charter was safe from alterations by the State of New Hampshire.

Even more to the point was the concurring opinion written by Associate Justice Bushrod Washington. Washington, a nephew of his much more famous uncle George

² See his opinion, <http://caselaw.lp.findlaw.com/scripts/getcase.pl?court=US&vol=17&invol=518>. Accessed 4 February 2014.

Washington, reiterated the conclusions of Justice Marshall but added some thoughts of his own about the competing public versus private purposes of the institution. He wrote:

It has been insisted, in the argument at the bar, that Dartmouth college was a mere civil corporation, created for a public purpose, the public being deeply interested in the education of its youth; and that, consequently, the charter was as much under the control of the government of New Hampshire, as if the corporation had concerned the government of a town or city. But it has been shown, that the authorities are all the other way.³

Though the public may be “deeply interested in the education of its youth,” the private organization of the College protected it from public control. There was no question but that education was good at a private and at a public level, but the simple fact of education’s public utility did not subject it to the direct authority of the state legislature. Its existence as an institution devoted to spreading learning and Christianity supported the public good by aiming at teaching virtue to its students, but it remained a private institution. All of this illustrates that the perfect union between education and service to the public, supposed by some members of the early American republic to be the bulwark of its liberties, was less than perfect.

This study has been, again, a “Rip Van Winkle” comparison of colonial American education and early national American education. While it is true that no single version of “American education” existed before or after the Revolution, certainly some broad and describable trends were present both before and after. There was of course the thread of religious education that ran all the way from 1740 to 1819. Piety and Christianity never ceased to be major goals of education. Moreover, attention to the development of public virtue grew enormously in the years just prior to, during, and after the Revolution. A

³ See Bushrod Washington’s concurring opinion, <http://caselaw.lp.findlaw.com/scripts/getcase.pl?court=US&vol=17&invol=518>. Accessed 4 February 2014.

republic would require virtue in its citizens, and that virtue needed to be instilled in them through training. Only an education in virtue and morality on a national scale could support the national virtue necessary to render republican government possible. Finally, though this thread was clearly connected to and intermixed with the other two, educators at the time were concerned with giving students a practical education. Learning became more focused on teaching students to read and write in English rather than Latin, Greek, or Hebrew because English was the language of business and society in America. Only the learned professions would require knowledge of the tongues of antiquity.

Though it required clearing away some twentieth century historiography of the period, I have argued that the Great Awakening led to a heightened interest in promoting Christianity through education. The religious influences so prominent in the 1740s and 1750s led to a flurry of college founding in the years from 1740-1775. These schools were founded almost entirely for the purposes of promoting religion and wisdom in their students. Many, however, revealed in their charters and practices that the ideas of the Enlightenment had played a role in their formation.

Thus in Chapter Two I have endeavored to demonstrate through the comparative study of Benjamin Franklin and John Witherspoon that in much of the educational activity of the late colonial period, Enlightenment thought—pragmatic, empirical, reasonable, and experience-driven—informed American education. Whether it was Franklin’s school in Philadelphia or Witherspoon’s in New Jersey, providing students a practical education, with a practical morality, was of great importance.

Chapter Three built on and extended this argument. After the conclusion of the Revolution, republican theories of education proliferated. Their shared focus was on the

necessity of virtue to sustain the republic and the need for new schools to promote that virtue. For some, this required a central role for religion in the new schools; others thought it precluded schools from teaching religious doctrines entirely.

Chapter Four examined how the two ideas were synthesized in the new republic. The triumph of moral philosophy in the colleges and universities allowed for a general conflation of the terms “religion” and “virtue” such that nearly everyone promoted some version of both. In early American educational thought, religion and virtue went hand-in-hand as being nearly synonymous.

Though Rip Van Winkle found everything about his home village strange—“Strange names were over the doors—strange faces at the windows—every thing was strange”—he was still able to readjust to life in the republican United States. No longer a subject of King George III but a free citizen, he found a niche for himself. Similarly, a transformation of American education had occurred from 1740-1819. Those changes would have surprised some educators who had lived in the 1740s, but the differences, while great enough in some ways, were perhaps small enough in others that these eighteenth century educators could have understood and adjusted to the new world of America in the nineteenth century.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- “Additional Charter of the College, Academy, and Charity-School of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.” Philadelphia: Franklin and Hall, 1755.
- Andrews, Edward. *Native Apostles: Black and Indian Missionaries in the British Atlantic World*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2013.
- Barnes, David. “A Discourse on Education.” Boston, 1803.
- Best, John Hardin, ed. *Benjamin Franklin on Education*. New York: Bureau of Publications, Teachers College, Columbia University, 1962.
- “Board of Trustees of Shearith Israel Congregation on the Purpose of Jewish Education.” 1804. In *Education in the United States: A Documentary History*. Vol. 2. New York: Random House, 1973. 1183.
- Brands, H. W. *The First American: The Life and Times of Benjamin Franklin*. New York: Doubleday, 2000.
- Burgh, James. “Thoughts on Education, Tending Chiefly to Recommend to the Attention of the Public, some Particulars Relating to that Subject; which are not Generally Considered with the Regard Their Importance Deserves.” Boston, 1749.
- Burtchaell, James. *The Dying of the Light: The Disengagement of Colleges and Universities from Their Christian Churches*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998.
- Butterfield, Herbert. *The Whig Interpretation of History*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1965.
- Campbell, Maria Anne. “Thoughts on Female Education.” Albany, NY: Websters and Skinners, 1812.
- “Candid Remarks on Dr. Witherspoon’s Address to the Inhabitants of Jamaica and the other West-India Islands.” Philadelphia, 1772.
- “Charter of the College of New-York in America.” New York: J. Parker and W. Weyman, 1754.
- Clap, Thomas. *The Religious Constitution of Colleges*. In *Theories of Education in Early America, 1655-1819*, edited by Wilson Smith, 162-170. New York: Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1973.

- Clarke, John. *An Essay Upon the Education of Youth in Grammar-Schools. In Which the Vulgar Method of Teaching is Examined, and a New One Proposed, for the More Easy and Speedy Training Up of Youth to the Knowledge of the Learned Languages; Together with History, Chronology, Geography, &c.* 2nd ed. London, 1730.
- Cohen, Sol, ed. "Charter of William and Mary College." In *Education in the United States: A Documentary History*. Vol. 1. New York: Random House, 1973. 645-647.
- Cohen, Sol, ed. "Charter of the College of New Jersey." In *Education in the United States: A Documentary History*. Vol. 1. New York: Random House, 1973. 685-687.
- Cohen, Sol, ed. "Charter of Rhode Island College." 1764. In *Education in the United States: A Documentary History*. Vol. 1. New York: Random House, 1973. 704-706.
- Cohen, Sol, ed. "Rules of King's College." 1755. In *Education in the United States: A Documentary History*. Vol. 1. New York: Random House, 1973. 696-698.
- Committee of Churches. "Essay on the Subject of Education, Together with a Few Propositions of a Practical Nature to be Adopted by our Respective Churches, for the Purpose of Promoting Moral and Religious Knowledge Among the Rising Generation." 1805.
- Coram, Robert. *Political Inquiries: to Which is Added, a Plan for the General Establishment of Schools Throughout the United States*. Wilmington, DE: 1791. In *Essays on Education in the Early Republic*, edited by Frederick Rudolph, 79-145. Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University, 1965.
- Cremin, Lawrence. *American Education: The Colonial Experience 1607-1783*. New York: Harper and Row, 1970.
- Demers, Patricia. *The World of Hannah More*. Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 1996.
- Doggett, Simeon. *A Discourse on Education, Delivered at the Dedication and Opening of Bristol Academy, the 18th Day of July, A.D. 1796*. In *Essays on Education in the Early Republic*, edited by Frederick Rudolph, 147-165. Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University, 1965.
- Ford, Charles Howard. *Hannah More: A Critical Biography*. New York: Peter Lang, 1996.

- Franklin, Benjamin. "Proposals Relating to the Education of Youth in Pennsylvania." Philadelphia, 1749.
- Franklin, Benjamin. "The Idea of the English School." Philadelphia, 1751.
- Hamilton, Elizabeth. *Letters on the Elementary Principles of Education*. 2 volumes. Alexandria, 1803.
- Hansen, Allen O. *Liberalism and American Education in the Eighteenth Century*. 2nd ed. New York: Octagon Books, 1977.
- Hatch, Nathan O. *The Democratization of American Christianity*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989.
- Hervey, James. "A Treatise on the Religious Education of Daughters." Boston: Fowle and Draper, 1762.
- Howe, Daniel Walker. "Church, State, and Education in the Young American Republic." *Journal of the Early Republic* 22, no. 1 (Spring 2002): 1-24.
- Howe, Daniel Walker. *What Hath God Wrought: The Transformation of America, 1815-1848*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2007.
- Jefferson, Thomas. "A Bill for the More General Diffusion of Knowledge." 1779. In *Education in the United States: A Documentary History Volume II*. Ed. Sol Cohen. New York: Random House, 1974. Pp. 739-40. New York: Random House, 1973.
- Jefferson, Thomas. *Notes on the State of Virginia with an Appendix*, 8th ed. Boston: David Carlisle, 1801.
- Justice, Benjamin. "The Great Contest: The American Philosophical Society Education Prize of 1795 and the Problem of American Education." *American Journal of Education* 114, no. 2 (February 2008): 191-213.
- Kaestle, Carl. *Pillars of the Republic: Common Schools and American Society, 1780-1860*. New York: Hill and Wang, 1983.
- Kerber, Linda. "The Republican Mother: Women and the Enlightenment—An American Perspective." In *Toward an Intellectual History of Women: Essays by Linda K. Kerber*. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1997. 41-62.

- Kidd, Thomas. “‘Becoming Important in the Eye of the Civil Powers’: New Light Baptists, Cultural Respectability, and the Founding of Rhode Island College.” In *The Scholarly Vocation and the Baptist Academy: Essays on the Future of Baptist Higher Education*. Edited by Roger Ward and David P. Gushee, 50-67. Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2008.
- Kidd, Thomas. *The Great Awakening: The Roots of Evangelical Christianity in Colonial America*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007.
- Knox, Samuel. *An Essay on the Best System of Liberal Education, Adapted to the Genius of the Government of the United States. Comprehending also, an Uniform General Plan for Instituting and Conducting Public Schools, in This Country, on Principles of the Most Extensive Utility. To Which is Prefixed, an Address to the Legislature of Maryland on That Subject*. In *Essays on Education in the Early Republic*, edited by Frederick Rudolph, 271-372. Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University, 1965.
- Knox, Samuel. “A Discourse on the Present State of Education in Maryland.” 1808.
- Marsden, George. *The Soul of the American University: From Protestant Establishment to Established Nonbelief*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1994.
- Marsden, George. *Jonathan Edwards: A Life*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003.
- Miller, Perry. *Jonathan Edwards*. New York: William Sloane Associates, 1949.
- Milson, Andrew, Chara Haeussler Bohan, Perry L. Glanzer, and J. Wesley Null, eds. *Readings in American Educational Thought*. Greenwich, CT: Information Age Publishing, 2004.
- More, Hannah. *Strictures on the Modern System of Female Education, With A View to the Principles and Conduct Among Women of Rank and Fortune*. 2 volumes. 3rd ed. Hartford, 1801.
- Morgan, Edmund S. *Benjamin Franklin*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002.
- Moroney, Siobhan. “Birth of a Canon: The Historiography of Early Republican Educational Thought.” *History of Education Quarterly* 39, no. 4 (Winter 1999): 476-491.
- Morrison, Jeffery H. *John Witherspoon and the Founding of the American Republic*. South Bend, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2005.
- Mott, James. “Observations on the Education of Children and Hints to Young People on the Duties of Civil Life.” New York, 1816.

- Nash, Margaret. *Women's Education in the United States, 1780-1840*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005.
- Noll, Mark. "The American Revolution and Protestant Evangelicalism." *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, 23, no. 3 (Winter 1993): 615-638.
- Noll, Mark. *Princeton and the Republic, 1768-1822: The Search for a Christian Enlightenment in the Era of Samuel Stanhope Smith*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1989.
- Pangle, Lorraine Smith, and Thomas L. Pangle. *The Learning of Liberty: The Educational Ideas of the American Founders*. Lawrence, KA: University of Kansas Press, 1993.
- Rahe, Paul. *Republics Ancient and Modern*. 3 vols. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1994.
- Reinier, Jacqueline S. "Rearing the Republican Child: Attitudes and Practices in Post-Revolutionary Philadelphia." *William and Mary Quarterly*, Third Series 39, no. 1 (January 1982): 150-163.
- Robson, David W. "College Founding in the New Republic." *History of Education Quarterly* 23, no. 3 (Autumn 1983): 323-341.
- Rudolph, Frederick, ed. *Essays on Education in the Early Republic*. Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1965.
- Rush, Benjamin. *A Plan for the Establishment of Public Schools and the Diffusion of Knowledge in Pennsylvania; to Which are Added, Thoughts upon the Mode of Education, Proper in a Republic. Addressed to the Legislature and Citizens of the State*. Philadelphia, 1786. In *Essays on Education in the Early Republic*, edited by Frederick Rudolph, 3-40. Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University, 1965.
- Sloan, Douglas. *The Scottish Enlightenment and the American College Ideal*. New York: Teachers College Press, Columbia University, 1971.
- Smith, Wilson, ed. *Theories of Education in Early America, 1655-1819*. New York: Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1973.
- Stott, Anne. *Hannah More: The First Victorian*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003.
- Tait, L. Gordon. *The Piety of John Witherspoon: Pew, Pulpit, and Public Forum*. Louisville, KY: Geneva Press, 2001.

- Tewksbury, Donald G. *The Founding of American Colleges and Universities Before the Civil War*. New York: Bureau of Publications, Teachers College, 1932.
- Thelin, John R. *A History of American Higher Education*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004.
- Tozer, Steven E., Guy Senese, and Paul C. Violas. *School and Society: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives*. 6th ed. New York: McGraw Hill, 2009.
- Urban, Wayne J., and Jennings L. Wagoner, Jr. *American Education: A History*. 4th ed. New York: Routledge, 2009.
- Warden, David Bailie. "A Sermon on the Advantages of Education Preached in the Reformed Dutch Protestant Church." Kingston, NY: 1802.
- Webster, Noah. *On the Education of Youth in America*. Boston, 1790. In *Essays on Education in the Early Republic*, edited by Frederick Rudolph, 41-77. Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University, 1965.
- Webster, Noah. *The American Spelling Book*. (1800?)
<http://www.merrycoz.org/books/spelling/SPELLER.HTM> (accessed November 29, 2013).
- Willard, John. "The Pious Education of Children—the Great Duty of Parents." 1801.
- Witherspoon, John. "Address to the Inhabitants of Jamaica." Philadelphia, 1772.
- Witherspoon, John. "Letters on Education." In *Theories of Education in Early America, 1655-1819*, edited by Wilson Smith, 185-220. New York: Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1973.
- Whitescarver, Keith. "Creating Citizens for the Republic: Education in Georgia, 1776-1810." *Journal of the Early Republic*, 13, no. 4 (Winter 1993): 455-479.
- Wood, Gordon S. *The Americanization of Benjamin Franklin*. New York: Penguin Press, 2004.
- Wood, Gordon S. *Empire of Liberty: A History of the Early Republic, 1789-1815*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2009.
- Worcester, Thomas. "Two Sermons on the Government and Religious Education of Children." Concord, MA: 1804.