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BICENTENNIAL LECTURE SERIES

AMERICAN RELIGIOUS VALUES AND THE FUTURE OF AMERICA

Values, Events, and Features in the American Religious Experience

A Lecture by Rabbi Marc H. Tanenbaum, National Inter-religious Affairs Director of the American Jewish Committee, at Villanova University, Philadelphia, Penna. November 6, 1975

The approach of the Bicentennial commemorating the American Revolution suggests an occasion if not a need to re-examine that epoch. If the exercise of re-examination is to be useful and not prove barren or self-defeating, some caveats should be observed:

First, the Bicentennial ought not to become an occasion for self congratulation, triumphalism or boosterism, either on part of the nation at large, or of its constituent elements - its political parties, or its diverse religious, racial, and ethnic groups. I have seen more than enough essays or projects which advocate or hint that our democratic achievements and prosperity derive primarily, if not exclusively, from the respective genius of the Republican or Democratic parties, or that American democracy is essentially a political expression of Judaism, or that Catholicism and Americanism are one and the same thing, or that Protestantism did all the rest of us a benign favor by letting us in on its country to enjoy its superior virtues and national glories. Such partisan ethnocentric, and self-serving approaches exploit the Bicentennial; they do not illuminate the occasion for our common welfare.

Second, the Bicentennial must not be allowed to become an occasion for escape into the past. America is very big on nostalgia these days, and there could easily develop a natural tropism to

bathe in a romanticized, idealized golden age of yesteryear. Such a tendency would not only be a distortion of the complex reality of our past, but would in fact be nothing less than a colossal cop-out. Indeed, it would constitute a flight from responsibility. In the face of the enormity and seriousness of the moral, spiritual, and human challenges we face as a nation and as a people, both at home and overseas, not to employ the Bicentennial as an opportunity to search our history for insight and values that would enable us to cope more effectively with the challenges, threats and promises of our times would be nothing less than immoral.

The need for probing our past in the most constructive, creative, and objective way in order to gain a clearer perception of who we are as a people, what we stand for in a radically changed global society, what are our intellectual, moral and spiritual resources on which we can build appropriate responses to the challenges of this moment is as great today as perhaps at any time during the past 200 years, if, in fact, not more so.

We face a "malaise of civilization" - a deep and pervasive crisis in values, which Robert Heilbroner, author of "An Inquiry Into the Human Prospect," describes in these words:

"There is a feeling that great troubles and changes loom for the future of civilization as we know it. Our age is one of profound turmoil, a time of deep change, and there is a widespread feeling that the world is coming apart at the seams.

"We have gone through 'a drubbing of history', and a barrage of confidence-shaking events have filled us with a sense of unease and foreboding during the past decade or so. No doubt foremost among these has been the experience of the Vietnam War, an experience that has undermined every aspect of American life--our belief in our own invincible power, our trust in government, our estimate of our private level of morality.

"But the Vietnam War was only one among many such confidence-shaking events. The explosion of violence in street crime, race riots, bombings, bizarre airplane hijackings, shocking assassinations have made a mockery of the TV image of middle class American gentility and brought home with terrible impact the recognition of a barbarism hidden behind the superficial amenities of life.

"We switch on the evening TV and learn what's going to hit us next on the head--a hijacking, a murder, a rape, or some other daily terror. These things profoundly affect our outlook."

What does the American Revolution - and the American past - say to us that might provide some insight and meaning for such a condition?

In his brilliant study on "The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution,"¹ Prof. Bernard Bailyn of Harvard University, writes:

"In the intense political heat of the decade after 1763, the long popular, though hitherto inconclusive ideas about the world and America's place in it were fused into a comprehensive world view, unique in its moral and intellectual appeal. It is the development of this view, to the point of overwhelming persuasiveness to the majority of the American leaders, and the meaning this view gave to the events of the time, and not simply an accumulation of grievances, that explains the origins of the American Revolution.

"A study of the sources of the colonists' thought... reveals at first glance, a massive, seemingly random eclecticism. But ultimately this profusion of authorities is reducible to a few, distinct groups of sources and intellectual traditions dominated and harmonized into a single whole by the influence of one peculiar strain of thought, one distinctive tradition."

Prof. Bailyn identifies the following five "distinct groups of sources and intellectual traditions" from which we derive our nation's values, ideals, and practices:

¹ The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution, by Bernard Bailyn, Belknap Press of Harvard University, Cambridge, Mass., 1967.

I THE HERITAGE OF CLASSICAL ANTIQUITY

Knowledge of classical authors was universal among Colonists with any degree of education, and references to them and their works abound in the literature. Among the Greeks to whom learned men like Jefferson and John Adams appealed for support were Herodotus, Thucydides, Plutarch and Polybius. Aristotle enjoyed only a slight vogue, and Plato was virtually ignored.

The Romans were much more useful to the Patriot cause, especially Cicero for his exposition of natural law, Tacitus for his defense of a simple, agrarian society, and the imperial lawyers for their insistence on the existence of a higher law. But, Dr. Clinton Rossiter² tells us that they, too, were men who confirmed the colonists in old convictions rather than taught them anything new. Americans would have believed just as vigorously in the beauties of public morality had Cato and the Gracchi never lived.

But the elaborate display of classical authors is deceptive, for most authors used the ancient Greeks and Romans simply for window dressing. What gripped their minds was the political history of Rome from the conquests in the east and the Civil wars in the early first century B.C. to the establishment of the Empire on the ruins of the Republic at the end of the 2nd century A.D. For the colonists, arguing the American cause in the controversies of the 1760s and 1770s the analogies to their own times were compelling. They saw their own provincial virtues - simplicity, patriotism, integrity, a love of justice and liberty - challenged by the corruption at the center of power, by the threat of tyranny, and by a constitution gone wrong.

² The Political Thought of the American Revolution, by Clinton Rossiter, Harvest Book, Harcourt, Bruce and World, N. Y., 1963.

But the classics of the ancient world are everywhere illustrative not determinative; they were not the source of political and social beliefs.

II ENLIGHTENMENT RATIONALISM - The ideas and attitudes associated with Enlightenment Rationalism were more directly influential in shaping the thought of the Revolutionary generation. Despite the efforts that have been made to discount the influence of the "glittering generalities" of the European Enlightenment on 18th Century Americans, their influence remains, and is profoundly illustrated in the political literature. It is not simply that the great virtuosi of the American Enlightenment - Franklin, Adams, and Jefferson - cited the Classic Enlightenment texts and fought for the legal recognition of natural rights and for the elimination of institutions and practices associated with the ancien regime. They did so; but they were not alone. The ideas and writings of the leading secular thinkers of the European Enlightenment - reformers and social critics like Voltaire, Rousseau, and Beccaria as well as conservative analysts like Montesquieu - were quoted everywhere in the colonies, by everyone who claimed a broad awareness. In pamphlet after pamphlet, Prof. Bailyn documents, the writers cite:

JOHN LOCKE (second treatise "On Civil Government") - on natural rights, and on the social and governmental contract;

BARON de MONTESQUIEU - On the character of British liberty, and on the institutional requirements for its attainment. His exposition of the separation of powers was already making perfect sense to American minds.

VOLTAIRE - On the evils of clerical oppression.

BECCARIA - On the reform of criminal law.

GROTIUS, BARON PUFENDORF, JEAN JACQUES BURLAINAQUI, (whose emphasis was on happiness as a right of man and an object of government), and EMMERICH de VOTTEL - on the laws of nature and of nations, and on the principles of civil government.

They all had a similar message for the people of the Revolution - that government could be limited, that people could be free, that a king could be unseated for playing the tyrant. Nevertheless, the major figures of the European Enlightenment contributed substantially to the thought of the Americans, but except for Locke's their influence, though more decisive than that of the authors of classical antiquity, was neither clearly dominant nor wholly determinative.

III ENGLISH COMMON LAW - Just as the colonists cited with enthusiasm the theorists of universal reason, so did they associate themselves, with offhand familiarity, with the tradition of English Common Law. The great figures of England's legal history, especially the 17th century common lawyers, were referred to repeatedly by the colonial lawyers above all, but by others as well. Sir Edward Coke "that great luminary of the law," the human embodiment of common law, the Magna Charta, and constitutionalism is everywhere in the literature; "My Lord Coke reports," "Lord Coke's second Institute." The citations are almost as frequent as, and even less precise than those to Locke, Montesquieu, and Voltaire. In the later years of the Revolutionary period, Blackstone's Commentaries and the opinions of Chief Justice Camden became standard authorities.

The Common Law was manifestly influential in shaping the awareness of the revolutionary generation. But again, it did not determine the kinds of conclusions people would draw in the crisis

of the time. The Law was no science of what to do next, To the colonists it was a repository of experience in human dealings embodying the principles of justice, equity, and rights; above all,,it was a form of history - ancient, indeed immemorial history; constitutional and national history; and as history, it helped explain the movement of events and the meaning of the present. Thus, English law as authority, as legitimizing precedent, as embodied principle, and as the framework of historical understanding stood side by side with Enlightenment rationalism in the winds of the revolutionary generation.

IV NEW ENGLAND PURITANISM - A major source of ideas and attitudes of the revolutionary generation stemmed ultimately from the political and social theories of New England Puritanism, and particularly from the ideas associated with Covenant Theology.

While economic factors, and the severe pressures on religious non-conformists carried out by Anglican Bishop William Land, 1628, played a role in the motivations that led to the great Puritan exodus of 1629, there can be no doubt that the chief motive for the founding of the Massachusetts Bay Colony was religious. Led by country squire John Winthrop and others, the group believed that the only safeguard against the forces of evil lay in establishing a society consisting of a confederation of congregations buttressed by a sympathetic government. This alone, they thought, would cleanse the churches of unworthy ministers and immoral communicants, remodel worship upon the Biblical model, and dethrone the Anglican bishops. Since this seemed impossible of accomplishment in England,they proposed to bring it about in distant America by founding there a "Wilderness Zion." They turned

to New England since it offered a religious as well as an economic haven.

To the settlers the spiritual side of their community was all important. This it was which had led them into the wilderness, which shaped their characters and thoughts, which determined the form of their social and economic life. One of their first steps upon reaching the site of their new homes was to form themselves into a church. This they did by assembling in some open space, perhaps a long-disused Indian corn-field, to enter into a solemn covenant with God.

For the covenant, the congregations claimed direct authority from the Bible and direct precedent in the history of Israel. William Brattle for example stated, "The Covenant of Grace is the very same now that it was under the Mosaical dispensation." (Ms Sermons, Harvard College Library). Vivian Oakes, in his election sermon of 1673 ("New England Pleaded With") emphasized God's covenant with the children of Israel and how they were led into the land of Promise. When this question was considered at a general convention of ministers at Boston on May 26, 1698, all save one agreed that "under the Old Testament the Church was constituted by a Covenant."

Mediated by the Puritans in New England, the Hebrew Scriptures in many ways the intellectual arsenal of the American Revolution. In the Hebrew Scriptures, the Patriots found precedent and inspiration, and the pulpits of the land, where public opinion was molded, resounded with their revolutionary summonses - as Rufus Lears asserts in his volume on The Jews in America (World Publishing Co., 1954).

The Exodus from Egypt was the classic model of liberation from tyranny; the colonies of America should also make their exodus. The ten tribes of Israel defied the arrogant son of Solomon and established their own government; the thirteen colonies should do likewise. The Hebrew Prophets denounced kings and potentates, and God-fearing Americans may do the same. The call engraved on the Liberty Bell - "Proclaim liberty throughout the land unto all the inhabitants thereof" selected from the Book of Leviticus - was symbolic of the attachment of the Founding Fathers to the Hebrew Scriptures. Revolutionary doctrine became crystallized in the slogan, "Rebellion to tyrants is obedience to God." Indeed, those were the words which Franklin, Jefferson and John Adams proposed for the seal of the United States; they were to be inscribed around a picture of the children of Israel crossing the Red Sea.

Not less potent was the influence of the Hebrew Scriptures in determining the basic political system of the new society that emerged from the War of Independence. To discredit the monarchy, preachers like the bold and brilliant Jonathan Mayhew of Boston held up the warning of the prophet Samuel against royalty. Samuel Langdon, the president of Harvard, considered the Jewish government "a perfect republic," and Ezra Stiles, the president of Yale, found in the American government the fulfilment of Biblical prophecy. In his classic work, History of the Rise and Influence of the Spirit of Rationalism in Europe, the eminent 19th century historian, William Edward Lecky, declares that "the Hebraic mortar cemented the foundations of American democracy."

The elaborate system of thought erected by the first leaders of settlement in New England had been consolidated and amplified by a succession of writers in the course of the 17th century, channeled into the mainstream of 18th century political and social thinking by a generation of enlightened preachers, and softened in its denominational rigor by many hands until could be received, with minor variations, by the almost entire spectrum of American Protestantism.

The work of the clergy as leaders of political thought was impressive, Prof. Rossiter asserts that had ministers been the only spokesmen of the American cause, had Jefferson, the Adamses and Otis, never appeared in print, the political thought of the Revolution would have followed almost exactly the same line - with perhaps a little more mention of God, but certainly no less of John Locke. In the sermons of the patriot ministers, who were responsible for fully one-third of the total output of political thought in these years, we find expressed every possible refinement of the reigning political faith.

This influential strain of Puritan thought found everywhere in the 18th Cent. colonies, stimulated confidence in the idea that America had a special place, as yet not fully revealed in the architecture of God's intent.

V OPPOSITION RADICALS - The ultimate origins of the distructive ideological strain of the American revolution lay in the radical social and political thought of the English Civil War and of the Commonwealth period; but its permanent form had been acquired at the turn of the 17th century and in the early 18th century in the

in the writings of a group of opposition theorists, "country" politicians, and publicists.

Among the 17th cent. progenitors of this line of 18th cent. radical writers and opposition politicians united in criticism of "court" and ministerial power, John Milton was an important figure - not Milton the poet so much as Milton the radical tractarian, author of Eikonoklastes and The Tenure of Kings and Magistrates (both published in 1649). Above all, they referred to the doctrines of Algernon Sidney, that "martyr to civil liberty" whose Discourses Concerning Government (1698) became in Caroline Robbins phrase, a "Textbook of Revolution" in America.

The colonists identified themselves with these 17th century heroes of liberty, but they felt closer to the early 18th cent. writers who modified and enlarged this early body of ideas, fused it into a whole with other contemporary strains of thought, and above all, applied it to the problems of 18th century English politics.

These early 18th century writers - coffee-house radicals and opposition politicians, spokesmen for the anti-court independents, draftsmen of a "country" vision of English politics that would persist throughout the 18th century and into the 19th - faded subsequently into obscurity and are little known today. But, according to Prof. Bailyn, more than any other single group of writers they shaped the mind of the American revolutionary generation.

To the colonists the most important of these publicists and intellectual middlemen were those spokesmen for extreme libertariansism, John Trenchard (1662-1723) and Thomas Gordon (died 1750). Trenchard, a west-country squire of ample means and

radical ideas, was a 57-year-old veteran of the pamphlet wars that surrounded the Glorious Revolution when in 1719 he met Gordon.

They joined forces to produce, first, the weekly Independent Whig to attack high church pretensions and, more generally, the establishment of religion, 53 papers of which were published in book form in 1721; then, Cato's Letters, a searing indictment of 18th century English politics and society written in response to the South Sea Bubble crisis, which appeared first serially in The London Journal, and then, beginning in 1720, in book form.

Incorporating in their colorful, slashing, and superbly readable pages the major themes of the "left" opposition under Walpole, these libertarian tracts, emerging first in the form of denunciation of standing armies in the reign of William III (Argument, Shewing, that a Standing Army Is Inconsistent with a Free Government, 1671), left an indelible impact on the "country" mind everywhere in the English-speaking world. In America, where they were republished entire or in part again and again, "quoted in every colonial newspaper from Boston to Savannah," and referred to repeatedly in the pamphlet literature, the writings of Trenchard and Gordon ranked with the treatises of Locke as the most authoritative statement of the nature of political liberty, and above Locke as an exposition of the social sources of the threats it faced.

Standing with Trenchard and Gordon as early 18th century "preceptors of civil liberty" was the liberal Anglican bishop, Benjamin Hoadly. This "best hated clergyman of the century amongst his own order," as Leslie Stephen described him - honored and promoted by an administration that despised him but could not do

without him - achieved fame, or notoriety, in England for his role in the elaborate polemics of the "Bangowan controversey" (1717-1720) in which he had been assisted by Gordon. In the course of the bitter and voluminous debate he had become an object of scorn and vituperation as well as of admiration in England. But in the colonies he was held to be one of the notable figures in the history of political thought. Anglicans in America, like their co-denominationalists at home, could scarcely endorse his extraordinary denial of sacerdotal powers for the church, hierarchy or his almost unbelievable repudiation of the whole idea of the church visible, nor could they, in theory, at least, accept his extreme toleration of dissent. But their attention focused not on his views of the church but on the crucial battles he had fought early in the century against the non-jurors and their doctrines of divine right and passive obedience, and on the extreme statements of whig political theory in his treatise, The Original and Institution of Civil Government Discussed (1710) and in certain of his many tracts, especially The Measures of Submission to the Civil Magistrates Considered (1705). Hoadly came to embody physically the continuity of the conglomerate tradition of English radical and opposition thought, for though he had been active at the end of the 17th century, he lived on until 1761, associating in his very old age with the English radicals of Jefferson's generation and establishing contact with such spokesmen of advanced American thought as Jonathan Mayhew (who wrote Discourse Concerning Unlimited Submission, Boston, 1750). An anonymous English writer attributed the origins of the French

Revolution to "Sidney, Locke, and Hoadly" and urged "every class of Frenchmen (to) become familiarly acquainted with them.

Opposition thought of these and later English advocates of reform in politics and religion (Viscount Bolingbroke, Richard Price, Joseph Priestly, John Cartwright, James Burgh), in the form it acquired at the turn of the 17th century and in the early 18th century, was devoured by the colonists. From the earliest years of the century it nourished their political thought and sensibilities. Prof. Bailyn declares that there seems never to have been a time after the Hanoverian succession when these writings were not central to American political expression or absent from political polemics. By 1728, Cato's Letters had already been fused with Locke, Coke, Pufendorf, and Grotius to produce a prototypical American treatise in defense of English liberties overseas, a tract indistinguishable from any number of publications that would appear in the revolutionary crisis 50 years later (such as the tract, The Right of the Inhabitants of Maryland to the Benefit of the English Laws.)

It should be borne in mind that on the main points of theory the 18th century contributors to the tradition were not original. Borrowing heavily from more original thinkers, they were often in their own time and after, dismissed as mere popularizers.

Their key concepts - natural rights, the contractual basis of society and government, the uniqueness of England's liberty, preserving the 'mixed' constitution - were commonplaces of the liberal thought of the time. Indeed, Thomas Jefferson testifies to the "ordinary" character of the Declaration of Independence in

these striking words:³

"Not to find out new principles, or new arguments, never before thought of, not merely to say things which had never been said before, but to place before mankind the common sense of the subject, in terms so plain and firm as to command their assent, and to justify ourselves in the independent stand we are compelled to take. Neither aiming at originality of principle or sentiment, nor yet copying from any particular or previous writing it (the Declaration) was intended to be an expression of the American mind, and to give to that expression the proper tone and spirit called for by the occasion. All its authority rests then on the harmonizing sentiments of the day, whether expressed in conversation, in letters, printed essays, or in the elementary books of public right, as Aristotle, Cicero, Locke, Sidney, etc."

But if the elements of their thought were ordinary, the emphasis placed upon them and the use made of them were not. Pride in the liberty - preserving constitution of Britain was universal in the political literature of the age, and everyone agreed on the moral qualities necessary to preserve a free government. (See next section on "The Moral Basis of Government.") But where the mainstream purveyors of political thought spoke mainly with pride of the constitutional and political achievements of Georgian England, the opposition writers, no less proud of the heritage, viewed their circumstances with alarm, "stressed the danger to England's ancient heritage and the loss of pristine virtue," studied the processes of decay, and dwelt endlessly on the evidences of corruption they saw about them and the dark future these signs portended. They were the Cassandras of the age, and while their

³ The Western Intellectual Tradition by J. Bronowski and Bruce Mazlish, Harper Torchbooks, 1962; cf., p. 378 - Letter of May 8, 1825, to Henry Lee, the Writings of Thomas Jefferson, ed. by P. L. Ford, 10 vols. (New York 1892-1899), Vol. X, p. 343.

maledictions were used for party purposes, what they said about antique virtue, native liberty, public spirit, and the dangers of luxury and corruption was of general application and was drawn from the common repository of political lore.

They used the commonplaces of the age negatively, critically. They were the enemies of complacency in one of the most complacent eras in England's history. Few of them accepted the Glorious Revolution and the lax political pragmatism that had followed as the solution to the political problems of the time. They refused to believe the transfer of sovereignty from the Crown to the Parliament provided a perfect quarantee that the individual would be protected from the power of the state. Ignoring the complacency and general high level of satisfaction of the time, they called for vigilance against the government of Walpole equal to what their predecessors had shown against the Stuarts. They insisted at a time when government was felt to be less oppressive than it had been for 200 years, that it necessarily was by its very nature hostile to human liberty and happiness; that properly it existed only on the tolerance of the people whose needs it served; and that it could be, and reasonably should be dismissed - overthrown - if it attempted to exceed its proper jurisdiction.

It was the better to maintain this vigil against government that they advocated reforms - political reforms, not social or economic reforms, for these were 18th - not 19th or 20th century - English radicals - beyond anything admissible in Walpole's age or indeed in any age that followed in England until well into the

19th century. At one time or another, one or another of them argued for

- adult manhood suffrage,
- elimination of the rotten borough system and the substitution of regular units of representation systematically related to the distribution of population,
- the binding of representatives to their constituencies by residential requirements and by instructions,
- alterations in the definition of peditious libel so as to permit full freedom of the press to criticize government, and
- the total withdrawal of government control over the practice of religion.

In summary, the 17th century radicals provided a harmonizing force for the other, discordant elements in the political and social thought of the revolutionary generation. Within the framework of these ideas, enlightenment abstractions and common law precedents, covenant theology and classical analogy - Locke and Abraham, Brutus and Coke - could all be brought together into a comprehensive theory of politics. It was in terms of this pattern of ideas and attitudes - originating in the English civil war and carried forward with additions and modifications not on the surface of English political life but in its undercurrents stirred by doctrinaire liberations, disaffected politicians, and religious dissenters - that the colonists responded to the new regulations imposed by England on her American Colonies after 1763.

THE MORAL BASIS OF GOVERNMENT

However angrily they might argue over points of constitutional structure, the American spokesmen agreed unanimously that it would take more than a perfect plan of government to preserve ordered liberty. Something else was needed, some moral principle diffused among the people to strengthen the urge to peaceful obedience and hold the community on an even keel. The wisest of the political philosophers had spoken of three possibilities: fear, honor, virtue.

Which were Americans to choose? The answer, of course, was virtue, for as the author of "The People The Best Governors" observed (in a direct steal from Montesquieu),

"Fear is the principle of a despotic, honour of a kingly, and virtue is the principle of a republican government."

Theophilus Parsons wrote at the end of his great Essex Result,

"The spirit of a free Republican Constitution, or the moving power which should give it action ought to be political virtue, patriotism, and a just regard for the natural rights of mankind."

Samuel Adams spoke for all American thinkers when he reminded James Warren,

"We may look up to armies for our defense, but virtue is our best security. It is not possible that any state should long remain free where virtue is not supremely honored."

Another Bostonian added, "Liberty cannot be preserved if the manners of the people are corrupted, nor absolute monarchy introduced, where they are sincere."

The decade of crisis preceding the Revolution brought new popularity to the cult of virtue that had long held sway in the colonies. Revolutionary thinkers drew heavily on their colonial heritage in proclaiming virtue the essence of freedom. There was a widespread conviction that free government rested on a definite moral basis - a virtuous people. Conversely, the decay of a people's morals signaled the end of liberty and happiness. On no point in the whole range of political theory were Americans more thoroughly in accord. Free government was in large part a problem in practical ethics.

Most of the ceaseless preaching about "the fatal effects of luxury to a free state" was directed at the mother country. This was especially true in the last months before independence, when men like Edward Bancroft began to argue that the "Effeminacy, luxury, and corruption which extend to all orders of men" in England would poison the youthful body of America unless it were to cut short its dependence.

Americans could launch a Republic with some hope of success, for it was the one form of government, John Adams pointed out, "whose principle and foundation is virtue."

In the process of exhorting one another to be brave, frugal, and honest, and of damning England as "that degenerate land," American writers worked out a well-rounded theory of the ethical basis of the government. In particular, they identified the essential public virtues, described the contrasting political fates of good men and bad, and recommended techniques for promoting virtue and discouraging vice.

In addition to approving all recognized Biblical (Jewish and Christian), Roman, and English virtues, Americans singled out several attitudes or traits of special consequence for a free republic:

First, the willingness to act morally without compulsion, to obey the laws of nature as interpreted by reason and the laws of man as established in consent;

Second, the love of liberty, the desire for the adventure and sacrifices of free government rather than the false security of tyranny;

Third, public spirit and patriotism, defined by a native in 1776 for the enlightenment of his fellow Virginians as "a disinterested attachment to the publick [sic] good, exclusive and independent of all private and selfish interest";

Fourth, official incorruptibility, a state of virtue saluted by Jefferson in The Summary View when he reminded George III that "the whole act of government consists in the art of being honest"; and

Fifth, industry and frugality, hard work and plain living, the only path to personal liberty and national independence.

Special attention was devoted to the fifth of these qualities for industry and frugality were essential to the success of America's program of economic resistance.

The cultivation of these great public virtues - moral action without compulsion, love of liberty, public spirit, incorruptibility, and industry and frugality - was considered the first duty of a free people. Men and women who displayed these qualities were

the raw material of liberty. Without such people, in low places as well as high, free government could not possibly exist. The fruits of virtue, for nations as well as men and women, were liberty, prosperity, and happiness; the fruits of corruption and luxury were tyranny, poverty and misery. "And as too great authority intoxicates and poisons kings, so luxury poisons a whole nation," Nathaniel Ames warned.

How to encourage virtue and thus "keep up the spirit of good government?" To this key question of political liberty, Americans replied: (a) hortatory religion; (b) sound education; (c) honest government; and (d) a simple economy.

A) RELIGION - The strain of piety in the philosophy of American life is evident in the appeal of the Declaration of Independence to "Nature's God," "the Creator," and "the Supreme Judge of the World." Few thinking lay people, whether believers like Samuel Adams or skeptics like Franklin, ever doubted the indispensability of organized religion in the preservation of public and private morality.

The practice of religion - and in the minds of the colonists, this meant solely the Christian religion - was as essential to virtue as was the practice of virtue to freedom. Religion helped put order in ordered liberty, especially by emphasizing the dependence of public morality on private virtue. Thus, for example, in 1779, the Massachusetts Convention adopted a "Declaration of Rights" that called for "support and maintenance of public Protestant teachers of piety, religion and morality."

B) EDUCATION - The second means of promoting virtue was public and private education. Like their colonial forbears, the men and women of the Revolution considered the inculcation of morality one of the three or four basic purposes of all instruments of education.

C) HONEST GOVERNMENT - In the Revolutionary mind, natural law and virtue were closely identified. The Massachusetts Constitution reflected the deeply-held conviction that government was important as a promoter of virtues. Not only did it nourish morality indirectly by encouraging and protecting, and perhaps supporting, the instruments of religion and education; it was expected to make a number of direct contributions by:

- a) Passing sumptuary laws "to discourage prodigality and extravagance, vain and expensive amusements and fantastic foppery, and to encourage the opposite virtues;"
- b) Making proclamations from time to time of days "of public humiliation, fasting, and prayer."
- c) Operating itself at the highest level of justice, virtue, and incorruptibility.

Preachers never tired of exhorting legislators and judges to be men of spotless integrity in both public and private dealings. Orators never tired of reminding the public that it should look for virtue before all other qualities in selecting candidates for public office.

D) SIMPLE ECONOMY - One influential group of Revolutionary thinkers asserted that the virtues necessary to maintain free government were more likely to flourish in an agrarian than in a manufacturing or commercial economy.

In sum, just as religion, education, government, and agriculture could raise the level of public and private morality, so morality could strengthen each of these great human undertakings.

It was the business of political philosophers to discover the virtues that lead to free government, and the form of government that leads men and women to virtue.

