







THE TWILIGHT OF
ORTHODOXY IN NEW ENGLAND
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✱✱ PREFACE: Some Terms Defined ✱✱

The words *infidelity*, *orthodoxy*, and *heterodoxy* are of course subject to a number of definitions; in this book they are used essentially as the clergy of the late 1700's would use them. *Infidelity* is used as a term describing the offense of those men who denied the Trinity, the virgin birth and miracles. It does not necessarily become the equivalent of the term *atheist*. *Orthodoxy* is used broadly to designate those who continued to hold the fundamental doctrines of the Christian religion; secondarily, it is used to designate the New England Congregation clergy. *Heterodoxy* carries much the same meaning that has been assigned to *infidelity*. ✱✱✱✱✱✱✱✱✱✱✱✱✱✱✱
When the terms "reason" and "rational" are used to denote the attempt of the human mind to produce a theology without reference to special revelation, i.e., the Bible, they will be enclosed in quotation marks. This is the usage of contemporary theologians. ✱✱✱



The
Twilight
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in
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As the eighteenth century came to a close in New England, the Federalist clergy began to perceive a threat to orthodox religion in the form of Enlightenment ideas and reacted to it. The manner in which they chose to defend orthodoxy, and their attacks on the various manifestations of the Enlightenment (as they, sometimes wrongly, saw them) have had a lasting impact on the course of American Protestantism.



Jedidiah Morse preached a sermon in New North Church, Boston, May 9, 1798, crying, "This day is a day of reviling and blasphemy." He spoke better than he knew. The phantoms of hysteria and shibboleth had been let loose over New England as the Federalist clergy looked about for weapons to defend their crumbling wall. The weapons of pen and pulpit had always been New England's first resource; the period between 1790 and 1807 was no exception. Jedidiah Morse used these weapons with the force and vigor that made the old Jeremiad so feared and admired. "Reason and nature are deified and adored. The Christian religion and its divine and blessed author are not only disbelieved, rejected and condemned, but even abhorred, and efforts made to efface their very name from the earth," he thundered that day in New North Church.¹ * * * * * Enlightenment ideas were no strangers to the American continent in 1790. Cotton Mather had contributed toward a rational spirit in  theology by his cautious employment

of "reason" in his theological works. From the inside, clergymen such as Jonathan Mayhew, Charles Chauncy and Ebenezer Gay quietly opened a rear door to the fortress of Puritan Calvinism, and the forces of Enlightenment theology quietly but steadily stole in.

In 1710, anti-ministerial feeling found little leadership, but it manifested itself among the common people in a reluctance to pay ministers their salaries and in a quiet abhorrence of obtuse, official doctrine.² The fervent Edwardian Calvinism that made up the Great Awakening left many New Englanders largely unaffected, some a little hostile toward the whole endeavor. Some turned aside to the latitudinarian Anglican Church, while others quietly set their own churches in order according to their own convictions. Locke and

Newton were read widely in the colonies, however, and by the middle of the eighteenth century, tolerance had taken the place of much of the bigotry of an earlier age. But as Sidney Mead makes plain, this toleration was extended only to those educated men who 

were willing to keep their beliefs to their own social class.³ * * * * * Mead further suggests that in order to understand the rapid shift from a nominal tolerance of deism to an acrimonious attack upon all infidelity, one must recognize two things.⁴ First, the proponents of deism and the Enlightenment belonged to the aristocratic class by birth or by education. Although such men tended to feel themselves superior to the enthusiastic religion with which they were often allied politically, they were reluctant to see the problem of special revelation versus "rational" religion carried to the common people. Their attitude was paternalistic in its concern over the necessity of leaving the common people with a religious view that insured morality and piety. Benjamin Franklin's statement to a correspondent is a classic of this kind. He wrote, "But think how great a proportion of Mankind consists of weak and ignorant Men and Women, and of inexperienced and inconsiderate Youth of both Sexes, who have need of the

motives of Religion to restrain them from Vice, and support their Virtue...?"⁵ But-tressing Mead's contention, Herbert Morais finds that the vilification suffered by Thomas Paine was the result of his indiscretion in carrying natural religion to the common people and thereby betraying his class.⁶ Mead believes that any position that could feel secure only if it confined its beliefs to its own class held little promise for a future that would flower into the equalitarianism of Jacksonian Democracy. Thomas Paine rushed into forbidden ground by carrying a popularized version of deism to the common people by means of his *Age of Reason*. Elihu Palmer shared the guilt of Paine's treasonous act when he organized deistical societies, published pamphlets, and lectured against orthodox theology. * * * * * Second, Mead finds that it was necessary only for some situation to accentuate the basic conflict between special revelation and the beliefs in the sufficiency of natural "reason" to bring both the sectarian pietist



and the traditionalist into the conflict against the deists. This situation developed when an interpretation of the French Revolution linked infidel thinking with the excesses of its later phases.⁷ When the Jeffersonian Republican party began to emerge and the religious views of Jefferson and other men in the party could be labelled "French" with enough plausibility to stick, the impetus for the great attack upon infidelity was at hand.⁸ * * * * * Thomas Paine's publishing *Age of Reason* in 1796 caused the theological issue between natural and revealed religion to be exposed before the common man. A match was applied to the fuse. Paine noted in this work that every national church or religion manages to establish itself by claiming the mission from God of communicating His will to men. Paine boldly struck at the heart of the matter by finding in church history parallels: the Jews had their Moses, the Christians their Christ and the Turks their Mahomet. He assured his readers that the way to God was open to every man alike. The



THOMAS PAINE

author's motivation was clear: If the church and special revelation could be cleared away by undermining the people's belief in these orthodox bulwarks, then the scene would be set for the true religion as revealed in "CREATION." Paine believed that all corruptions of religion are produced by "revealed religion" and the best antidote to this poison is to admit no revelation but that found in creation. All else, he said, is fable.⁹ When Ethan Allen's *Reason the Only Oracle of Man* (1784) and Joseph Priestley's *History of the Corruption of Christianity* (1782) are added to the list of attacks on orthodoxy, one sees that heterodoxy had by now become explicit and the attack upon the Federalist clergy of New England well-launched. * * * * *

One of the most active agents for Enlightenment theology was Elihu Palmer, a graduate of Dartmouth College and a student of the Rev. John Foster of Pittsfield, Massachusetts. His activities are worth more than a mention because of their extent. Dispossessed of
8  his pulpit at Newtown, New York

and at Philadelphia because of his heretical beliefs, he and a few followers formed in 1791 the "Universal Society." Together with John Fitch (the inventor of the steamboat), he denied the divinity of Christ. Public indignation forced Palmer to flee the city to escape the violence of the populace. In 1793 he was admitted to the bar in Philadelphia and subsequently lost his sight in a yellow fever epidemic. He went to Augusta, Georgia and began preaching deism. A year later, he was active in New York; he lectured on deism and organized deistic societies until his death in April 7, 1806. * * * * *

Palmer found Calvinism with its "wicked God," ever ready to punish the victims of his sovereign will, an absurdity. He believed that the authority of the Bible was founded upon a tissue of prejudices inculcated by the religiously-oriented educational pattern of the day. He concluded that the Bible's obscurity, its conspicuous obscenity and its mixture of contradictions made it unreasonable to attribute such a work to the Deity.¹⁰  9

Palmer regarded the drama of Christian salvation absurd and those doctrines derived from it as giving rise to corrupt institutions which make the Christian tradition the only real evil existing in the world. If this evil with its despotism and superstition could be destroyed, he felt, a secularized education could do the rest. * * * * * Knowledge was at once the banner and the great principle of Palmer's system. Once the "sun of reason" appeared, banishing the mists of churchly ideals and oppressions, then human reason could increase and grow in an eternal day. In sum, Palmer had a boundless faith in mankind and unaided reason.¹¹ * * * Palmer was a Puritan in his strength of conviction; he brought the fervor and determination of that tradition to bear upon the problem of enlightening the people of America. His great aim was to disseminate deism among the lower classes by means of deistic societies and popular pamphlets.

 He was engaged in bringing a new gospel to the multitudes. * * * * *

When Palmer came to New York in 1794, a Deistical Society was formed with the help of the Democratic Society. He was frequently requested to lecture. Palmer's famous Fourth of July oration of 1797 was moved from the Court Room of the city hall because the city fathers found Palmer to be, as the minutes of their meeting show, "an infidel."¹² * * *

Gaining new zest with the triumph of the Republican Party in 1800, Palmer and his group began publishing *The Temple of Reason*, a deistical weekly paper. This periodical was very concerned with disproving the universal deluge and fighting Christian superstition. On the positive side, it promoted the study of astronomy, mathematics and living languages. * * *

(Also in 1800, Philadelphia once again attempted to organize a deistical society which called itself the Theophilanthropists. The city of Newburgh founded one of the most pugnacious of all deistical societies, "The Druid Society." It was founded by apostate Masons who, in the full flush of radicalism derived from the French Revolution, 

found Masonry in America too closely allied to Christianity.¹³) * * * * * Besides Thomas Paine and Elihu Palmer, John Foster, a Universalist preacher, joined the ranks of dissenters from the Christian churches of New England. And John Stewart, called "Walking Stewart," also joined these opposers of orthodox Christianity. His *Opus Maximus*, which appeared in 1803, avowed human perfectability and asserted that man must free himself from all prejudices and customs. Advocating the superiority of natural religion over revealed religion, Stewart further suggested a kind of materialism which later issued into Utilitarianism.¹⁴ From a quasi-materialism Stewart developed his ethical principles now known as the "greatest happiness formula" of British Utilitarianism. * * * The back door to the fortress of Puritan Calvinism had been left open by such men as Jonathan Mayhew and this entrance to the citadel was found to be more subversive to traditional Christianity than the frontal attacks of the American deists. An



example of this subversive attack from within was the movement of Universalism. John Murray of London preached universal salvation at Gloucester in 1779 and at Boston in 1793. Universalist Societies sprang up in New England preaching that everyone should in due time be separated from sin and found fit to enjoy heaven. In 1791 Murray met Hosea Ballou at the New England General Convention of Universalists. Ballou asserted that society could dispense with the doctrines of the deity of Christ and human depravity. Ballou's successful preaching reached New Hampshire, Vermont and western New York. Within a decade the Universalist periodical, *The Gospel Visitant*, appeared. * * * * * Through the back way into the fortress also came Unitarianism, a product of the ancient Socinian heresy which found its way to America via England.¹⁵ King's Chapel, an Episcopalian church in Boston, was persuaded by James Freeman to repudiate the doctrine of the Trinity. Freeman was active in publishing tracts encouraging the



Congregational Churches of New England to turn to Unitarianism. By 1797 several ministers in southern Massachusetts openly preached Unitarianism while others quietly and unobtrusively preached the same doctrine without the objectionable label. Unitarianism offered a powerful antidote to the doctrines of human depravity and original sin. It offered the New England congregations an opportunity to orient their religious aspirations around ethical goals which under this new aegis became completely attainable. ✱ ✱ The rising tempo of assaults on orthodoxy made it clear to Old Lights and New Lights alike that the "Moses and Aaron" alliance of church and state had not been proof against heresy. To their minds, Christianity itself was being undermined. It was time for watchwords to be coined and watchmen to mount the walls of Zion to prepare for the coming battle. Defenders of New England orthodoxy — Timothy Dwight, Lyman Beecher, Jedidiah Morse, David Tappan, and lesser men — seized their pens

and set to work. This was not a time for rational argument and theological hair-splitting; one must lay about him with what was at hand to win in this crisis. But Jedidiah Morse might well have been writing his own epitaph and that of his generation when he made the statement in 1798: "A difference in political and religious opinions, indeed, unhappily exists among us. Party zeal and animosities have, in some instances, marred our happiness. Prejudices have too often blinded the eyes of the mind against... truth." ¹⁶ ✱ ✱ Deism had been infiltrating into the colleges of New England for several decades. During the administration of Ezra Stiles at Yale (1778-1795) it made great headway. The even-tempered, critical analysis that Stiles had applied to Tyndale, Shaftesbury, Hume, and Voltaire was not equal to coping with the threat. When Lyman Beecher entered Yale in 1793, he found that the students of the college were an ungodly lot. Few of the students were not outright sceptics, and wine, gambling, profanity, licentiousness

and rowdiness were common among them. "That was the day of the infidelity of the Tom Paine school. Boys that dressed flax in the barn, as I used to, read Tom Paine and believed him; I read, and fought him all the way. Never had any propensity to infidelity. But most of the class before me were infidels, and called each other Voltaire, Rousseau, D'Alembert, etc., etc.," Beecher wrote in his journal.¹⁷ * * * * * Cambridge was no better than New Haven. An anonymous author in the *Panoplist* wrote of conditions at Harvard in 1792:

When he [the Rev. David Tappan, Hollis Professor of Divinity] was introduced into the Professor's office, the religious character of the university was uncommonly dissolute. For some time the students had received no regular instruction in theology. Books, containing the poison of deism, were eagerly read and the minds of many were corrupted. The tide of fashionable opinion began to run in the channel of infidelity. Few dared to be serious advocates for the cause of Christian Truth.¹⁸

At Dartmouth, in the class of 1799, only one student was known to be a professing Christian.¹⁹ And the College of New Jersey, that center of learning for the Great Awakening, could boast only three or four students who had any pretensions to piety. * * * * * It is clear, also, that infidelity and free thinking were not confined to the colleges. Gustav Koch advances the thesis in his *Republican Religion* that a spirit of lawlessness was rampant in the country. The American Revolution had done more than gain political freedom. The spirit behind the Revolution had ushered in an era of freedom in religion and morality as well.²⁰ Family devotions were being abandoned and the traveler in America would not go far before meeting the sceptic, the deist, and the atheist. The post-Revolutionary period was convulsed by more than the usual upheaval of habits and institutions that follows the conclusion of armed conflict. War morality became habit in many communities. Timothy Dwight thought that drunkenness, lewdness, and habitual fraud

could be explained in terms of the new doctrines introduced by foreigners from France: The new ideas were readily embraced by those wishing to justify their sins.²¹ * * * The broad generalization that the heated controversy that arose in 1794 did not produce subtle distinctions is proven by contemporary sources. The controversy came as the result of the attack upon the foundations of New England theology and, even more, an attack upon the very fabric of society. The conflict could be characterized as an emotional war of propaganda in which intellectual controversy played only a minor role.²² An argument to the effect that immorality resulted from teaching deism, was the redoubt that became the central defense of the orthodox clergy. * Why the orthodox clergy of New England condemned themselves to asserting that infidelity led to vice and immorality, instead of joining the issue and attacking infidelity on its own grounds, is difficult to answer. A tenable explanation may be found in the nature of Enlightenment theology. The

climate of opinion embodying Enlightenment principles was the product of historical evolution in Europe; it can be characterized as the beginnings of modern secular culture. In contrast to the theological orientation which had constituted the regulating principle of society in the preceding period, the Enlightenment brought about a gradual transformation of the genius of the times into a secular pattern. Its basic premises may be traced back to the Renaissance and beyond. These ideas became a part of the intellectual climate of the seventeenth century and achieved maturity in the eighteenth century. * * * * * The animating principle of the Enlightenment was basically that of opposition to the domination of theological and churchly ideals, predicated upon the irreconcilable contradiction between faith and reason. The Enlightenment deplored the interference of the church in the affairs of practical life. Rather, religion was to be given a definite emotional sphere to operate within. The unsparing use of critical analysis and of reforming utilitarianism

in this climate brought into opposition to the truths of theology a body of sanctions derived from "reason" and experience. ✱ ✱

The new movement's metaphysic was derived from ancient tradition and the newly-risen science. There was in this movement a tendency to find the basis of morality in an area not dominated by religion. In fact, the Enlightenment attempted to emancipate all branches of human interest from theology. The Elizabethan concept of the Great Chain of Being furnished an idea that gave new order to the eighteenth century universe. As a result, theories of natural law established their independence first from theology; while natural religion and morality achieved freedom with greater difficulty. ²³ ✱ ✱ ✱ ✱ ✱

The Enlightenment needed only the refutation of the doctrines of hereditary sin and total depravity in order to gain a foothold in the fortress of supernatural revelation. Herbert Morais states that the introduction of English rationalistic works, the philosophy of Newton, the empirical psychology of John

Locke and a certain amount of anti-clerical feeling prepared the way for the beginning of deistic speculation in Colonial and Revolutionary America. The progress of deism, if not of that of the more general influences of the Enlightenment, was slow during the colonial period. Until 1776 deism was still an aristocratic cult confined to a few intellectuals resident in large seacoast cities. ²⁴ ✱ ✱ ✱ ✱

The New England Puritan clergy, however, viewed life from a radically different viewpoint than did those espousing Universalism, Unitarianism and the "rational" principles of the Enlightenment. The New England Puritan clergy held to a philosophy of life which set a higher value upon that which was supernaturally revealed in the scripture rather than the explanation of natural theology which grew out of the climate of the Enlightenment. They viewed with alarm this natural theology which found its *raison d'être* in a God who could be known only from the data of nature as apprehended and systematized by the human mind. In short, the orthodox

metaphysic with its doctrines of sin and redemption was essentially mystical. This is one of the reasons why the issue between the orthodox and the infidel was seldom joined in the post-Revolutionary era. The two philosophies could agree on no common ground suitable for a match of weapons. * * * * *

Timothy Dwight, one of the New England clergy first to mount the walls of Zion, illustrates the point of view of the conservative clergy. In *The Dignity and Excellence of the Gospel* . . . he sets up a list of objections to deism that is almost catechetical in its simplicity. It is roughly the answer of an unconscious pragmatist. He states that infidels lose by rejecting the Bible in enjoyment of taste, in intellectual enjoyment, in their character (morality), in their hopes, and in their end.²⁵

What he implies but does not say is that the drama of redemption cannot be proven by the epistemology of the Enlightenment, but that those who assume this drama of redemption

to be untrue will lose no matter what is
22  at last proven to be the fact:

Were the Gospel as untrue as Infidels assent; they would be no gainers. If it should be true; what will become of them? What must be the feelings of an Infidel on a dying bed, if he is then in possession of sober thought, and solemnly remembers his contempt for the Savior, and his rejection of the offers of life? With what emotions must he enter eternity?²⁶ * * * * *

This cleric of New England found it necessary to give battle on the ground of morality and the fear of an afterlife. Morality was his soundest ground because it could be measured by infidel and orthodox alike. This, then, was to be the battlefield of the New England clergy. The sounds of conflict became louder.²⁷ * *

The principles set forth by Elihu Palmer and Thomas Paine seemed the embodiment of all that was repugnant to the clergy. They saw in the works of these infidels an invitation to vice and, at the same time, an explanation of the excesses of the French Revolution.

English refutations of Thomas Paine's *Age of Reason* were imported and reprinted in the United States. One such refutation was
"Divine Authority of the Holy Scrip-
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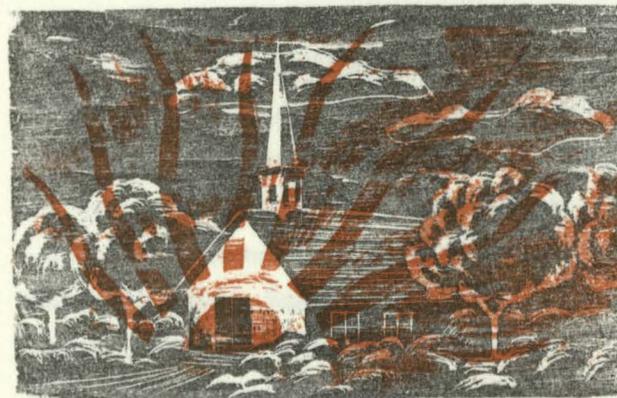
ture," printed in the *Christian Observer*, an Anglican monthly periodical published in London and reprinted in Boston.²⁸ But American answers to Paine were also penned after 1796.²⁹ One of the most formidable answers came from the pen of Uzal Ogden in Newark and was widely read in New England. This work, full of calumny and abuse, was *Antidote to Deism, The Deist Unmasked; or an Ample Refutation of All the Objections of Thomas Paine, against the Christian Religion*.... The work was published in two volumes in Newark in 1795. Ogden did not attempt to "amply refute" the arguments of Paine, but instead tried to find whether the *Age of Reason* indicated most clearly Paine's intellectual weakness, the depravity of his mind, or the impertinence of his life and conduct. It is not surprising that Ogden found Paine lacking on every count.³⁰ Ogden observed that the true reason for Paine's infidelity was that divine revelation cast too harsh a light upon eyes reddened by intemperance and libertine conduct. Ogden asserted that

24 when the restraints of religion were

withdrawn from men and punishment and reward abolished, human laws became insufficient to restrain men. In conclusion, he penned a piece of abuse that must have been admired by the writers of the partisan press of his day:

With a mind besotted with liquor; replete with prejudice against Christianity; grossly ignorant of its nature; and the domination of vice, and encircled by deistical companions, it is probable he will drag out the remainder of his days in infidelity, guilt and wretchedness, and leave the world either in stupid insensibility, or in a state of horror, without the least rational hope of future happiness!³¹

Upon such statements the defense of orthodoxy rested. * * * * *



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The ideological warfare in New England took on a new dimension when the European political situation allowed the belief to grow that an international underground fostering the overthrow of church and state was in operation in America. At first no active opposition existed in New England to those who admired the French Revolution. A nearly uniform enthusiasm was only broken occasionally by a mild assertion of distrust from time to time. Such eminent men as Noah Webster praised the Revolution. This admiration for the French Revolution continued through 1793. The Genet incident may be viewed as stimulating the admiration of New England for the French.³² But a reaction against the Revolution soon developed in the orthodox ranks. * * * *
Jedidiah Morse, minister in the First Church in Charlestown, Massachusetts, and geographer of America, sounded the cry against the French Revolution which was, to his mind, only a part of a widespread scheme to corrupt the civilized world by means of secret societies. In a Fast-Day sermon preached

in Boston, May 9, 1798, he lamented the fact that "Reason and Nature are deified and adored," Christianity is trampled upon, and "Fraud, violence, cruelty, debauchery and the uncontrolled gratification of every corrupt and debasing lust and inclination of the human heart, exist, and are increasing with unaccountable progress."³³ He was dismayed by the abuse that the civil rulers had suffered in recent years in spite of their integrity. Furthermore, the clergy were being systematically slandered: "What can be the design and tendency of all these things? Have we not reason to suspect that there is some secret plan in operation, hostile to true liberty and religion, which requires to be aided by these vile slanders?" Morse answered in the affirmative. "We have reason, my brethren, to fear that this preparatory work is already begun, and made progress among us; and that it is a part of a deep-laid and extensive plan, which had for many years been in operation in Europe."³⁴ * * * *
Morse had taken his cue in 1798 from

a work written by John Robinson, professor at the University of Edinburgh. The title of this book does much to explain how its thesis thrust into the hands of the Federalist clergy a lever that could move the men of New England to repudiate the Enlightenment and all its works. It was *Proofs of a Conspiracy Against all Religion and Governments of Europe Carried on in Secret meetings of Free Masons, Illuminati, and Reading Societies.* * * * * *

The order of the Illuminati was founded by Adam Weishaupt, dean of the faculty of law at the University of Ingolstadt. Wishing to subvert the influences of conservatism in Bavaria, he organized a secret organization and dedicated it to promoting the ideas of the Enlightenment. The society was organized much on the same plan as the Masons and had a similar ritual and symbolism.

When the Bavarian Government began to issue orders to suppress all secret organizations, the papers of the Bavarian Illuminati were seized and on August 16, 1787, the Duke of Bavaria issued his final edict

against the society.³⁵ Several factors contributed towards creating the impression that the order was still functioning in the rest of Europe, however. After the suppression of the Jesuits in 1773, members of that order joined the Rosicrucians. The result was a vigorous attack by the Rosicrucians upon the Illuminati. In Prussia, King Frederick William II warned his neighboring monarchs of the peril that was spreading. The Elector of Saxony set an investigation afoot. Thereafter, the notion that the Illuminati were still active was given the sanction of the German monarchs.³⁶ * * *

Since orthodox Protestants were not disposed to make a distinction between advocates of rationalism and membership in the Illuminati, the plausibility of the assumption that organized infidelity was abroad in the world was scarcely questioned.³⁷ When the German Union was discovered to have the aim of promoting a rational approach toward religion, the orthodox of Europe found a connection between its activities and those of the Illuminati. Much more relevant to the

New England situation, however, was the fact that in Europe many men were defending the thesis that the French Revolution had its inception in the meetings of the Illuminati. Vernon Stauffer finds that this preposterous explanation of the inception of the French Revolution was a favorite with German and French writers of the "special-pleader type."³⁸ Both Robinson and Augustin Barruel, a Jesuit driven from France, advanced this thesis. Stauffer writes, "At every point this fantastic exposition suffered the fatal defect of a lack of historical proof. Even the specific assertions of its inventors, which were most necessary to their hypothesis, were disproved by the facts brought to light by more cautious and unbiased investigators who followed."³⁹ The truth of the matter was that the religious world was suffering from a bad case of nerves at the end of the eighteenth century. * * * One must constantly keep in mind that most of the orthodox clergy were firm supporters of the Federalist Party and the movement  to maintain the *status quo* in society.

The sermons of the period must be read in this light, for they always contained assertions that implied a defense of a much broader range of institutions than just orthodoxy. Jedidiah Morse's sermon on the Fast Day, May 9, 1798, went beyond the ordinary political sermon that so disgusted the Democratic Press of the day: It introduced the Illuminati scare to America. Morse assured his audience in Boston that branches of the Bavarian order were already established in America, that Thomas Paine's *Age of Reason* was one of its results, and that Democratic Societies were spreading the principles of Illuminism through the land. The thesis that Illuminism was responsible for the French Revolution became American property as a consequence of this sermon. All the fury that conservatives could concentrate upon the men who changed the French Revolution into a bloodbath now turned against the Democratic Societies and deist organizations of America. This new weapon was welcomed by the forces of religious and political conservatism. 

Morse concluded his Fast Day Sermon:

... We have reason to tremble for the safety of our political, as well as our religious ark. Attempts are making, and are openly, as well as secretly, conducted, to undermine the foundations of both. In this situation of things, our duty is plain, and lies within short compass.⁴⁰ * * * * *

The sound of Morse's cannon was soon nearly drowned out by cannonading from other sources. The Illuminati were new and unfamiliar to New England and their exposure made little noise as compared to the thunder which resulted when the X.Y.Z. dispatches were printed in the newspapers.⁴¹ Public assemblies were held to disarm the dispatches and numbers of petitions and addresses were presented to the President of the United States. National patriotism was greatly enflamed. For a time, Morse's cannon sounded like a popgun, but a formidable echo was soon heard. Timothy Dwight and David Tappan saw the danger and took up positions to support him. Morse's simplified interpretation was picked up by
32  others and sermons bristled with dark

suspensions of the activities of the Illuminati. It is probable, Stauffer suggests, that there was not a single Federalist leader in America who was not convinced that French ministers and secret agents were in league with important representatives of the Democratic Party.⁴² * Timothy Dwight continued the discussion of Illuminism in his fourth of July address of 1798. He made it clear that the Illuminati were the cause of the political and spiritual ills of the world. Dwight urged the people of Connecticut to be doubly on their guard. He warned, in one extravagant passage, that the daughters of Connecticut were in danger of becoming the concubines of the Illuminati. "Justice, truth, kindness, piety, and moral obligation universally have been, not merely trodden under foot...but ridiculed, spurned, and insulted, as the childish bugbears of drivelling idiocy. Chastity and decency have been alike turned out of doors; and shame and pollution called out of their dens to the hall of distinction and the chair of
state...."⁴³ * * * * *  33

The Anniversary Thanksgiving in Massachusetts in the latter part of November, 1798, offered fresh opportunities for Jedidiah Morse to further the attack on Illuminism. Although Massachusetts had been blessed with "Constitutions of Civil Government," he preached, these institutions were threatened. The sources of harm were the demoralization of the people in general, their selfish spirit evidenced in their lust for riches, the spread of infidel and atheistical principles, extravagances and dissipation and a spirit of insubordination to civil authority.⁴⁴ The tone of this sermon indicates that Morse was prepared to defend political as well as religious conservatism. * * * * *

It does not take much historical perspicuity to apprehend the determination of Morse and Dwight and their Federalist congregations to maintain the *status quo*. Religion and politics were not generally separated in the public mind. The evil of infidelity was inextricably connected with the rising Republican party. Charles

 Beard overstated the case for an economic link between the clergy and the rich

merchant-Federalist when he wrote that "the clergy of New England, in the main, saw eye to eye with the wealthy occupants of the pews, in the matter of Jeffersonian candidature In many places, the clergymen were closely related to the dominant commercial and trading families."⁴⁵ Although this was true, his notion that the assault of the clergy upon the Republican party was due solely to an economic link is unconvincing. The opposition of the clergy went much deeper than this. Federalism was a part of an even broader philosophy than merely a political set of ideals. The Federalist clergy were fighting a movement on religious, social and philosophical as well as political fronts. * * * * *

The Republican Party was a menace to the Federalists around 1800 and, in spite of the opposition of the Federalist clergy, the Republican Party was growing in New England. It gained several seats in the Connecticut legislature and the Republican vote in Connecticut in 1800 was over three thousand. Although the Federalists in Massachusetts

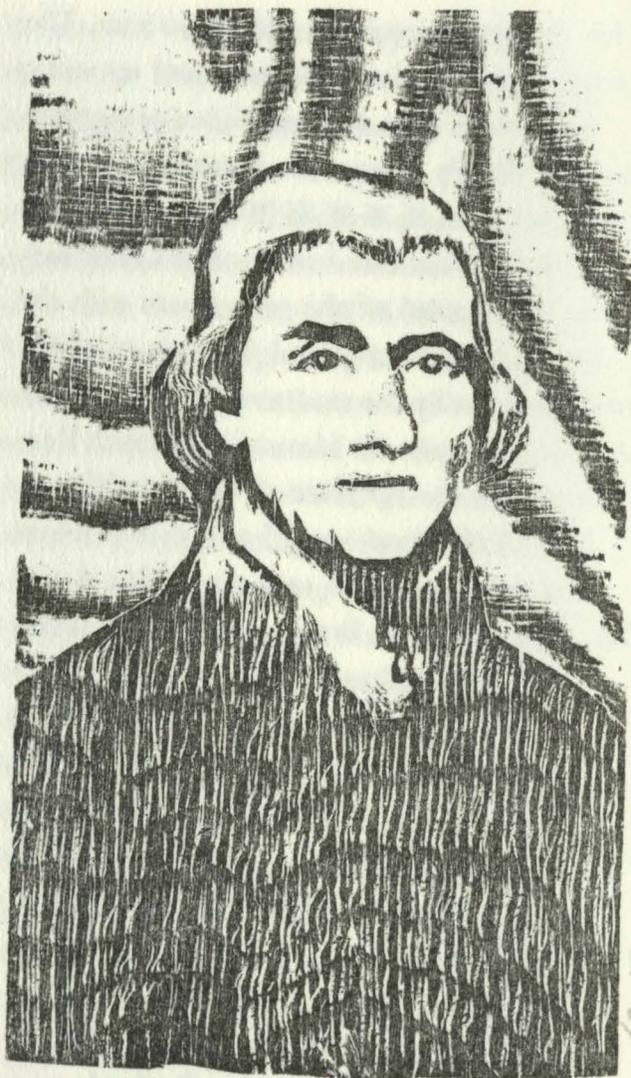
elected Caleb Strong in 1800, Gerry polled 17,000 votes for the Republicans. The Federalist gain in voting strength was 76.8% while the Republicans increased 146.5%.⁴⁶ * * * The Federalists' attempt to stop their opponents by exploiting anti-French and anti-infidel feelings and denouncing Jeffersonian Republicanism as an extension of the French Jacobins was notably unsuccessful. The Republicans in New England gained much support because they favored the disestablishment of the Congregational Church and therefore attracted the sectarians to their party.⁴⁷ The election of 1800 in which the "Jacobin" Jefferson was elected caused the Federalist clergy of Connecticut to find solace only in the doleful thought that "the Lord reigneth."⁴⁸ * * * The attempt to associate Republicans with Jacobins was given further impetus by Jedidiah Morse's sermon delivered on November 29, 1798. Morse rejoiced in the fact that the nation had balked the plans of "wicked, artful men" to undermine the foundations of religion, overthrow altars, and deprive

the world of the benign influence of the church by secret and systematic means.⁴⁹ Earlier, in 1795, Morse had established the Federalist idea that the leaders of the nation were indispensable and above attack. Morse had likened George Washington to Moses leading his people out of danger. He found attacks upon the noble officers of government scandalous.⁵⁰ * * * His later attack on the Jacobins, in November, 1798, differed from the old plan of the Jeremiad and the defense of the *status quo*, in that it was published together with an astonishing array of supplementary material and appendices. Note F contained the startling information:

The Jacobin Clubs, instituted by Genet, were a formidable engine for the accomplishment of the designs of France to subjugate and govern this country. They started into existence, by a kind of magic influence, in all parts of the United States, from Georgia to New Hampshire; and being linked together by correspondence, by constitutional ties, and, if I have been correctly informed, by oaths, after the manner of the societies of the Illuminati in Europe, they acted upon one plan, in concert, and with an ultimate reference to the same grand objects.⁵¹ * * *

A survey of the contemporary newspapers shows that they also played an important part in setting out the absurd charges concerning Illuminism. Some saw danger in the Illuminati while others opened their columns to men who ridiculed the idea. A few remained discreetly silent over the matter.⁵² * * * * * Two newspapers originating in Philadelphia but having an extensive influence in New England were *Porcupine's Gazette* and *The Aurora General Advertiser*. William Cobbett, the Federalist editor of *Porcupine's Gazette*, found Morse's sermons a timely warning and the proofs of a conspiracy in Robinson's work convincing. On the other side, Benjamin Franklin Bache, editor of the *Aurora*, found the conjecture built on falsehood. He theorized that Jedidiah Morse found Robinson so convincing because the minister at Charlestown had received his doctor's degree from Glasgow just as Robinson had. It was a case of two alumni attempting to reflect credit upon each other at the expense of America.⁵³ Meanwhile the presses of New England ground out fuel

for the controversy at a prodigious rate. The accusations of Morse did not stand up under the critical gaze of Republican newspapers and eventually Morse was ignominiously vanquished. * * * * * The Federalists who had identified their success and control of the government with the health of the nation had found it expedient to declare war by the enactment of the Sedition Act of 1798 upon the ideas of the French Revolution and the agitation of the Republicans. These Federalists remembered that Jefferson had associated with eminent infidels during his five-year stay in France. Jefferson's caution in public utterance did not enable him to keep his name from being linked with the deists and their views. This assumed link made plausible the view that Jefferson was part of the world-wide plot. * * * * * The political possibilities to be found in linking the Republican Party with Jacobinism were immense. The political campaign of 1800 was carried out on these grounds in New England. Most of the New England



THOMAS JEFFERSON in 1800

clergy believed that opposition to Federalism and to the Congregational Church was equivalent to advocating the abrogation of all government and all religion. There were, however, voices raised in opposition to this view. In 1799, the Rev. John Coses Ogden, formerly of New Hampshire, published in Philadelphia a pamphlet entitled, *A View of the New England Illuminati: Who Are Indefatigably Engaged in Destroying the Religion and Government of the United States; Under a Feigned Regard for Their Safety and Under an Impious Abuse of True Religion*. Ogden was ready to grant that there were Illuminati Societies, but they were nothing more than the monthly meetings of the New England clergy at which mysterious sentiments about the origin of deism and scepticism were discussed. Ogden attributed to Timothy Dwight, president of Yale, the position of head of the New England secret society. Since the election of 1800 was carried on amongst vituperation and calumny, this break in the ranks was welcomed immediately by the Republicans.⁵⁴ * * *

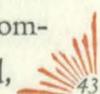


On the Republican side, Abraham Bishop, a graduate of Yale, delivered a resounding counterblast to the charges of the Federalist clergy in September, 1800. He asserted that there was not a single atheist or modern philosopher among the Republican Party. He protested that people ought to be infinitely more concerned to wrest the protection of religion from those who wish to use it for political purposes.⁵⁵ Bishop further stated that it was by these very calumnies against deism and Illuminism that people were lead into doubt and questioning. It was clear that the word "Illuminati" had lost all exact meaning and had become a shibboleth for the use of politicians.⁵⁶ Bishop's case against the New England clergy had much merit for all its hyperbole. ✱ The really telling blows against infidelity were made, not by the political attacks of respectable Congregationalists or Episcopalians, but by the left-wing of the protestant churches in America. The New Divinity Congregationalists, the Methodists, the Baptists, and the Presbyterians fought at close quarters



with infidelity. Apart from some New Congregationalists, the ministers of these humbler sectarian congregations were not interested in politics as a means of maintaining the *status quo*.⁵⁷ However, the members of the sectarian churches were often incidentally members of the Republican Party because of its active policy for disestablishment. ✱ ✱ ✱ ✱ ✱ ✱ The non-theological orientation of the sectarian clergy made them effective messengers to the common people on the frontiers and in the back-country settlements of New England.

Already in 1799 the beginning of a revival among the New Divinity Congregationalists was emerging in Connecticut.⁵⁸ The well-educated often looked upon this new revival with disgust, but the Old Divinity Group was weakened internally by Unitarianism and Universalism. Timothy Dwight, although a Federalist to the core, belonged to the New Divinity Group and was largely responsible for the revival that swept Yale in 1802. Tappan performed a similar service at Harvard. Commenting on the situation at Harvard,



the *Panoplist* said, "In the course of a few years the triumphant air of infidelity disappeared, and it became customary in all public performances, to speak of Christianity in terms of respect and veneration."⁵⁹ Aided by the revivalistic temper of the day, Tappan spoke to his students in a way that was "didactic yet persuasive, profound and yet pathetic."⁶⁰ ✱ ✱ The attack upon irreligious forces in society took on a new tone with the advent of the new revivals. Religious propaganda was addressed to the individual in intimate terms: it was not addressed to a society or a group of men. A letter in the *Panoplist* conveys some of the evangelistic feeling rampant in New England. Addressing the sinner, the author pleads, "Turn away from false lights that allure you, and take heed to the Bible The Bible can solve all your doubts, answer all your inquiries, relieve all your difficulties, and guide your feet, which have hitherto greatly wandered, in the way to glory."⁶¹ Several kinds of argu-

 44  ments were used in the *Panoplist* to assure its readers that orthodoxy was superior

to the current infidelity. "Letters to a brother, a young man of fashion; On the Immutability of religion," was one of the more successful attempts to fight infidelity. This column ran serially during 1805. The series offers an excellent insight into the kind of argument the new revivalism was using. An older brother corresponds with his younger brother who finds the orthodox religion is only suitable for an age just removed from superstition and popery. Religion should change from age to age with man's circumstance; the present age is an "enlightened, polished age," the young man declares in one serial installment. The older brother is much given to quoting Scripture to refute this argument and to support his own position. Doctrines come from an immutable God and there is but one truth, he writes. This truth is that all men must repent to be saved. Our primitive forefathers had a proof for their doctrines in the Bible, and the Bible is where the proof still is.

Adam's fall and the hope of salvation through the redeemer, Christ, have not  45

changed. The evidence of man's sin has not changed.⁶² In a later issue of the *Panoplist*, the older brother outlines the necessity of "regeneration by divine power."⁶³ * * * * * Another set of articles assumes a more philosophical tone. These pieces presume to defend the Biblical concept of the universal deluge, a case of meeting the deists on their own ground, for this was a favorite point of attack for Paine and Palmer. The rebuttal, however, is made up largely of quoted Scripture, a maneuver not designed to refute a deist convincingly.⁶⁴ * The check in the progress of deism was brought about by the increasing orthodoxy coming out of the new revival. Religious societies, Bible associations, missionary societies, religious periodicals and educational institutions were established to strengthen the line of battle. After 1800, Connecticut, Massachusetts, New Hampshire and Vermont maintained missionary activities aimed at the West and South. The Missionary Society of Connecticut reported a fund of \$15,000 for these activities in 1807. * * * * *



Religious periodicals were founded for the purpose of defending divine revelation and reporting the successful revivals. The revival in Connecticut was reported by *The Connecticut Evangelical Magazine*. In the early 1800's the *Evangelical Magazine* described the awakenings at Torrington, West Simsbury, Somers, and Northampton.⁶⁵ The accounts indicate that the doctrinal cast of these revivals was strictly Edwardian Calvinism. The most popular and successful of these periodicals was *The Panoplist*, and *Missionary Magazine United*, which came out under the aegis of Friends to Evangelical Truth, a society patronized by the missionary societies of Massachusetts, Hampshire, Maine, Berkshire and Rhode Island. The magazine attained a circulation of seven thousand in 1809.⁶⁶ Its columns were open to anyone of "sound" theological background and were not limited to any one denomination. *The Panoplist* assailed those who with "specious and subtle philosophy, by secret marches, were pouring in like a flood upon the Christian world."⁶⁷ Both the Baptist and the



Presbyterian Assemblies issued journals which printed vigorous attacks upon infidelity and deism. Bible and tract societies also rushed to the field of battle. * * * * * No historian of this period is willing to give the laurel of victory to the Federalist clergy.⁶⁸ It is important to note that the issue between faith and reason which constituted the real differences between deist and orthodox was all but lost in the excitement of the political and religious controversy. The standard argument against infidelity became moral and political. The argument that infidelity produced a tendency toward immorality was commonplace. It was repeated faithfully with a monotonous regularity in the periodical literature and pulpit utterances between 1790 and 1807. Historians generally agree that the pietism and New Divinity revivalism sweeping the country in the early nineteenth century drowned the militant deism that had been making progress in earlier decades.⁶⁹ * * * * *

 Students of the period are equally convinced that it was the victorious sectarian

movement that furnished many of the members of the Republican Party in New England. The Federalist clergy saw the Republican Party as a sinister agent of French Jacobinism, but the truth of the matter was that the Presbyterian, Baptist, and Methodist Republicans were the backbone of the attack upon infidelity. While the pietistic sectarians rejected the "rationalistic" religious convictions of such eminent Republicans as Thomas Jefferson, they retained many of the same liberal, social and political views. When the pietists allied themselves with the orthodox of New England in the New Revivalism that swept over the land after 1800, they clung to their Republican ideals.⁷⁰ It is significant that in 1800 Jefferson pointed with pride to the spread of the revival as a refutation of the charge that Republicanism meant the beginning of a new age of "rationalism." When the Federalist reply to infidelity included an attack upon a supposedly Jacobin Republican Party, the Federalists made it plain that they were concerned with preventing 

liberalism in social institutions as much as with "rationalism" in theology. ❀❀❀❀❀
Here in short is what happened in New England after the Revolution. Gustav Koch, Vernon Stauffer and Herbert Morais are content to trace the main influences of infidelity in America and to attempt to clarify the roles of Republican and Federalist. Sidney Mead, perhaps because of his theological training and his profession as church historian, probes deeper into the results of the conflict between the two. He suggests that the underlying schizophrenia of nineteenth century popular religion is explained by the weapons the opponents of the Enlightenment theology chose at this time. Because Protestants rejected the possibility of a rational and theological attack upon deism and chose the murky tactic of reducing intellectual questions to moral ones, American Protestantism left the job unfinished. ❀❀❀
Maligning character was not the solution to the problem of resolving the relationship of a church to other churches or of the church
 to civil government. The theoretical

foundations of the present system of the separation of church and state still rest upon James Madison's *Memorial and Remonstrance on the Religious Rights of Man* of 1784 and Thomas Jefferson's *An Act for Establishing Religious Freedom* written in 1779. The affiliation of traditionalism and sectarian-pietism against "rationalism" during the revolutionary period gained a tremendous victory in the popular arena, but gave its peculiar strengths and weaknesses to all later American Protestantism.⁷¹ ❀❀❀❀❀❀

※ NOTES ※

1. Jedidiah Morse, *A Sermon Delivered at the New North Church in Boston ... May 9, 1798...* (Boston: Samuel Hall, 1798), 17-18.
2. Perry Miller, *The New England Mind from Colony to Province* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1953), 448-9. See also Gustav A. Koch, *Republican Religion: The American Revolution and the Cult of Reason*, Studies in Religion and Culture, American Religion Series VII (New York: Holt, 1953), 194-6.
3. Sidney E. Mead, "American Protestantism During the Revolutionary Epoch," *Church History*, XXII (December, 1953), 350.
4. *Ibid.*, 283-4.
5. Albert H. Smyth, ed., *The Writings of Benjamin Franklin* (New York: Macmillan, 1906), IX, 521.
6. Herbert M. Morais, *Deism in Eighteenth Century America*, Studies in History, Economics and Public Law, No. 397 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1934), 121.
7. Mead, "American Protestantism," 283-4.

8. Koch, *Republican Religion*, 262-4. See also, Mead, "American Protestantism," 284; Charles D. Hazen, "The French Revolution as Seen by the Americans of the Eighteenth Century," *Annual Report of the American Historical Association* (1895), 453-66; Vernon Stauffer, *New England and the Bavarian Illuminati*, *Studies in History, Economics and Public Law*, No. 191 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1918), 83-94; Merle Curti, *Growth of American Thought*, 2nd ed. (New York: Harpers, 1951), 199; Anson P. Stokes, *Church and State in the United States* (New York: Harpers, 1950), I, 266-7.
9. Arthur W. Peach, ed., *Selections from the Works of Thomas Paine*, American Authors Series (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1928), 232. There is a fine summary of the writings of Thomas Paine in the introduction of Harry H. Clark, ed., *Thomas Paine*, American Writers Series (New York: American Book Co., 1944), xi-xxxiii.
10. Koch, *Republican Religion*, 58-61.
11. *Ibid.*, 78-87.
12. *Ibid.*, 81.

13. *Ibid.*, 118.
14. *Ibid.*, 161.
15. John A. Krout and Dixon R. Fox, *The Completion of Independence: 1790-1830*, A History of American Life, V. (New York: Macmillan, 1944), 168. The term Socinianism is used here to describe the tenets associated with Faustus Socinus (1539-1604) who denied the divinity of Christ and offered rationalistic explanations of sin, salvation and regeneration.
16. Jedidiah Morse, *A Sermon Preached at Charlestown, November 29, 1798...* (Boston: Samuel Hall, 1798), p. 9.
17. Charles Beecher, Ed., *Autobiography, Correspondence, Etc., of Lyman Beecher* (New York: Harper, 1865), I, 43.
18. *The Panoplist, and Missionary Magazine United* (Boston), Sept., 1805, 137.
19. Koch, *Republican Religion*, 243-7.
20. *Ibid.*, 241-7. See also J. Franklin Jameson, *The American Revolution Considered as a Social Movement* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1929), 133-4.

21. Koch, *Republican Religion*, 246-7.
22. Mead, "American Protestantism," 288.
23. Edwin A. Burtt, *The Metaphysical Foundations of Modern Science* (New York: The Humanities Press, 1951), 23-7.
24. Morais, *Deism*, 16-7.
25. Timothy Dwight, *The Dignity and Excellence of the Gospel...* (New York: J. Seymour, 1812), 23.
26. *Ibid.*, 25-6.
27. Mead, "American Protestantism," 289.
28. *The Christian Observer* (Boston), July, 1802, 421-5.
29. Koch, *Republican Religion*, 247.
30. *Ibid.*, 248.
31. Uzal Ogden, *Antidote to Deism...* (Newark: John Woods, 1795), II, 270.
32. Hazen, "The French Revolution," 456-64.
33. Morse, *Sermon of May 9th, 1798*, 18.
34. *Ibid.*, 20.
35. Stauffer, *Illuminati*, 182-3.
36. *Ibid.*, 189.
37. *Ibid.*, 189-90. See Morse's defense of

- Robinson in *The Independent Chronicle and Universal Advertiser* (Boston), May 31, 1798.
38. *Ibid.*, 196-7.
39. *Ibid.*, 197.
40. Morse, *Sermon of May 9th, 1798*, 25.
41. Stauffer, *Illuminati*, 239.
42. *Ibid.*, 126-8.
43. Timothy Dwight, *The Duty of Americans, at the Present Crisis...* (New Haven: Thomas and Samuel Green, 1798), 250-1.
44. Morse, *Sermon of November 29, 1798*, 10-14.
45. Charles A. Beard, *Economic Origins of Jeffersonian Democracy* (N.Y.: Macmillan: 1927), 363.
46. Joseph F. Thorning, *Religious Liberty in Transition* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America, 1931), 51-2.
47. Evarts B. Greene, *Religion and the State: the Making and Testing of an American Tradition* (New York: New York University Press, 1941), 109. See also, John L. Diman, "Religion in America, 1776-1876," *North American Review*, CXXII (January, 1876), 1-47. William W. Sweet agrees with this conclusion in his, "Natural and Religious

Liberty in America," *Journal of Religion*, XXV (January, 1945), 54.

48. Charles R. Keller, *The Second Great Awakening in Connecticut* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1942), 26,

49. Morse, *Sermon of November 29, 1798*, 20-22.

50. Morse, *A Sermon Delivered at Charlestown . . . February 19, 1795 . . .* (Boston: Samuel Hall, 1795), 5-9.

51. *Ibid.*, 67. Proof of this fear in New England is also to be found in letters to the editor of *The Columbian Centinel* (Boston), March 12, 1800.

52. Stauffer, *Illuminati*, 276.

53. *Ibid.*, 285-7.

54. Koch, *Republican Religion*, 260.

55. *Ibid.*, 262.

56. Stauffer, *Illuminati*, 360.

57. "New Divinity" is a term used here to describe the aggressive, vigorous movement associated with neo-Edwardian theology which sprang into being in 1797. See Keller, *The Second Great Awakening*, 36-7.

58. Koch, *Republican Religion*, 275-80. For the missionary activities of the Congregational Church, see Williston Walker, *A History of the Congregational Churches in the United States* (New York: The Christian Literature Co., 1894), 320-2. For the reaction of the "respectable" religious men to the revivals, see James M. Buckley, *A History of Methodists in the United States* (New York: The Christian Literature Co., 1896), 286-7.

59. *Panoplist*, Sept. 1805, 139.

60. *Ibid.*, 139-40.

61. *Ibid.*, 150.

62. *Ibid.*, June, 1805, 13-16.

63. *Ibid.*, July, 1805, 61-5.

64. *Ibid.*, Jan., 1805, 343-7.

65. *The Connecticut Evangelical Magazine* (Hartford), July, 1805, 6, 21-2, 25; August, 1800, 62. See also Keller, *Second Great Awakening*, 37-45.

66. Morais, *Deism*, 175. See William W. Sweet, *The Story of Religions in America* (New York: Harper, 1930), 307-9.

67. Preface of the first issue of *The Panoplist*, June, 1805, i-v.
68. Mead, "American Protestantism," 290. Koch, *Republican Religion*, 276-80.
69. Morais, *Deism*, 140-1; Mead, "American Protestantism," 290; Koch, *Republican Religion*, 281-3.
70. Mead, "American Protestantism," 291, and Morais, *Deism*, 144-5.
71. *Ibid.*, 293-4.

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