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**Frank Lambert: The Founding Fathers and the Place of Religion in America**

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## ❖ Introduction ❖

IN 1639, a group of New England Puritans drafted a constitution affirming their faith in God and their intention to organize a Christian Nation. Delegates from the towns of Windsor, Hartford, and Wethersfield drew up the Fundamental Orders of Connecticut, which made clear that their government rested on divine authority and pursued godly purposes. The opening lines express the framers' trust in God and their dependence on his guidance: "Forasmuch as it hath pleased the All-mighty God by the wise disposition of his divyne providence so to Order and dispose of things, . . . [and] well knowing where a people are gathered together the word of God requires that to mayntayne the peace and vnion of such a people there should be an orderly and decent Government established according to God, to order and dispose of the affayres of the people." Moreover, the aim of the government so instituted was religious: "to mayntayne and preseeare the liberty and purity of the gospell of our Lord Jesus which we now professe, as also the disciplyne of the Churches, which according to the truth of the said gospell is now practised amongst vs."<sup>1</sup> Like their neighbors in Massachusetts Bay, the Connecticut Puritans determined to plant a "Christian Common-wealth," what Governor John Winthrop hoped would become a "City upon a Hill" that would inspire believers everywhere as a model Christian Nation.<sup>2</sup>

Those Puritan Fathers exemplify two of the most enduring views of colonial America: America as a haven of religious freedom, and America as a Christian Nation. First, the Puritan settlers had fled England, where Archbishop William Laud had persecuted them because they refused to subscribe to religious beliefs and practices that they deemed to be unscriptural. Now in the American wilderness, they were free to worship according to the dictates of their consciences, governed only by the rule of God's word. And, second, those Puritan Fathers organized a Christian State. They established their Congregational churches as the official reli-

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gion of Connecticut, supported by tax revenues and defended by the coercive arm of government. The churches defined “heretics,” and the state punished them, even to the point of executing those found guilty of “direct, express, presumptuous, or high-minded blasphemy.” Moreover, citizenship in the state was directly tied to one’s religious faith. The authors of the Fundamental Orders meant for only godly Christians to rule, an intention embodied in the oath of the governor, which committed the chief magistrate to govern “according to the rule of the word of God.”<sup>3</sup>

One hundred and fifty years later, George Washington took another oath, swearing to “faithfully execute the office of the President of the United States” and pledging to the best of his ability to “preserve, protect and defend the Constitution of the United States.” The constitution that he swore to uphold was the work of another group of America’s progenitors, commonly known as the “Founding Fathers,” who in 1787 drafted a constitution for the new nation. But unlike the work of the Puritan Fathers, the federal constitution made no reference whatever to God or divine providence, citing as its sole authority “the people of the United States.” Further, its stated purposes were secular, political ends: “to form a more perfect Union, establish Justice, insure domestic Tranquility, provide for the common defence, promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty.” Instead of building a “Christian Commonwealth,” the supreme law of the land established a secular state. The opening clause of its first amendment introduced the radical notion that the state had no voice concerning matters of conscience: “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion or prohibiting the free exercise thereof.”<sup>4</sup> In debating the language of that amendment, the first House of Representatives rejected a Senate proposal that would have made possible the establishment of the Christian religion or of some aspect of Christian orthodoxy.<sup>5</sup> There would be no Church of the United States. Nor would America represent itself to the world as a Christian Republic.

Just as 1639 represents a defining moment in Americans’ religious heritage, so does 1787. While the Puritan Fathers gave us the symbols of America as haven of religious freedom and America as a Christian Nation, the Founding Fathers provided enduring legacies that define the place and role of religion in American society. Their bequests were the ideas of separation of church and state and the free exercise of religion ex-

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tended to people of all faiths or no faith. Their achievement can be understood only against the backdrop of the American Revolution. Clearly, they were architects of a political revolution, throwing off constitutional monarchy for a democratic republic. But they were also framers of a religious revolution, rejecting the idea of an established or official religion, which was the organizing principle informing church-state relations in the vast majority of countries, as indeed it had been in most of the American colonies. Never before had there been such a total separation of religious and political institutions. But the ban on establishment was not the Founders' only legacy in church-state matters. Regarding religion as a natural right that the governed never surrendered to government, they prohibited any interference in citizens' rights to the free exercise of religion.

These two defining moments in American history, 1639 and 1787, frame the central question of this book: How did the Puritan Fathers erecting their "City upon a Hill" transform into the Founding Fathers drawing a distinct line between church and state? The answer lies in the changing meaning of freedom in the concept of freedom of religion. To the Puritans who fled persecution, Massachusetts Bay represented the freedom to practice without interference the one true faith, which they based solely on the Bible, correctly interpreted. Thus religious freedom in the "City upon a Hill" meant freedom from error, with church and state, though separate, working together to support and protect the one true faith. Those who believed differently were free to go elsewhere and sometimes compelled to do so. The Founding Fathers had a radically different conception of religious freedom. Influenced by the Enlightenment, they had great confidence in the individual's ability to understand the world and its most fundamental laws through the exercise of his or her reason. To them, true religion was not something handed down by a church or contained in the Bible but rather was to be found through free rational inquiry. Drawing on radical Whig ideology, a body of thought whose principal concern was expanded liberties, the framers sought to secure their idea of religious freedom by barring any alliance between church and state.

The radical change in the meaning of religious freedom greatly concerned many in 1787. William Williams of Connecticut was appalled when he first read a draft of the proposed United States Constitution.

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The merchant and delegate to the Connecticut Ratifying Convention expected to see in the document's preface language similar to that found in the Fundamental Orders, some acknowledgment that the new republic rested on a Christian foundation and depended upon divine providence. Instead he saw no hint of the nation's religious heritage: no mention of God, no appeal to divine guidance, no pledge to build a godly society. Williams thought that the Preamble ought at least to express "*a firm belief of the being and perfections of the one living and true God, the creator and supreme Governour of the world.*" To Williams, the period between 1639 and 1787 represented decline, at least in the important matters of personal piety and public morality. He wanted the United States Constitution to include a religious test for officeholders that would "require an explicit acknowledgment of the being of a God, his perfections and his providence."<sup>6</sup> After all, the Connecticut Constitution, as well as those of most of the states, called for such a test.

Unlike Williams, James Madison applauded the new federal constitution for its contribution to religious life in the new republic. To him, it safeguarded religious freedom for all citizens by eliminating the government's voice in ecclesiastical matters. He regarded religion as a "natural right" that the governed never surrender to their governors. Further, he thought that "true" religion would triumph by its own merits if its advocates were free to pursue it without coercion. To Madison, "the separation between Religion & Govt in the Constitution of the United States" was the surest guarantee of "the sacred principle of religious liberty."<sup>7</sup> History was filled with examples of unholy alliances between church and state as religious and political leaders sought to curry each other's favor for their own selfish ends. Indeed, the Puritan Fathers themselves had fled England when Charles I's strict enforcement of religious conformity violated the Puritans' liberty of conscience. While Williams was primarily worried about America as a "Christian Nation," Madison was more concerned about America as a haven of religious liberty.<sup>8</sup>

The same questions that Williams and Madison raised in the late eighteenth century continue to interest Americans today, sometimes expressed with great passion. During the last two decades of the twentieth century and continuing into the twenty-first, Americans have engaged in a culture war that informs much of the country's political discourse in the new millennium. On one side of the debate are those who insist that

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America has been since its conception a “Christian Nation,” and that somewhere along the way, as such it has lost its bearings. They blame “liberals” for not only turning their backs on the country’s religious heritage but openly attacking those who embrace “traditional” Christian values.<sup>9</sup> To support their claims, these conservatives often conflate the planters—such as the New England Puritans and the Chesapeake Anglicans—and the Founders into one set of forefathers who came to America to plant “true” Christianity and to practice it in freedom. Further, they insist that the Founders never intended a separation of church and state, arguing that at most the First Amendment aimed at preventing Congress from favoring any single sect. In searching the historical record, these partisans seek or invent a “usable past” that supports their positions. For example, in asserting that early America was a Christian Nation, they gloss over the fact that many Americans, especially Native Americans and African Americans, were non-Christians, and they fail to recognize the deep-seated differences among Christians, so deep that in some instances one sect questioned whether another was Christian at all.

Partisans on the other side of the culture war also consult the nation’s Founders for a “usable past” of their own. They, too, tend to conflate the two sets of progenitors by making both the Founding and the Planting Fathers impassioned champions of a religious freedom that extended liberty of conscience to all. They often conceive of religion as strictly a private matter between individuals and God; in their view, the fight for religious freedom has always been that of individuals insisting on practicing their faith as they deem they should. These liberals in the culture war forget that many of the champions of religious liberty and separation of church and state during the late eighteenth century were fighting for the right to express their beliefs *publicly*. None were more insistent on keeping government out of religion than were the Baptists, whose experience in England and in the colonies had been that of persecution by states favoring an established church. Yet Baptist leaders Isaac Backus and John Leland fought for the right to a form of public worship that many of the rational Founders would later roundly criticize. Thus at the center of the culture war remains the question of how to reconcile the notion of America as a Christian Nation with that of America as a haven of religious freedom where the beliefs of a diverse and pluralistic population are respected.

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Each side of the cultural debate finds ample scholarly support for its position. Much of the work produced by legal scholars and constitutional historians focuses on the First Amendment and the Founders' "original intent" concerning the dividing line between church and state. Those who subscribe to Thomas Jefferson's metaphor of a wall separating church and state adopt a separationist perspective, while those who endorse the view that the Founders never intended such a division subscribe to an accommodationist interpretation. Separationists accept Justice Hugo Black's logic in *Everson v. Board of Education* (1947). His understanding of the establishment clause gave no voice whatever to any state or federal government in religious matters. "Neither a state nor the Federal Government can set up a church," he wrote, adding that "neither can pass laws which aid one religion, aid all religions, or prefer one religion over another."<sup>10</sup> Historians, social scientists, and lawyers have weighed in on the separationist side.<sup>11</sup> In this model, Jefferson is the Founder of choice, and the Virginia struggle for religious liberty is normative.<sup>12</sup> Moreover, religious freedom is interpreted as "the absence of government constraint upon individuals in matters of religion." That is, the individual, rather than society, is the focus, reflecting a radical Protestant as well as Enlightenment perspective.<sup>13</sup>

Accommodationists oppose such a restrictive reading of church-state relations and charge separationists with assigning the federal government an antireligious position.<sup>14</sup> They believe that the Founders recognized the importance of religion in society and intended for the government to support religious instruction and practice as long as it favored no particular sect. Rather than interpreting the establishment clause as aimed toward protecting individual religious liberty, accommodationists argue that the Founders wished to protect "the various religious practices of the states, including preferential establishments in some of them." Further, instead of regarding government's position negatively, as the absence of interference with free exercise, they view it as a positive role in promoting the blessings of religion. Chief Justice William Rehnquist provided the legal basis for the accommodationist interpretation in *Wallace v. Jaffree* (1985): "Nothing in the Establishment Clause requires government to be strictly neutral between religion and irreligion, nor does that Clause prohibit Congress or the States from pursuing legitimate secular ends through non-discriminatory sectarian means."<sup>15</sup>

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The separationist and accommodationist interpretations provide clear, powerful analytical categories for partisans debating church-state relations in the twenty-first century. However, as tools for investigating the Founders' deliberations and actions, they suffer from a presentist perspective that fails to consider adequately the historical context of late-eighteenth-century America. Indeed, they tell us more about the present debate than they do about the founding era. Each reads a consensus back into the deliberations over framing and ratifying the Constitution that obscures the highly contingent terms in which the Founders searched for a way to define the place of religion in the new republic. Separationists portray the Founders as embracing a radical Enlightenment philosophy that viewed religion solely as an issue of individual freedom with no consideration for religion's value in providing society with a moral ground. Accommodationists depict the Founders as agreeing on a broad, catholic view of Christianity, one that all Americans could support, thereby glossing over the bitter differences that separated Protestants from Catholics and divided Protestants into countless sects. Both view the issue as one involving only a few men, the Founders, paying little heed to the constituents who sometimes dictated that the lawmakers adopt positions counter to their personal preferences. And, too often, each side presents the other in caricature, with separationists seeing accommodationists as opposed to religious freedom, and accommodationists viewing separationists as opposed to religion. Both are teleological in that they depict a straight line running from their particular version of the Founders' views to those of their own advocates.

This book attempts to capture some of the contingent nature of the Founders' deliberations regarding the place of religion by paying close attention to historical context and striving to consider events as they unfolded. It explores the options available to the Founders, the history of church-state relations that they pondered, and the constraints that they were under. It investigates the choices that the delegates to the Constitutional and Ratifying Conventions considered. By 1787 each of the thirteen states had, often through bitter and divisive debate, decided the place of religion, and the Founders were aware of the many proposals suggested as well as those passed. The book also examines how they interpreted the interaction between religion and politics in European, English, and colonial American history. Most were well read in history and law and

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brought that knowledge to bear on their proceedings. Further, this study looks at the cultural and political boundaries that circumscribed the Founders' decisions and actions. They operated within a Revolutionary moment that made Americans wary of any real or perceived threat to their "natural" liberties, including that of liberty of conscience. Moreover, they faced the daunting task of trying to forge a "more perfect union" out of thirteen disparate states, each with numerous interests or factions, including many different religious sects.

In this investigation, the "place" of religion has two meanings. First, it defines a space within which religion operates. For the Planting Fathers, that was a church-state sphere wherein an established church or official religion enjoyed government protection and support. For William Penn and Roger Williams, founders of Pennsylvania and Rhode Island, respectively, religion functioned freely outside state supervision, within unregulated, voluntary congregations. The second connotation of the place of religion is that of significance, or the importance of religion to civil society. All of the Planting Fathers and some of the Founding Fathers believed that religious instruction in moral behavior was essential for a virtuous citizenry. Other Founders disagreed, viewing religion as more a divisive than a uniting force.

This book argues that in deciding the place of religion in the new republic, the Founding Fathers, rather than designing a church-state framework of their own, endorsed the emerging free marketplace of religion.<sup>16</sup> Forty years before the American Revolution, a religious revolution swept through the colonies in a spiritual revival known as the Great Awakening, and thousands of evangelical Dissenters embraced the radical notion that individual experience, not church dogma or government statute, was authoritative in religious matters. Salvation, they argued, occurred through the outpouring of God's grace in what they called a spiritual "New Birth." Thus empowered, converted men and women, called New Lights, challenged both church and state authority in matters of faith. Many left their own congregations and started Separate Churches or joined with such radical sects as Baptists. They insisted that religion was strictly voluntary, and that no government could compel an individual to subscribe to any belief or practice. The result was a new place for religion, a religious marketplace in which individual men and women chose among voluntary, competing sects.

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The best description of the transformation of the place of religion in America comes from an unlikely source. In his *Wealth of Nations*, published in the same year as the Declaration of Independence, Adam Smith devoted a section to church-state relations and their change over time. A political economist, Smith explained religious organizations and exchanges in the same terms he used to describe commerce. In his view, established churches, such as those put in place by the Planting Fathers, were operationally similar to the great trading monopolies of the day. "The clergy of every established church constitute a great incorporation," he wrote. Supported by the state and protected from competition, "they can act in concert, and pursue their interest upon one plan and with one spirit, as much as if they were under the direction of one man." He added that "where there is . . . but one sect tolerated in the society," religious teachers give full vent to their "interest and zeal," including the propagation of fear, prejudice, and superstition, and thus can become "dangerous and troublesome."<sup>17</sup> Smith's description fit the regulated religious economy of Connecticut and, indeed, of most of the English colonies planted in North America. In describing religion in early Virginia, Thomas Jefferson depicted a Smithian monopoly. The original charter, he pointed out, contained an "express Proviso that their laws 'should not be against the true Christian faith, now professed in the Church of England.'" The laws establishing the church required all inhabitants to be assessed the parish levy "whether they were or not members of the established church."<sup>18</sup>

Extending his advocacy of free trade to the exchange of religious ideas, Adam Smith believed that religion would prosper in a free and open religious market where men and women could choose among contending faiths. In a society without an established religion, there would be "no doubt . . . a great multitude of religious sects." Faced with competition on all sides, "each teacher would no doubt [feel] himself under the necessity of making the utmost exertion and of using every art both to preserve and to increase the number of his disciples." But just as competition would make religious teachers more industrious, it would check fanaticism. He argued that religious "zeal must be altogether innocent where the society is divided into two or three hundred, or perhaps into as many thousand small sects, of which no one could be considerable enough to disturb the public tranquility. The teachers of each sect, seeing themselves surrounded on all sides with more adversaries than friends,

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would be obliged to [exercise] . . . moderation.” Finally, a competitive religious market would offer inhabitants choice. “If politics had never called in the aid of religion,” Smith reasoned, “it would probably have dealt equally and impartially with all the different sects, and have allowed every man to choose his own priest and his own religion as he thought proper.”<sup>19</sup> Smith argued that such a religious market was not some fanciful notion, declaring, “It has been established in Pennsylvania,” where no church enjoyed state privilege and numerous sects competed for the allegiance of men and women.<sup>20</sup>

Adam Smith’s notions about the wisdom of free choice in a competitive religious market appealed to the Founders, who confronted the challenge of creating a union in a diverse, pluralistic society. James Madison worried about forging a republican union in a vast country consisting of many local factions, all insisting on protecting their own interests or, worse still, imposing their views on others. In reading writers of the Scottish Enlightenment, including Adam Smith, he came to see that if some means could be found whereby the various factions could check each other’s ambitions to dominate by advancing their own interests, then diversity and pluralism would not undermine union and would indeed promote liberty.

Few of the Founding Fathers, including Madison, agreed with New Light beliefs and practices, but most endorsed their ideas of religious freedom. The New Lights were too enthusiastic and emotional for the Founders, whose sensibilities ran more toward Enlightenment rationalism. But the point of agreement was emphasis on individual choice. Like the Great Awakening, the Enlightenment placed the individual at the center of the search for truth, encouraging men and women to question all traditional authority and conduct their own investigations, relying solely on their own reason and observation. Even those Founders who leaned toward traditional religious authority recognized that the new religious marketplace offered a possible solution to the problem confronting them in the late 1780s: how to avoid disunion through sectarian strife.

The first attempts to fix the legal place of religion occurred in 1776 in state constitutional conventions, often in heated, contentious exchanges. Some delegates fought for a continuation of the religious settlement put in place by the Planting Fathers. They argued that the establishment of the “true” religion, the faith of their fathers, had served society well and

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should be continued. Dissenters objected, calling for constitutional recognition of the free marketplace of religion as the best guarantee of freedom of conscience. At the end of the first round of constitution making, only the three Puritan states of Massachusetts, Connecticut, and New Hampshire preserved a religious establishment, and those came under sustained attack by Dissenters until they were dissolved in the nineteenth century. The Founding Fathers faced an even more difficult challenge in 1787 as they considered the place of religion in the federal constitution. Their first response was silence. That is, wanting to avoid any religious rancor that would threaten union, they delegated no power concerning religion to the federal government. The effect of that choice was to allow the emerging religious marketplace to function, subject only to restraints that the New England states imposed. But delegates to the Ratifying Conventions wanted explicit assurance that the federal government would neither establish a religion nor interfere with free exercise. The result was the First Amendment clause prohibiting establishment and guaranteeing free exercise. In proposing language for that amendment, Madison called for a ban on any establishment, state or federal. Some in the Senate, however, wanted language that would allow for nonsectarian government support of religion. The compromise was, in effect, an endorsement of a marketplace of religion operating free of government involvement.

By their actions, the Founding Fathers made clear that their primary concern was religious freedom, not the advancement of a state religion. Individuals, not the government, would define religious faith and practice in the United States. Thus the Founders ensured that in no official sense would America be a Christian Republic. Ten years after the Constitutional Convention ended its work, the country assured the world that the United States was a secular state, and that its negotiations would adhere to the rule of law, not the dictates of the Christian faith. The assurances were contained in the Treaty of Tripoli of 1797 and were intended to allay the fears of the Muslim state by insisting that religion would not govern how the treaty was interpreted and enforced.<sup>21</sup> John Adams and the Senate made clear that the pact was between two sovereign states, not between two religious powers.<sup>22</sup>

Like markets in goods, the religious market never operated in its pure form free of any government influence. Even Adam Smith thought that on occasion state intervention was necessary to mitigate worrisome

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trends in the religious marketplace. He fretted that some enthusiastic sects might become “unsocial or disagreeably rigorous” in their morals. As a remedy, Smith proposed “the study of science and philosophy, which the state might render almost universal among all people of middling or more than middling rank and fortune.” Further, he advocated a state-imposed probationary period, “to be undergone by every person before he was permitted to exercise any liberal profession, or before he could be received as a candidate for any honourable office of trust or profit.” While agreeing with the American Founders that there should be no religious test, Smith favored a science test of sorts, requiring ministers, along with lawyers and other professionals, to demonstrate a certain knowledge of science and philosophy before becoming practitioners. He thought that such knowledge would have a moderating influence on the teachings of the more narrow, enthusiastic sectarians.<sup>23</sup>

Almost from the beginning, Americans have sought various ways to regulate the religious marketplace. Some Founders believed that religion was too important in a republic to leave in the hands of voluntary associations of believers, and they sought state promotion of Christianity. They wanted some religious presence in the public realm. Though they failed in an attempt to provide publicly funded religion in the Northwest Territory (1785), they were able to secure the place of chaplains in the military and to permit state-declared days of thanksgiving and prayer. Throughout the nineteenth century and continuing to the present, various groups, dissatisfied with the effectiveness of the religious marketplace in promoting particular teachings and behavior, have advocated government intervention to permit state-sponsored religious practices, such as prayers in public schools. The lines in the ensuing debates have been drawn, as they were during the early republic, between those who want no interference with the free marketplace of ideas and those who desire some sort of state regulation.

While the Founding Fathers are at the center of this study, Dissenters are also an important focus. According to one historian, the distinguishing characteristic of American religious history is Dissent. Dissenters played a major role in settling British North America and placed their stamp on its culture.<sup>24</sup> British and Loyalist observers cited Dissent as a major factor in the American Revolution. Edmund Burke said that American Dissenters represented a “refinement on the principle of resistance,”

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and that they, long accustomed to challenging ecclesiastical power, led the attack on political power in 1776.<sup>25</sup> Burke's comment can be extended to the constitutional fight over the place of religion in America. Dissenters, including those evangelical dissenters who now opposed the heirs of the Puritan Dissenters, insisted on complete religious freedom. In the fight for a free religious marketplace, Whigs and Dissenters made common cause.

This examination, or reexamination, of how America's founding fathers—both seventeenth-century planters and eighteenth-century republicans—defined the place and role of religion in the nation and state is organized in three parts. Part One, "Religious Regulation," explores the Founders' British and colonial heritage and the religious regulations flowing from it. During colonization, most English planters were virulently anti-Catholic, and unregulated religion was unthinkable because it would allow papists to gain a foothold in what the adventurers conceived to be a Protestant land. Moreover, many planters were passionate sectarians, stressing fundamental differences that separated Protestants. New England Puritans could not imagine allowing Anglicans to practice their unbiblical faith in their midst, and Chesapeake Anglicans were equally adamant in stamping out the Puritan heresy. During the settlement period, British immigrants to North America could find sufficient land to pursue their particular brand of Protestantism without interference from those with different beliefs. With the notable exceptions of Rhode Island and Pennsylvania, religious regulation, if not monopoly, was the goal in most colonies, although economic and social changes made that an elusive aim.

Part Two, "Religious Competition," examines a profound shift in the way that many colonists understood religious faith and religious freedom. It explores those people and forces that challenged religious regulation and promoted religious competition. Influenced by an exploding population, a flood of immigration, and an expanding commercial market, coupled with the widespread acceptance of new ideas empowering individuals, religion in America grew much more competitive and pluralistic. Churches could not accommodate all the change, and religious regulations came under great strain as newcomers brought their new ideas and ways into a given colony, challenging existing laws and structures. The established clergy complained about the unwelcome competition

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from itinerant preachers who invaded their parishes and wooed their parishioners. Laymen and -women, however, exulted in the expanded religious choice. They delighted in being able to consider competing claims; they expressed a new sense of power in choosing the message or style that most appealed to them. By the American Revolution, an unlikely alliance emerged to fight for complete liberty of conscience. Enlightened politicians, including most of the Founders, and awakened evangelicals, consisting of tens of thousands of dissenters, joined forces in challenging establishment laws restricting freedom of religious choice.

Part Three, "Religious Freedom," explores that brand of freedom in the birth of the republic and depicts its triumph more in terms of the workings of the free marketplace of religion than as the design of enlightened statesmen. Conflict arose between those who desired some sort of religious establishment and those who wanted no state interference with religion at all. For the delegates at the Constitutional Convention in 1787, religion was a divisive issue that threatened the union they were trying to forge. Fractured by pluralism and enflamed by sectarianism, Americans were unlikely to agree upon any federal establishment, no matter how broadly stated. Thus the delegates opted to avoid conflict by making no mention whatever of religion in the proposed Constitution except in the ban against all religious tests. Thereby, they gave legal standing to the free religious marketplace. Similarly, in those few states that retained establishment provisions, dissenters pressured lawmakers to follow the federal model and permit religion to operate in a free, competitive marketplace, a goal finally realized in 1833 with disestablishment in Massachusetts. Though state constitutions continued to impose various religious tests throughout the nineteenth century, Americans had moved beyond religious regulation to religious freedom.

While providing analysis of key events that shaped church-state relations and individuals who were central to major struggles involving religion and politics, this is by no means an exhaustive study of religion in America. Such an effort would take into consideration a myriad of sects and individuals whose actions shaped the practice of religion, and would require volumes. This book focuses primarily on those individuals and groups that shaped the writing and revision of laws and constitutions defining the place and role of religion in a colony, a state, or the nation as a whole. For the most part, the sources come from religious and political

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leaders, but this does not mean that ordinary men and women who sometimes followed them and sometimes challenged them do not play key roles. From the beginning, leaders in America lacked the institutional underpinning that gave their English counterparts stature and authority. There were, for example, no resident bishops, no peerage, and no standing army. Leaders had to persuade. Sometimes followers dictated events by taking a different path from that of their leaders. Indeed, our story ends with tens of thousands of nameless men and women caught up in a great evangelical revival that changed the course of religion in America as envisioned by such enlightened men as Thomas Jefferson and James Madison, who were confident that all Americans would soon embrace a deistic or rationalist perspective.

An epilogue notes some of the unintended consequences of the Founders' religious settlement. For one, the alliance between enlightened leaders and their evangelical supporters soon unraveled. Jefferson had been confident that his religious views would prevail, and that, in a generation or two, all Americans would embrace a rationalist Unitarianism. However, he underestimated the extent and fervor of revealed religion, and he lived to witness a great revival of religion that took the country by storm. Jefferson also failed to anticipate the democratization of American religion wherein ordinary men and women applied the Revolution's legacies of popular sovereignty and egalitarianism to the religious marketplace. As a result, scores of new sects sprang up, rendering the term "dissenter" meaningless in a society without an official church. In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, such freedom promoted vigorous debates aimed at defining America's religious character. As contestants in the current culture war turn to the Founders for historical validation of their respective positions, they confront the reality of a dual legacy: if John Winthrop's monopolistic "City upon a Hill" is to prevail, it must triumph in James Madison's free marketplace of ideas.