AMERICA'S *TEMPLE OF REASON*: PROSELYTIZING DEISM IN THE EARLY REPUBLIC

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ABSTRACT

During the early American Republic the Age of Enlightenment was in its twilight years. The era of rationalism was coming to an end, much of which was due to the astounding growth of religious revivalism. Overwhelmingly, the public showed a preference for a God who appealed to emotion rather than reason. However, the Enlightenment did not quietly submit to defeat. Thomas Paine's *Age of Reason*, a blistering denunciation of revealed religion, created a sensation on both sides of the Atlantic. In America, a spirited minority followed in Paine's footsteps as proselytizers of deism. From November 1800 to the February 1803, they printed *The Temple of Reason*, a weekly newspaper that endeavored to spread the wisdom of religious toleration and a God of Reason to the public. What made these individuals unique was that they helped to bring the Enlightenment down from the confines of the intellectual elite.

This thesis builds on the scholarly discussion among historians of the Early Republic that deist proselytizers attempted to attract a popular following. I further the discussion by arguing that *The Temple of Reason* endeavored to reach out to the middling sort and working people, typically a non-traditional audience for the Enlightenment. Constituting the majority of my sources are articles from the newspaper itself. By disseminating the content, I demonstrate that much of the language and thematic material employed were specifically designed to appeal to people from ordinary backgrounds. This was not random or coincidental, but a conscious strategy on the part of deist proselytizers to make the Enlightenment a more inclusive movement.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

On November 8, 1800, from a printing office on Beaver Street in New York City, a newspaper called *The Temple of Reason* ran off the press. It was the first issue of the first candidly deist newspaper in America. Under the large letters of its bold name ran the motto: "GREAT IS THE TRUTH, AND IT SHALL PREVAIL"- a tagline that would appear in every edition of the paper during its two-plus year run. The opening story announced the impetus for its start: "The torrents of illiberal reflection and unqualified abuse poured forth every day, through the channels of bigotry and intolerance, against Deists, have provoked this publication." This was a message that in America's culture war over religiosity the side of reason was taking the offensive.[1]

At the close of the eighteenth century the struggle between deism and religious orthodoxy was nothing new. Gauging by the print media, arguments surfaced in the English-speaking world over one-hundred years prior to *The Temple of Reason*'s debut. A relative starting point for this is John Toland's *Christianity Not Mysterious* (1696), an early landmark in which deistic concepts are openly advocated. Although Toland was a firm believer in divine revelation – a concept many deists decried as superstition – he also contended that the common man was just as capable of comprehending its mysteries as priests. Trusting that ordinary people could use reason and empirical investigation to make discoveries on their own, he wrote: "And why may not the Vulgar…be Judges of

[1] *Temple of Reason* (New York), November 8, 1800.

the true Sense of Things, tho they understand nothing of the tongues from whence they are translated for their use."[2] Here, Toland is making an early argument against the necessity for priests to act as intermediaries between people and their God, eventually a standard conviction among deists.

The year after Toland's publication, Christian orthodoxy had its say with Charles Leslie's *A Short and Easie Method with the Deists* (1697); a tract intending to provide readers with the intellectual tools to conquer the *infidel* threat. In this concise and easily readable pamphlet, its Anglican clergyman author lays out what he understands to be familiar deist claims, such as "all these Pretences to Revelation are Cheats, and ever have been among Pagans, Jews, Mahometans, and Christians," and then combats their arguments with a set of rules of his own devising. He posits that events like the Exodus and the life and miracles of Jesus Christ were irrefutable because they had been substantiated by witnesses, memorialized, and continuously commemorated since their respective points of origin.[3]

Doctrinaire Christians like Leslie perceived a growing menace towards established religion, as logic and reason, cornerstones of Enlightenment thought, gave birth to a new concept of God's role in the universe. Central to this philosophy was the belief that God is unconcerned with the minutiae of humanity's affairs, but rather acts the

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[2] John Toland, *Christianity not Mysterious: or, a Treatise Shewing, That there is nothing in the Gospel Contrary to Reason, nor Above it: And that no Christian Doctrine can be properly call'd a Mystery* (London: Sam. Buckley, 1696), iv-xxvi; Kerry Walters, *Revolutionary Deists: Early America's Rational Infidels* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 2011), 31-32; Henry F. May, *The Enlightenment in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976), 20.

[3] Charles Leslie, *A Short and Easie Method with the Deists, Wherein the Certainty of the Christian Religion is Demonstrated by Infallible Proof from the Four Rules which are Incompatible to any Imposture that ever yet has been, or that can Possibly be* (London: George Strahan, 1715), 1-5.

part of a dispassionate master-mechanic. He had created the world to run according to His specifications, much like a watchmaker's careful crafting of a timepiece.

The new theology challenged the foundation of the old by undercutting the logic of divine revelation. Deists reasoned that if God appeared on earth in corporeal form to heal the sick and raise the dead then it must be concluded that He bungled His divine plan. Why, after all, would His plan require correction? *The Temple of Reason* would make a related point with the notion that Jesus Christ came to reform Mosaic Law, as this implies a defect in God's prior pronouncements.[4]

Many deists continued to hold Jesus in high regard, but it was for his moral teachings and not his miracles. An oft-cited example of this distinction is Thomas Jefferson's experiment with editing biblical scripture. In a letter to John Adams, Jefferson explains that when all references to the miraculous are excised from the New Testament, the remnants can be greater appreciated for their simple truths: "I have performed this operation for my own use, by cutting verse by verse out of the printed book, and arranging, the matter which is evidently his, and which is as easily distinguishable as diamonds in a dunghill."[5] In other words, not only are the miracles of Jesus colorful fantasy, but they dilute the most profound messages that the Gospels have to offer.

Jefferson undertook his editing project after retiring from public life, but his spiritual outlook had been affected by the Enlightenment decades before. Deism was prevalent in North American colleges by the mid-eighteenth century, when many of the

[4] David Holmes, *The Faiths of the Founding Fathers* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 47; Gary Wills, *Inventing America: Jefferson's Declaration of Independence* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 2002), 194; *Temple of Reason* (Philadelphia), March 6, 1802.

[5] Thomas Jefferson to John Adams, October 12, 1813, in Thomas Jefferson, *Writings*, ed. Merrill D. Peterson (New York: The Library of America, 1984), 1301.

colonies' soon-to-be revolutionaries, including Jefferson, attended. Hence there is a convincing argument that the intelligentsia of America's founding generation was largely deist.[6] Yet this also typifies a lasting stigma surrounding deism, which is that it rarely transcended the coteries of the intellectual elite.

However, some adherents of the new theology succeeded quite well at crossing the barrier dividing the elites from the broader public. Thomas Paine showed an uncanny ability to speak the language of the common man in his scathing indictment of organized religion, *The Age of Reason* (1794 and 95). This treatise was not bogged down with scholarly verbiage but used comprehensible and eloquent language to persuade its readers. Paine's words were a clarion call to reject the aid of corrupt clergymen and find spirituality within the self; sentiment perhaps best expressed in the famous line: "I do not believe in the creed professed by the Jewish church, by the Roman church, by the Turkish church, by the Protestant church, nor by any church that I know of. My own mind is my own church."[7] The astounding popularity of his treatise aroused a firestorm of feedback from deism's opponents. Within a decade of its release, the American press produced in excess of fifty different pamphlets disputing Paine's theories.[8]

Paine was riding the crest of a wave, as *The Age of Reason* came on the scene when the Revolutionary era appeared to be progressing from a war against 'king-craft' to also include a war against 'priest-craft.' In France, actions went beyond ideas on paper with the transformation of many Catholic churches, including Notre Dame Cathedral,

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[6] Holmes, *The Faiths of the Founding Fathers*, 49-51.
[7] Thomas Paine, *The Age of Reason: Being an Investigation of True and Fabulous Theology* (Boston: Thomas Hall, 1794), 4.
[8] Marcus Daniel, *Scandal & Civility: Journalism and the Birth of American Democracy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 248.

into Temples of Reason. That this could happen to some of the world's foremost houses of Christian worship was a statement that the Enlightenment was opening its doors – literally and figuratively – to all levels of society. Subsequent attempts were made to establish Temples of Reason in the United States; and while such projects never got off the ground, there was poetic justice in spreading deism with a newspaper of that title. It compliments Paine's declaration that his mind was his church.[9]

More than ever before, the God of Reason was not restricted to the confines of intellectualism. As Donald Meyer writes: "The deism of the 1790s was intended as a popular creed, a new religion for the masses." Realizing that building a new world on the ash heap of the old required popular support, there were deists who became militant crusaders at spreading the God of Reason among the populace.[10] One of these was Elihu Palmer, an outspoken American deist and former Presbyterian minister. Like Paine, he propagated his views through pamphleteering, penning the successful tract *Principles of Nature* (1801), and also may have been principally responsible for establishing *The Temple of Reason* newspaper. If not Palmer, then evidence points to ex-Anglican clergyman Denis Driscol.

Historians of religious controversy in the Early Republic show a disparity of opinions on the newspaper's origins. Most give Palmer the lion's share of credit for beginning the venture, although Eric Schlereth makes a persuasive case for Driscol. Schlereth points out that Driscol got the project underway by borrowing a press from

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[9] Eric Schlereth, *An Age of Infidels: The Politics of Religious Controversy in the Early United States* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013), 123.
[10] Donald H. Meyer, *The Democratic Enlightenment* (New York: Capricorn Books, 1976), 175; Henry F. May, *The Enlightenment in America*, xvi, 153.

David Denniston, a likeminded radical editor, and securing a loan to purchase type. He also argues that *Temple*'s political partisanship and analysis of foreign affairs aligns more closely with Driscol's interests than Palmer's.[11]

The most convincing clue that *Temple* was first and foremost Driscol's enterprise comes quite simply from what appears unambiguously on the newspaper's masthead. He is credited with being the editor for every edition of the paper during the first two-thirds of its existence. This might be as close to a smoking gun as we are likely to get, but there is one important piece of evidence in Palmer's favor which, while still inconclusive, keeps the debate alive. In February 1803, when *Temple* was concluding its run due to lack of funding, an announcement in its final issue mentioned that although the paper was ceasing publication, "Mr. Palmer, in a few weeks, intends to revive it…"[12] It is reasonable to speculate that if Palmer were planning to revive the paper then he must have been running it at some point, perhaps even at the origin. But until – or unless – more information is uncovered, the question remains unsettled.

This lack of concurrence among historians over *The Temple of Reason*'s beginning underscores the limited scholarship on the newspaper. It has received a modicum of analysis, but usually within larger works about religious controversy in the Early Republic. What needs elaboration is a study of the newspaper's content for the purpose of revealing how deists used specific strategies to attract a readership beyond the

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[11] Holmes, *The Faiths of the Founding Fathers*, 46; Walters, *Revolutionary Deists*, 21; Sean Wilentz, *Chants Democratic: New York City and the Rise of the American Working Class, 1788-1850* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 78; Amanda Porterfield, *Conceived in Doubt: Religion and Politics in the New American Nation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012), 27; Schlereth, *An Age of Infidels*, 113; Eric Schlereth, Email to the author, January 15, 2015.

[12] *Temple of Reason* (Philadelphia), February 19, 1803.

intellectual elite. This thesis seeks to fill that gap. It will show that *The Temple of Reason* took part in attempting to make deism a popular movement by reaching out to a non-traditional audience for the Enlightenment, working people and the middling sort. [13]

It is not surprising that the likeliest suspects for founding *The Temple of Reason* were men who began their careers in the church pulpit. They had been trained to proselytize, and this weekly paper was certainly a form of proselytization. The era itself is often characterized by the large-scale espousal of religious beliefs, mainly due to the waves of religious revivalism gaining traction in the United States. However, Christian evangelicals did not hold a monopoly over proselytization. Palmer and Driscol were among a minority who made a concerted effort to advance a radically different message. With Paine's example before them, it was in part due to the efforts of this minority that the Enlightenment was made available to multiple classes of Americans. The side on which they fought was eventually marginalized by the Second Great Awakening, but in the thick of the struggle it was far from certain what the outcome would be. *The Temple of Reason* stands out as proof of how the Enlightenment in America did not die a quiet death, but endeavored to spread the wisdom of the God of Reason to the masses.

[13] Eric Schlereth gives the most thorough rendering of *The Temple of Reason* in *An Age of Infidels*, hence I make very liberal use of his findings. He explains that the paper's method of propagating deism was to advocate for republicanism, as deists believed the promotion of one meant the same for the other. (*See* Schlereth, *An Age of Infidels*, 112). This thesis does not seek to dispute that claim, but to add another dimension to it. Namely, to illustrate how the newspaper's content often indicated a conscious effort to attract people from the middle class (middling sort) and down.

CHAPTER 2

RELIGIOSITY IN THE CULTURE WAR

Even before the Treaty of Paris closed the final chapter on America's War for Independence, the issue of religion's place in the new republic was on the table. As Amanda Porterfield observes, one of the most radical shifts to transpire from overturning the monarchical system in America was that religion no longer streamed from political authority. This sea change brought forth arguments which ranged from allowing faith to be a matter of personal choice to establishing a new form of state-sanctioned Protestantism.[14] For a deist like Thomas Paine, casting away traditional religion was the next logical step. But many Americans shied away from setting themselves spiritually adrift, and some who felt the need for damage control went on the offensive.

Anti-social behavior exhibited by perceived infidels became useful propaganda, as with 'the Beadle affair' in 1782. This was the case of a murder-suicide in Wethersfield, Connecticut, in which William Beadle, a respected citizen who also happened to be a deist, brutally murdered his wife and children before taking his own life. Within a month of the incident, New England newspapers laid the blame squarely at the feet of Beadle's spiritual beliefs- or lack thereof. Christopher Grasso argues that at the core of this anti-deist bias was the notion "that virtuous citizenship presupposed

[14] Amanda Porterfield, *Conceived in Doubt*, 6-7.

Christianity and that challenging the divine inspiration of the Bible was therefore not just heterodox but un-American and, perhaps, lunacy."[15]

In the 1790s, the French Revolution heightened fears about the dangers of a Godless society all the more. Widespread theories of an anti-Christian conspiracy behind the Jacobin uprising were prevalent throughout quarters on both sides of the Atlantic. John Robison, a professor of natural philosophy at the University of Edinburgh, claimed in his 1797 treatise, *Proofs of a Conspiracy Against All the Religions and Governments of Europe*, the Order of the Illuminati was in large measure responsible for orchestrating events. He argued that the strategy of this secret society was to "root out all religion and ordinary morality, and even break the bonds of domestic life, by destroying the veneration for marriage-vows" in order to clear a path to a more egalitarian society.[16]

Robison's theories came under the purview of highly regarded clergymen in America, including Jedidiah Morse. While delivering a sermon in Charlestown, Massachusetts, Morse claimed to have definitive proof of "*Secret Societies* (operating in the United States), under the influence and direction of France, holding principles subversive to our religion and government." He was not alone in his concerns, as paranoia over subversion reached a high water mark in the late 1790s. It even trickled into the highest echelons of the federal government, culminating in the *Alien Act* of 1798. Suspicion of who constituted the greatest threat frequently fell on French and French

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[15] Christopher Grasso, "Deist Monster: On Religious Common Sense in the Wake of the American Revolution," *The Journal of American History*, Vol. 95, No. 1 (June, 2008), 43-44.

[16] John Robison, *Proofs of a Conspiracy Against All the Religions and Governments of Europe, Carried on in the Secret Meetings of Free Masons, Illuminati, and Reading Societies* (Edinburgh, 1797), in *The Fear of Conspiracy: Images of Un-American Subversion from the Revolution to the Present*, ed. David Brion Davis (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1971), 38-9.

Caribbean émigrés, who throughout the decade had been arriving in droves at cities along the eastern seaboard. Their presence on American soil stoked the fears of rebellion spreading like a 'contagion.' A racial component accompanied these worries, with concerns over black émigrés encouraging African Americans to revolt in like manner to the slave uprisings in Guadeloupe, Martinique, and Saint Domingue.[17]

Christian tract writers in America were also on board with promoting the idea that infidelity was the culprit of France's descent into mayhem. In *Antidote to Deism* (1795), Uzal Ogden projected a tone of moral superiority by claiming that America, because of the religious convictions of its citizenry, was foolproof against the occurrence of any such disaster. Perhaps hoping to discourage deists by implying that they only inhabited the fringes of American society, Ogden conveyed the idea that the road to infidelity was not only dangerous but futile as well.[18] Considering Ogden's work was published following the first installment of *The Age of Reason*, he was likely trying to counter a groundswell of popular support for deism.

The opposing side of the tract war produced sparser volumes, but Elihu Palmer's *The Examiners Examined* (1794), written with the primary purpose of defending *The Age of Reason*, expressed confidence in eventual victory for the Enlightenment every bit as certain as *Antidote to Deism* for Christianity. Palmer felt that Americans were not so

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[17] Jedidiah Morse, *A Sermon, Exhibiting the Present Dangers, and Consequent Duties of the Citizens of the United States of America, Delivered at Charlestown, April 25, 1799. The Day of the National Fast* (Charlestown, MA, 1799), in *The Fear of Conspiracy: Images of Un-American Subversion from the Revolution to the Present*, ed. David Brion Davis (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1971), 46-47; Gary B. Nash, *Forging Freedom: The Formation of Philadelphia's Black Community, 1720-1840* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988), 140-43; Ashli White, *Encountering Revolution: Haiti and the Making of the Early Republic* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010), 124-65.

[18] Schlereth, *An Age of Infidels*, 64-65; Uzal Ogden, *Antidote to Deism. The Deist Unmasked; or An Ample Refutation of all the Objections of Thomas Paine…* (Newark: John Woods, 1795), v-vi.

unyielding in their religious faith as to be immune to reason. Thinking that the time was near at hand when they would act on sound common sense, he wrote: "…the Christian religion, as generally practiced, presents itself as one of those monuments of ignorance and credulity, which the wisdom of the present generation is probably destined to overthrow, and to substitute a system more simple, more pure, and more agreeable to the dictates of reason."[19] Of course such an overhaul would require much more than a small group of intellectuals.

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Approximately five years prior to writing so critically of the Christian faith, Palmer was fresh from his training for the ministry. He had been assigned to a Presbyterian Church in Long Island, but his tenure there would be brief. The church's congregants quickly detected shades of humanism in his sermons and became eager for his departure. In 1791, while still in his twenties, he moved to Philadelphia and joined the Universal Society, a sect reputed for accommodating a wide spectrum of beliefs under its umbrella. However, his flagrant denial of revelation ultimately proved too radical even for these liberal Christians to accept. In March 1792, he crossed the line when he advertised his plan to present a lecture on the *non*-divinity of Christ. It was a discourse he would be prevented from delivering, as an angry mob took offense at his audaciousness

[19] Elihu Palmer, *The Examiners Examined: Being a Defence of The Age of Reason* (New York: Printed for the author and sold by L. Wayland and J. Fellows, 1794), 6.

and compelled him to flee the city. The episode turned out to be the final nail in the coffin of Palmer's days as a Christian.[20]

Palmer returned to Philadelphia in 1793 to practice law, but could not stay out of the culture war limelight for long. That year, while delivering a July Fourth oration, he expressed the opinion that opposition to religion was as much a part of the American Revolution as opposition to monarchy, proclaiming that "King-craft and priest-craft, those mighty enemies of liberty and reason, were struck with death by the genius of 1776."[21] In distinct contrast to the writers and clergymen who pounced on deists in the aftermath of the Beadle affair, Palmer's statement implied that an inseparable bond between priest-craft and king-craft meant that orthodox Christians, and not the rejecters of revelation, were in fact the un-American ones. Deists, he believed, were better suited for citizenship in a post-monarchical society than those still mired in superstitious beliefs.

Two months after the oration, Palmer faced a horrifying personal tragedy when the Yellow Fever swept through Philadelphia. The epidemic claimed the lives of thousands that year, including Palmer's wife; and while Palmer himself survived his own bout with the illness, he was stricken blind during the ordeal. His enemies chose to see his misfortune as divine retribution, but if Palmer entertained any such notions it was not apparent by his subsequent actions. In 1794 he settled in New York City, where he persisted in attracting attention as an outspoken opponent of revealed religion. He also, as he had before the debilitating setback, occasionally took his message on the road (perhaps

[20] Walters, *Revolutionary Deists*, 181-84; Schlereth, *An Age of Infidels*, 31-44; May, *The Enlightenment in America*, 231; *General Advertiser* (Philadelphia), March 17, 1792.
[21] Elihu Palmer, *Political Miscellany …Extracts from an Oration, delivered by Elihu Palmer, the 4th of July, 1793…* (New York: Printed by G. Foreman, no. 36, Maiden-Lane, 1793), 22; Walters, *Revolutionary Deists*, 185.

resembling a Methodist circuit rider who offers a different brand of spiritual guidance). His blindness was surely a terrible source of frustration, but his supporters came to regard it as a mark of fortitude. Indeed, by emphasizing that his disability had no untoward effects on his mental prowess, they may have actually increased his popularity.[22]

Palmer was a moderately well-known public figure when *The Temple of Reason* began in the autumn of 1800. Regardless of whether or not he started the paper, at bare minimum he had a close association with it. From November 1800 to February 1801, the entire period it ran in New York, it printed lengthy notices for his discourses, the wording of which demonstrated his continuing dedication to the precepts of deism. One of the stated goals of these 'sermons' was to prove that Christian revelation "has been one of the worst scourges of the human race." However, Palmer wished to do more than simply expose treachery and fraud. Another of his goals was to show "(that) the powers of man are competent to provide for human happiness." He wanted to inspire hope that all people, regardless of class, possess remarkable abilities within themselves to achieve greatness, and need not rely on authoritative figures.[23] Palmer was first and foremost a populist, and wanted his message to resonate as such.

Denis Driscol's background and spiritual journey towards deism were strikingly similar to Palmer's. (This makes it tempting to surmise that *Temple* was a collaborative affair.[24]) The two were close in age – Driscol was born in 1762 and Palmer in 1764 – and each had flirted with more than one sect of Christianity before casting it aside for the God

[22] Walters, *Revolutionary Deists*, 185-86; Schlereth, *An Age of Infidels*, 88-90.
[23] *Temple of Reason* (New York), November 8, 1800, also printed in subsequent editions; May, *The Enlightenment in America*, 231.
[24] Porterfield claims as much, writing that Driscol ran the paper under Palmer's auspices. *See* Porterfield, *Conceived in Doubt*, 27.

of Reason. Driscol, originally a Catholic, became an Anglican curate in 1789, and served in that capacity in his native Ireland until becoming a committed deist a few years later.[25]

Driscol's radical politics attracted as much attention as his unorthodox spiritual beliefs. He was outspokenly pro-French and anti-British; sentiment expressed through his journalistic endeavors as editor of the *Cork Gazette*. He was also a staunch Irish nationalist, participating in the ill-fated 1798 rebellion against the British. When that uprising was summarily crushed, he was forced to flee the country. In 1799, he arrived in New York City as a political exile.[26]

The press during the Early Republic acted like a magnet for attracting radicals, and it was not long after Driscol's arrival that he too jumped into the fray. He was among a handful of Irish printers in America – counting the likes of Matthew Carey and William Duane in their ranks – who were brazen in their political partisanship.[27] Schlereth goes so far as to claim that Driscol's motivation for starting *The Temple of Reason* was to support Thomas Jefferson's bid for the presidency and uphold the Republican Party platform.[28] This is a believable suggestion, for religion was now highly politicized on the national level. The myth that Federalists were all sincere Christians while Republicans leaned towards infidelity flourished throughout the 1790s. By the election of 1800, although John Adams certainly took his share of blows from the Republican press, relentless attacks from the Federalists led to the widespread notion that Thomas Jefferson was an

[25] Schlereth, *An Age of Infidels*, 113.
[26] *Ibid*.
[27] Daniel, *Scandal & Civility*, 231-74; Gordon S. Wood, *Empire of Liberty: A History of the Early Republic, 1789-1815* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 252-54.
[28] Schlereth, *An Age of Infidels*, 112.

infidel.[29] The battle scars from this brutal campaign were reflected in the first sentence of *Temple*'s opening article – "The torrents of illiberal reflection and unqualified abuse…have provoked this publication."

However, as Schlereth further argues, the triumph of republicanism was not Driscol's primary goal. He, as with Palmer, held the much loftier ambition of spreading Enlightenment theology, and partisanship served a utilitarian function towards that end. These men believed that the interconnectivity of republicanism and deism meant the status of one naturally affected that of the other. Republicanism's greatest value, therefore, was providing the means by which deism could advance. [30] So while it was certainly the case that *Temple* showed favoritism towards Jefferson and his policies, the paper was less concerned with destroying political opponents than it was with promoting an enlightened society. Its vision was of an egalitarian world where common belief in a God of Reason demolished any need for patriarchs wielding absolute and arbitrary authority. Consequently, of benefit to the middling sort and working people, distinctions of class would be greatly diminished.

[29] Daniel, *Scandal & Civility*, 248-51; Edward J. Larson, *A Magnificent Catastrophe: The Tumultuous Election of 1800, America's First Presidential Campaign* (New York: Free Press, 2007), 165-82; Schlereth, *An Age of Infidels*, 119.
[30] Schlereth, *An Age of Infidels*, 112; May, *The Enlightenment in America*, 232.

CHAPTER 3

AMERICA'S *TEMPLE OF REASON*

When *The Temple of Reason* debuted, the Age of Enlightenment was in its twilight years. With the obvious advantage of hindsight, we know that that it would not survive long into the nineteenth century. However, there were periods during the Early Republic when it was not so obvious that the Enlightenment's God of Reason was losing a popularity contest to revivalism's God of Emotion. It is even doubtful that Driscol believed – at least during the first half of *Temple*'s run – this was where the struggle lay. Most of his energies were spent wrestling orthodox Christianity and not revivalism. And while *Temple*'s statement about "the torrents of illiberal reflection and unqualified abuse" might present a picture of the Enlightenment barely keeping its head above water, it is our present-day knowledge of the movement's eventual demise that creates this conception.

In fact, by 1800 deists were in a formidable position. Events on both the national and international levels provided grounds for predicting a boost in their favor. America was leaning towards electing one of the foremost figures of the Enlightenment to the highest office in the land; and the situation in revolutionary France, which previously supplied such damning propaganda about the dangers of infidelity, now seemed under control- at least with regards to the Terror. So while striking back against "the channels of bigotry and intolerance" was certainly a large part of what motivated *Temple*'s

publication, perhaps it was also the case that the paper's founders gambled on America being at a liberal enough ebb for Enlightenment theology to find greater acceptance.

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Temple's debut issue was blunt, hard-hitting, and exhibited no diplomacy when taking on its adversaries. Its opening article, after declaring the impetus for the paper's start, seized the moral high-ground by staking a claim for tolerance as a specifically deist virtue: "It is the settled maxim of the philosophic Deist, to let all men rest in peace, and enjoy their speculative opinions, however absurd, without animosity and persecution." Whereas the opposition, it argued, was intent "to abuse and revile all those who are not of their creed." Having delineated the opposing sides of the debate, *Temple* then revealed its penultimate objective: "We are determined to shew to the world, the purity of our doctrines and the soundness of our principles, exposing at the same time, the corruption of those of our adversaries."[31] It was a friendly invitation, seemingly designed to connect with people who were weary of being kept in line by clergymen who threatened the fires of hell for straying from the faith.

As the article continued, it emphasized that deists had a lock on America's founding principles: "the immortal framers of the constitution, wisely thought, that in matters of religion, all men have an equal right to private and public opinion; and therefore, left them all on the same level – On this level we stand." In other words, liberty of conscience is integral to any notions of citizenship in a republic. The opposition, however, would have the nation adopt a style of religious persecution associated with the

[31] *Temple of Reason* (New York), November 8, 1800.

most oppressive forms of government in recent memory: "If we were to conclude from the intemperance of overheated bigots… we must think that the inquisition had been established, with all its terrors, in the United states, and the christian religion, in all its sects and branches, had been placed under its *holy protection*."[32] Employing the term 'inquisition' likely stirred images of a collaborative affair of king-craft and priest-craft, a not-so-subtle hint that orthodox Christians were stuck in a monarchical mindset. It was an attempt to appeal to people's patriotism. Rejecting those who try to impose religion on others was the *American* thing to do.

After making it abundantly clear that deists have a right to express their beliefs without fear of recrimination, the edition proceeded next to a dissemination of just what those beliefs were. Page two began with "The Deist Creed," a profession of deism's core tenets which appeared in a structure loosely resembling official creeds professed in Christian dogma. It started with the acknowledgement of a *single* Creator – to distance themselves from Trinitarians – and then spelled out some of man's most essential duties in life: to worship this Creator, lead an honest and virtuous existence, and do his utmost to be good to others.[33] This broke down Enlightenment theology to its ABC's, which, for luring the uninitiated, was an intelligent move for *Temple*'s inaugural issue.

Amounting to roughly half of the edition were extracts from Samuel Clarke's *A Demonstration of the Being and Attributes of God* (1705). Although first published nearly a hundred years prior, this classic work fit in comfortably with the issue's probable agenda as a deist primer. Clarke's argument for the existence of God was based on the

[32] *Ibid.*
[33] *Ibid.*

'Supreme Cause' theory, a fundamental premise of Enlightenment theology. And, since reason dictated the necessity for such a Cause, his attacks against atheism must have struck an agreeable chord.[34]

Printing these lengthy extracts from Clarke, of which more would appear in subsequent issues of *Temple*, set something of a standard for the paper. The writings of other prominent Enlightenment thinkers like Boulanger, the Abbe Raynal, Volney, Hume, and Voltaire would receive similar treatments in future editions. Beginning with Clarke, however, made sense chronologically, since his work stands as an early touchstone in the evolution of deism. Furthermore, its reprinting served the function of clarifying that atheism, like revelation, was anathema to deists. Apparently this needed elucidation, for many Americans perceived no distinction between a rejection of revelation and a rejection of God. *Temple* would tackle this subject every so often during its run, at one point bemoaning: "So supremely ignorant are the royal editors of America, or so supremely malevolent, that they do not know the distinction between the terms atheist and deist; or, if they do, they do not wish to apply them properly."[35] Considering the paper was trying to attract readers who likely knew their theology from ministers more than a university setting, it cannot be faulted for overstating the claim.

Leading off the foreign news section was a story that heralded the end of hostilities between France and the United States, no doubt referring to the two-year Quasi War. Significantly, the recent signing of "a treaty of Amity and Commerce" provides one

[34] *Ibid.*
[35] *Temple of Reason* (Philadelphia), July 15, 1801; Grasso, "Deist Monster," 45; May, *The Enlightenment in America*, 11-16, 21.

possibility as to why *Temple*'s founders felt the coast was clear to begin operations when they did. They were not in the uncomfortable position of having to justify that a country so identified with the growth of deism was also a belligerent. Cries of treason, should anyone be foolish enough to make them, would be unfounded. And while the atrocities of the Terror must have remained an uncomfortable sticking point, France's new order appeared to have subdued the aberration. *Temple*'s conviction that all the unpleasantries were a thing of the past was illustrated by its confidence to go the extra mile in being unambiguously pro-French.[36]

It may seem ironic in hindsight, but *Temple* was also, at least at its beginning, pro-Napoleon. In a way that now appears almost charmingly naïve, *Temple* cast France's new leader in the role of an enlightened republican:

> The Chief Consul of France continues to distinguish himself by his benevolent and humane intentions: He is said to actually be negotiating with the Pope, on behalf of the republican priests of France and Italy, for a restoration of their long suspended right to marry. By this Buonaparte proves himself a friend to the human species.

The paper also depicted him as an advocate for peace, and the nations at war with France as aggressors in the conflict. Future events would not vindicate this view, although portraying the countries ruled by monarchs as villains of the conflict was consistent with politically active deism.[37]

Temple's inaugural edition was eight pages total, and its format served as a template which, with a modicum of variance, every successive edition would follow. Driscol and his colleagues had learned something from Paine. The writing was

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[36] *Temple of Reason* (New York), November 8, 1800.
[37] *Ibid.*

straightforward and not difficult to comprehend. The extracts from Clarke were of a scholarly vein, but not onerously so. And even the scholarly writings that appeared in subsequent editions more often than not were balanced out with original pieces that would not intimidate a non-intellectual crowd.

In the coming weeks the paper proved its penchant for courting controversy was no anomaly, particularly with Driscol's compositions. The next several issues would showcase his talent for writing with a bitingly sarcastic but also thoughtful style. His articles during this early period were fluid, concise, and not littered with obscure references to philosophical treatises that would have left the unschooled scratching their heads. He did not reference works from scholars or notable deists whose work he may have built upon. The articles simply come across as his reasonable interpretation of biblical scripture, which was source material people of any class had an equal chance to be familiar with.

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For *Temple*'s second edition, Driscol wrote an article in which he bluntly stated his thesis in the title, "Jesus Christ A Deist, And No God: Clearly proved from the Scriptures, especially his own words." The piece's introduction began with a statement that Jefferson would have approved of, as it places Jesus in the moral philosopher category. Driscol writes that all of Jesus's words show that he is "a good Deist, recommending the practice of virtue, as the only conduct pleasing to his father: No where is he foolish or vain enough to pretend to be a God." The early Christians, Driscol argues,

went overboard by elevating him to absurd heights, even borrowing from pagan traditions in making him a deity.[38]

Driscol then proceeded to unleash a searing attack on Christian hypocrisy. He emphasized what a mockery Christians have made of the precepts they supposedly held so dear by providing satiric commentary alongside eight of the Commandments from *Exodus*. For instance, "Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image; and their churches are full of them!" and "Honour thy father and mother – Nothing more common than to see the son kick the father, and the daughter beat the mother." Yet as provocative as these statements were, if the article stayed in this vein for its entirety it could be summarily dismissed as an exercise in angry bloviating.[39]

After the introduction, however, it becomes apparent that Driscol is going beyond sheer mockery. He sets out to prove his theory by combing the New Testament for specifics. Beginning chronologically, he references an episode recorded in *Matthew* and *Luke* in which Jesus is tempted by Satan. When Satan offers to bestow upon Jesus all the kingdoms of the world in exchange for fealty, Jesus replies: "'…get thee hence satan; for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou worship.'" Driscol then explains, "Here is the worship of one God only declared." That Jesus himself does not acknowledge his supposed divinity should lead, as Driscol must have believed, to the logical conclusion that self-serving priests later conjured that attribute.[40]

[38] *Temple of Reason* (New York), November 15, 1800.
[39] *Ibid.*
[40] *Ibid.*

A second part to "Jesus Christ A Deist…" appeared the following week, continuing where it had left off with a comparative analysis of the four Gospels. Driscol begins by recounting a story in which Jesus explains to a Samaritan woman that the ideal place to worship God is not in a physical location but within one's mind. The logic, according to Driscol, is that since "God is spirit…he ought to be worshipped by the mind of man." In acknowledging this, the ritualistic practices common in established religions then appear ludicrous: "…all this may do very well for mountibanks or drill serjeants; but can never be of use in worshipping the Supreme Being; who only requires the homage of the mind."[41] This conclusion is reminiscent of, and perhaps even inspired by, Paine's opening statement in *The Age of Reason*. Driscol would have had good reason for wanting readers to make that connection, as it could only help among an audience of the middling sort to be identified with the man popularly recognized as the face of deism.

This edition of *Temple* contained a second article by Driscol, entitled "The Christian God, Satan." As if establishing a trend, he was showing a knack for the edgy and provocative. The contention of this piece was that Christians, with an eye towards fear mongering, have elevated the Devil's power and influence to be on par with God's. The absurdity of this *promotion*, Driscol argued, should be apparent right from the very first quarrel the Supreme Being has with His apostate angel:

> This God of the priests is a strange God indeed; one time they place him in heaven contending with the Almighty about sovereign sway and universal empire… Then after a dreadful conflict, Satan is overpowered and tied down in hell! Then they let him loose again, by what means they do not tell us.

[41] *Temple of Reason* (New York), November 22, 1800.

There was, however, method to the madness of those who invented the tale. As the early church saw it, the devil had to be unleashed "…else the priests could not live; if he had been kept away chained… he would not have it in his power to act his part in the facerdotal and religious farce." After unveiling this ulterior motive, Driscol declares that the time has finally arrived to forsake the imaginary deity.[42]

Yet Driscol does not suggest ripping away what has become so ingrained in society's consciousness simply to leap into the unknown. He offers the *deist-way* as an enlightened alternative:

> Rational and enlightened man will learn to do good and shun evil, upon another principle, and by means quite different from those of *devilish* fear and horror. He will do good for good's sake – He will love virtue because it is amiable in itself, and entitled to praise here, and rewards hereafter – And he will shun evil, not from fear of a devil, but from a love for God. [43]

In believing that people will come to recognize that acting virtuously is its own reward, Driscol is exhibiting a tremendous degree of confidence in their innate reasoning abilities. It is a claim that expresses the triumph of humanism.

For the second time, Driscol had presented an intelligently reasoned and simple theological argument. He was also proving to be a good marketer of ideas; beginning with a title that would have perked his audience's curiosity, writing content that was both entertaining and thoughtful, and concluding on an optimistic note of humanity's ability for greatness. The spiritual path he was attempting to show readers was not one plagued with fear and intimidation. It was one in which they could follow on their own, without

[42] *Ibid.*
[43] *Ibid.*

holding the hand of a clergyman. No one individual or class is mentioned as being incapable of making these discoveries.

Driscol was also doing something quite revolutionary with 'Jesus, the man.' In removing the label of deity, Jesus appears as a champion of the people who declaims all pretensions to power. This falls in line with how *Temple* chose to see Napoleon and Jefferson; as men who put the interests of humanity ahead of personal ambitions. All three were cast as individuals who did not look to rule by absolute or arbitrary authority. Their portrayals were ideally suited to resonate with a people recently liberated from monarchical rule. True, they were in positions of leadership, but only elevated a modest level above the ordinary. As such, they could be trusted as being not so very different from the common man.

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As 1800 neared its end, *Temple* responded ecstatically to the results of the national election, declaring: "Every good Republican…will rejoice at this news, and feel proud that the administration of this country is placed in the hands of men distinguished for their integrity, talents, patriotism and Republican principles."[44] The paper had great cause to celebrate, as the nation had chosen Jefferson despite the relentless propaganda condemning him as an infidel. While *Temple* did not show its hand on all that this implied, Driscol and Palmer may have concluded that a popular surge for deism, as the natural companion of republicanism, was just around the corner.

[44] *Temple of Reason* (New York), December 20, 1800.

Only a few months later, however, the paper found itself in a precarious spot. On February 7, 1801, a mere three months after its debut, it ran a notice stating that operations would be suspended for at least several days. But problems were to prove more severe than that, as several days turned into several months. According to Schlereth's findings, Driscol had a falling out with his backers, David Denniston and James Cheetham, which compelled him to move *Temple* out of New York altogether. When the paper resumed in late April, it was headquartered in an office on Tenth and Arch Streets in Philadelphia.[45]

[45] *Temple of Reason* (New York), February 7, 1801; Schlereth, *An Age of Infidels*, 113.

CHAPTER 4

THE TEMPLE OF REASON'S SECOND LIFE

Despite the two month gap and the burden of transplanting to another city, *Temple*'s first issue off the press in its new home had the look of carrying on without missing a beat. It was not until six pages in that *Temple* addressed its relocation. Choosing to be confident of its prospects, a notice emphasized the positive reception it was given in the Quaker City. More intriguingly, however, the article contained a comment which would have made sense as part of the paper's original mission statement:

> As this paper combines Politics with Pure Religion, it becomes an object for the middling and industrious class of citizens, who, having neither means nor leisure to peruse the daily prints, will, at a glance, see the important news of the day compendiously summed up, impartially reported. Contrary to the opinion of most men, we hold, that Deism and Liberty should go hand in hand; and as mankind get enlightened, we are happy to find, that our opinion is verified. It would appear to be a contradiction in terms, to find men renounce *King-craft*, and still remain *enchanted* by Superstition and Priest-craft.

Here, perhaps for the first time, *Temple* was explicitly disclosing its agenda to reach out to people from ordinary backgrounds. With politics serving as the hook to get 'the middling and industrious class' reading the paper, these same readers would come to understand that Christian revelation was a stale remnant of monarchy. This would in turn lead to the natural conclusion that their country's political structure was amenable to deism.[46]

[46] *Temple of Reason* (Philadelphia), April 22, 1801.

Following in the footsteps of Paine and Palmer, Driscol was revealing himself unequivocally as a proselytizer of deism. He had a distinct method for using *The Temple of Reason* to open the doors of the Enlightenment to a popular audience.

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One noticeable change after *Temple*'s move was that its content sometimes indicated its adaptation to new surroundings. Several issues into its second life, it ran an item which had the intention of showing that deists were supported by Pennsylvania's laws and traditions. This article included the extract from Penn's Charter of Privileges which codified belief in one God as Pennsylvania's *only* required profession of religious conviction. It then offered a glowing illustration of what it viewed were the positive results of that decree: "People of all nations have flocked to Philadelphia, which has become the handsomest and happiest city in the world, and the metropolis of the state." These sentiments might have been Driscol's attempt to ingratiate himself to Philadelphians, but perhaps he was also trying to convince himself that he was now working in a better place; one that personified the ideals he wished to propagate.[47]

Conspicuously absent from the paper were the advertisements for Palmer's weekly lectures, since the *might-be* co-founder had remained in New York. However, it eagerly reported on his visit through Philadelphia that summer. In July, he was scheduled to deliver a discourse at the city's Universalist Church, but, in an incident reminiscent of eight years earlier, a sign appeared on the church door refusing his admittance at the appointed time. *Temple* expressed its dismay, declaring the episode "*An* UNIVERSAL

[47] *Temple of Reason* (Philadelphia), May 13, 1801.

Insult to the Citizens of Philadelphia!" However, the paper also found a way of using the incident to argue for constructing a *brick-and-mortar* Temple of Reason: "Let us hope, however, that friends…are *now* convinced of the necessity of erecting a building, where they may be sheltered and protected from the persecution of ignorance and the malice of bigotry."[48]

Creating or designating such a place was the goal of Philadelphia's Society of Theophilanthropists, a deistical group whose formation had been inspired by a French organization of the same name. Driscol supported their ambitious plan, employing *Temple* as a fundraising vehicle for the project.[49] Despite a possible contradiction with the *church of the mind* being the ideal place of express devotion, Driscol may have understood the value of having an actual physical structure to help the movement grow. It would answer the needs for mutual support that the printed word of newspapers or pamphlets could not.

Located one block away from its headquarters, *Temple* saw just how effective a non-traditional house of worship could be with a Methodist church that had once been a livery stable. Deciding to take a favorable view of the transformation, the paper applauded the Methodists for being consistent with the spirit of the Gospels: "And considering the place the savior of the world was born in, the idea of consecrating a livery stable to his worship, was as characteristic as it was pious." Furthermore, their act

[48] *Temple of Reason* (Philadelphia), July 8, 1801.
[49] *Temple of Reason* (Philadelphia), November 25, 1801, also printed in subsequent issues; Schlereth, *An Age of Infidels*, 70-71.

highlighted the hypocrisy of orthodox Christians: "It is only popes and bishops who are ashamed of the *manger* and the *stable*."[50]

It is easy to understand why *Temple* initially felt such affinity for Methodists. The sect had a less rigid hierarchy than other denominations, and held that ordinary individuals possess the capability of interpreting scripture on their own. By lauding this particular congregation *Temple* ran the risk of promoting revealed religion, although perhaps it was one worth taking in order to show to the middling sort and working people that deists were on the same side as non-elites.

The article is also illustrative of how *Temple*, in its willingness to go easier on some Christian sects than others, supported the political alliance between the Republican Party and evangelicals. The olive branch would be extended again in a later edition when it reprinted the now-famous correspondence between President Jefferson and the Danbury Baptists. These letters concerned the Baptists' worries about their religious rights being trampled upon, and Jefferson's reassuring reply that the First Amendment guarantees freedom of conscience to *all* Americans without the threat of government interference. This was the most important point of concurrence between deists and evangelicals, and one in which they could unite against a common enemy. [51]

Deists probably reasoned that there was no great harm in the alliance if it helped swing the electorate in Jefferson's favor. The immediate results made it appear that they played their cards right, for they now had one of their own in the presidency. *Temple* would happily claim him as such, writing: "we (cannot) suppose him to be so credulous

[50] *Temple of Reason* (Philadelphia), July 29, 1801.
[51] *Temple of Reason* (Philadelphia), February 6, 1802; Schlereth, *An Age of Infidels*, 111-12.

and weak as to worship a dove, and to think with the heard of believers, that God has metamorphosed himself into a man, to save knaves in Judea or New England."[52] However, it soon became apparent that America's choice for Jefferson did not necessarily equate to a choice for the Enlightenment. Evangelicals, as events would prove, were not so benign that deists could simply discard them when they were no longer of use. Instead, they became the largest obstacle to deism's very survival.

Temple realized this dilemma during the middle to latter stages of its run, reacting in abject horror to the rapid growth of Methodism. The paper never singled out Baptists for criticism, probably because it was held in check by the good will between Jefferson and the Danbury dissenters, but Methodists were fair game. Within five months, the paper went from referring to Methodists as "the modest and graceful disciples of John Wesley," to railing against them over their nerve to judge non-believers as fit for hell.[53]

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The Temple of Reason's Philadelphia phase also saw a diversification in its range of targets, as other revealed religions would have to take their lumps. A November 1801 issue contained an original poem, "Judaism," a mocking satire characterizing the ancient Hebrews as bloodthirsty religious fanatics. As to who devised this story of *divinely sanctioned murder*, the poem reveals the fingerprints of priest-craft:

> Their bulky legend writings swell,
> With many tales absurd,
> As wrote by priests, – tho' as they tell,
> All written by the Lord.

[52] *Temple of Reason* (Philadelphia), May 13, 1801.
[53] *Temple of Reason* (Philadelphia), July 29, 1801; *Temple of Reason* (Philadelphia), December 23, 1801.

The religion under scrutiny may have been different, but the villains were not.[54]

Islam would fare no better. It was similarly ridiculed in poetic form with "Mahometinism."[55] *Temple* also encapsulated the life of Mohammed in a short biography spanning three successive issues. An introduction to the piece elucidated the paper's opinion that Islam did not begin with the purest intentions: "To shew the reader how a designing knave, or an enthusiast, may obtain credit among the ignorant and propagate doctrines contrary to reason and common sense, we here copy a brief sketch of the life and adventures of Mahomet." However, the purpose of the article was not simply for readers to shake their heads at mistakes of the past, for it warned that "we see the same plans pursued, and men pretending to divine inspiration draw multitudes of credulous and unwary people after them, deluding them in the name of Jesus."[56] *Temple* likely had evangelical proselytizers in mind when referring to the 'men pretending to divine inspiration.' The article's warning seems intended for the 'credulous and unwary,' the non-intellectuals it was most worried would fall for these religious charlatans. *Temple* was showing signs that it knew competition was afoot for 'the middling and industrious class of citizens.'

No records have come to light of either Jews or Muslims taking offense at *Temple*'s gibes, but accounts abound of Christians registering complaints. In August 1801, the paper found itself in a media war a Baltimore paper, *The Temple of Truth*. The similarity in titles was no accident, for *Truth*'s founder, Mark Hargrove, started the paper

[54] *Temple of Reason* (Philadelphia), November 4, 1801.
[55] *Temple of Reason* (Philadelphia), December 16, 1801.
[56] *Temple of Reason* (Philadelphia), November 11, 1801.

in response to *Temple*. The feud between the two began with correspondence over a month prior, in which Hargrove, a self-professed Christian deist and minister of Baltimore's New Jerusalem Church, wrote a letter to Driscol challenging some of *Temple*'s assertions about biblical error. He also requested the rather large favor of having *Temple* print the letter. However, much to his chagrin, only select excerpts appeared, which were accompanied by some unflattering commentary: "We must beg leave to inform our reverend correspondent, that the Temple of Reason is not established for every furious fanatic and wild visionary to *rant* and *cant* away in it." Stung by these words, Hargrove sent a strongly worded rebuke to Driscol. He then got his paper underway. In its first issue, to show that he had upper hand in good faith, he printed his letters along with *Temple*'s responses in their entirety.[57]

As the media war stretched into months, *Temple* increasingly dedicated more newspaper space to the fight. It even reprinted long passages from *Truth* on its own pages. *Temple*'s writers may have appreciated the possibility of greater attention that a media war could bring. They also had the satisfaction of declaring victory that October, as *Truth* had to cease publication when it ran short of funding. Unable to contain its elation, *Temple* sarcastically declared: "Is not this very extraordinary in so christian a country, where this humble disciple of Jehovah Jesus declares himself the champion of revealed religion. We have fallen on evil times indeed![58] Perhaps if the author of this

[57] *Temple of Truth* (Baltimore), August 1, 1801, in John Hargrove, *The Temple of Truth; or A Vindication of Various Passages and Doctrines of the Holy Scriptures* (Baltimore: Warner and Hanna, 1801), 1-7; *Temple of Reason* (Philadelphia), July 1, 1801.
[58] *Temple of Reason* (Philadelphia), October 21, 1801.

statement knew that *Temple* would one day face a similar fate, he would not have been so smug.

CHAPTER 5

"BONAPARTE HAS DISAPPOINTED US"

In April 1802, with Driscol departing Philadelphia to work on a Baltimore newspaper, *Temple*'s editorial reigns were handed over to John Lithgow, a Scottish émigré who would see the paper through to its conclusion in early 1803. Lithgow's most enduring contribution to *Temple* was his authorship of a series of articles entitled "Equality – A Political Romance." These essays concerned the fictional state of Lithconia, a utopian society without priests, lawyers, jails, or private property. Some historians have taken a keen interest in the work, considering it to be an early expression of socialist thought. Certain tell-tale signs substantiate this claim, such as Lithgow's conviction that private property and excessive wealth for the few were societal ills. This ideal runs counter to the revolutionary generation's arguments for property rights, but might appear attractive to those on the lower rungs of the social ladder. However, for an America not yet immersed in the industrial age, the essays were probably *too* ahead of their time for working people to take much notice. [59]

Equality, as practiced in Lithconia, did not stop at the gender line. What held Western culture back from achieving a similar equality was the institution of marriage, of which Lithconia exercised no stringent policies. Lithgow was indignant over society's condemnation of any woman whose *crime* was not being able to find a husband and

[59] Michael Durey, "John Lithgow's Lithconia: The Making and Meaning of America's First 'Utopian Socialist' Tract," *The William & Mary Quarterly*, Vol. 49, No. 4 (October, 1992), 675-78, 686-88, 692-93; Schlereth, *An Age of Infidels*, 114, 265.

therefore forced to live in "shameful prostitution." Adding further insult to this plight, she was held to an unequal standard: "…it is a shame that women should be stigmatized, by custom, for what is approved in a man."[60]

Lithgow was boldly championing an improvement in the female condition, but it was not quite a first for *Temple*. Several months earlier, while still under Driscol's editorship, it reprinted Benjamin Franklin's 1747 story of Miss Polly Baker, a fictional tale about a woman standing trial for conceiving out of wedlock for the fifth time. In a heart-felt speech of her plight, she explains that there was no choice for her to have children any other way since no suitor ever came forward to marry her.[61]

The impetus for reprinting Franklin's story was a recent scandal in which a baby was found strangled to death several blocks away from *Temple*'s office. Commenting on the incident, the paper did not fault the mother – assuming the crime was committed by her – but rather laid the blame on western culture's draconian social conventions:

> When we consider the shame and disgrace, the temporal and eternal punishment, which with the Christian religion threatens the unfortunate female, who has been betrayed through the tenderness of heart, and the strong dictates of nature, to give a citizen to the republic; we are not surprised that such a dreadful departure from the feelings of nature should sometimes be found among modest females, who have, from their infancy, been imbued with a strong sense of shame, and the conviction that they must be, forever after, the outcasts of society, and abandoned to a life of wretchedness and misery.[62]

This was showing solidarity with the largest disenfranchised group in the nation. Driscol saw the injustice of vindictively hanging fear over the heads of women, threatening punishment to those who simply followed the laws of nature in conceiving children. He

[60] *Temple of Reason* (Philadelphia), May 15, 1802.
[61] *Temple of Reason* (Philadelphia), March 6, 1802.
[62] *Ibid.*

and Lithgow were right in step with how militant deism was coming to regard gender relations. Five years earlier Palmer had called for "the total annihilation of the prejudices which have established between the sexes an inequality of rights."[63]

As there were women in the Early Republic's printing industry, it is conceivable that if any worked at *Temple*'s office they could have had a hand in influencing these compositions. What we *do know* is that during the first half of the nineteenth century many women were drawn to the free inquiry movement. Arguably, Palmer, Driscol, and Lithgow were among those planting the seeds for this attraction.[64]

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1802 would also see *Temple* adopting new stances on familiar subjects, even before Driscol's departure. The paper's opinion on Methodism turned from distaste to utter contempt, as the sect continued attracting converts at startling rates. It also did an about-face on Napoleon, whom it could no longer rationalize defending. The final straw was the First Consul's reconciliation with Catholicism, a crippling blow to the deist vision of France carrying the torch of the Enlightenment.

With events looking grim on both the national and international stages, the optimism the paper had exhibited during the first half of its run began showing signs of strain. At one point, exasperated over the euphoria surrounding revivalism, it stated: "The last century is said to have been the age of Reason and Philosophy, but *this* seems to be

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[63] Durey, "John Lithgow's Lithconia," 686; Elihu Palmer, *An Enquiry Relative to the Moral & Political Improvement of the Human Species. An Oration, Delivered in the City of New York on the Fourth of July, Being the Twenty First Anniversary of American Independence* (New York: Crookes, 1797), 32; Walters, *Revolutionary Deists*, 205; May, *The Enlightenment in America*, 232.
[64] Schlereth, *An Age of Infidels*, 162-64, 180-81,198-99.

that of madness and folly."[65] *Temple* was clearly disgusted with the phenomenon of *emotional* Christianity. It had not counted on people's embrace of a viable alternative to deism within a republic. Belatedly adding Methodism to its list of enemies, the paper showed selective amnesia by commenting on the sect as though never having written anything positive about it. For instance, an article setting out to prove the flaws of Presbyterianism began by stating: "Hitherto, the Christian superstition has been attacked in a body – If any of the corps has been singled out, more particularly, it has been the catholics or the methodists."[66]

Temple was not alone in its concern over this matter. Their traditional adversaries were equally appalled. Eminent clergymen such as Lyman Beecher and Timothy Dwight took issue with itinerants who had the audacity to consider themselves qualified exhorters or ministers. They believed, as did others of orthodox persuasion, in the importance of seminary training. However, Christianity had been injected with the populist spirit, and mass evangelization increasingly came into the hands of the uneducated and illiterate. This new breed, usually Baptists and Methodists, was not burdened by excessive dogma or lengthy preparation time to receive a license. As a result, they could spread the word of God along the frontier and elsewhere with tremendous expediency. This had the effect of producing more converts who could in turn proselytize to others. The results of their

[65] *Temple of Reason* (Philadelphia), February 20, 1802.
[66] *Temple of Reason* (Philadelphia), March 13, 1802.

efforts were startling. A decade later, it was estimated that over a quarter of the nation's total population had attended revivalist camp meetings.[67]

What may have grated on *Temple*'s nerves more than anything else in the matter was that the people falling for revivalism were often the same middling sort and working people that the paper wanted for its *own* audience. As anti-authoritarian Jeffersonian republicans with no love for either social or religious hierarchies, they should have been ideal candidates for deism. But instead of coming to recognize the wisdom of the Enlightenment in a post-monarchical age, they were allowing themselves to be seduced by an odd form of democratized Christianity.

Sickened by this development in its own country, *Temple* also had trouble when looking to Europe for encouraging signs. In December 1801, it reacted in shock to rumors that Napoleon had "(forbidden) the Theophilanthropists to assemble in the national edifices in France." Although holding out hope that the news was erroneously reported, it did concede that "(if true,) Buonoparte is an avowed enemy to liberty of conscience; or at least that he wishes to discountenance every other religious system and mode of worship, in favor of popery; and this gives strong grounds to suspect the ambitious views of the First Consul."[68] Napoleon no longer appeared as the enlightened republican the paper previously proclaimed him to be.

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[67] May, *The Enlightenment in America*, 321-22; Nathan O. Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 17-22, 49-56; Joyce Appleby, *Inheriting the Revolution: The First Generation of Americans* (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 2000), 117-18, 200, 205; Daniel Walker Howe, *What Hath God Wrought: The Transformation of America, 1815-1848* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 176-77.

[68] *Temple of Reason* (Philadelphia), December 30, 1801.

A precursor to *Temple*'s modified view occurred several months earlier when it commented on Saint Domingue's success at achieving greater autonomy from French rule. It applauded the colony's abolition of slavery, anticipating that the example would "lead to the emancipation of this unfortunate race in all the West-India Islands."[69] Prior to that point, *Temple* had been relatively quiet on the slavery question; likely because of its ties to the Republican Party, which relied heavily on southern slaveholders for support. This would also explain why it never condemned Jefferson's ownership of hundreds of enslaved Africans. Coincidentally, it was around this time that Palmer also chose to address the issue of racialized slavery. In *Principles of Nature* he wrote: "the immoral opinion, that the whites have the right to enslave the blacks, is a complete abandonment of reciprocal justice, and a violation of the fundamental laws of Nature."[70] Having waited so long in his career to finally speak out, it is fair to wonder if he was similarly watching his step among Republican Party allies.

The following March, its opinion of Napoleon having completely soured, *Temple* wrote disparagingly of France's attempt to reintroduce racial slavery into its rogue colony. Its critique essentially turned into a condemnation of all human bondage, declaring: "There can be no lasting happiness in any nation where there are two distinct people – the one governing and the other governed. In every country where that has been the case, the human mind has sunk beneath the ordinary standard."[71] It took the extreme measures of a tyrant to push *Temple* into taking this stand, but the paper was finally

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[69] *Temple of Reason* (Philadelphia), August 19, 1801.
[70] Elihu Palmer, *Principles of Nature; or A Development of the Moral Causes of Happiness and Misery among the Human Species*, Third edition (New York: Naphtali Judah, 1806), 68-69; Walters, *Revolutionary Deists*, 204-05.
[71] *Temple of Reason* (Philadelphia), March 13, 1802.

making a case for abolitionism. The statement bears a resemblance to deism's condemnation of kings and priests, meaning that *Temple* similarly regarded the slaveholder as someone unlawfully wielding absolute and arbitrary authority. Even though the paper was otherwise generally low-key on abolition, it cannot be accused of inconsistency in recognizing the common trait of tyranny in these forms of patriarchy.

Temple's decision to speak out when it did may have had a lot to do with operating in Philadelphia. Pennsylvania's Gradual Abolition Law (1780) had dramatically decreased slavery in the city within the span of a generation. Deists who were anti-slavery more in sentiment than deed could now safely be forthright in expressing their views on the subject. At least locally, *Temple* did not have to be so concerned with offending middling sort readers. There were certainly slaveholders of that class, but also grounds for believing that slavery would vanish quicker among them than with wealthy Pennsylvanians. The latter more readily possessed the means to consistently circumvent the 'six month clause' by shuttling their human property across the state line before the deadline and then back again to restart the cycle.[72]

Temple's most virulent attacks against Napoleon, however, were not about his attempt to reinstitute slavery in Saint Domingue, but rather over France's renewed religiosity. It responded angrily to his proclamation justifying the "(necessity) *to set religion on its basis*." Thinking that this could only result in violence – as that was, in

[72] Gary B. Nash and Joan Soderlund, *Freedom by Degrees: Emancipation in Pennsylvania and its Aftermath* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 32, 75, 99-114, 137-40; Nash, *Forging Freedom*, 60-65; Richard S. Newman, *Freedom's Prophet: Bishop Richard Allen, the AME Church, and the Black Founding Fathers* (New York: New York University Press, 2008), 141. The 'six month clause' was a stipulation that – with some exceptions – slaveholders had six months to keep their slaves in the state before having to manumit them.

Temple's opinion, the recurring history of religious conquest – the paper wrote: "…we may soon expect to see Christians, under his banner, and under the influence of *that morality which is common to all christians*, namely, mutual hatred and animosity, deluging Europe with blood."[73]

Temple could not conceal its discouragement. In 1800, it had placed confidence in a man it believed was setting the French Republic aright. Less than two years later that trust looked horribly misplaced. Napoleon could no longer be held up as a leader who looked out for the interests of the common man. In November 1802, the paper reprinted an article from the *London Courier* that may well have captured the feelings the proselytizers of deism had at the moment. The article stated how France, due to the ambitions of a tyrant, squandered the opportunity for allowing liberty to bloom. The tragedy was that Napoleon's talents had made him seem an ideal candidate to lead the way towards enlightenment. Yet his choice to forsake the French Revolution's ideals caused the article to lament: "In truth, *Bonaparte* has disappointed us."[74]

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By this time, *Temple*'s days were numbered. The issue of finances, always a consistent problem, had begun to worsen over the summer. In July, it printed a stern notice for subscribers delinquent in their dues to come forward with what they owed.[75] By autumn, its pleas became much more desperate, with an October notice stating:

[73] *Temple of Reason* (Philadelphia), June 5, 1802.
[74] *London Courier*, reprinted in *Temple of Reason* (Philadelphia), November 6, 1802.
[75] *Temple of Reason* (Philadelphia), July 24, 1802, also printed in subsequent issues.

"When you subscribed for this paper you bound yourselves to pay three dollars in advance. Why have you not done it?"[76]

That winter, unable to sustain itself any longer, *Temple* exited the stage.

[76] *Temple of Reason* (Philadelphia), October 2, 1802, also printed in subsequent issues.

CHAPTER 6

"THE PRIVILEGE OF REASONING AND BELIEVING FOR OURSELVES"

Despite Palmer's plans to revive *The Temple of Reason* in New York, the paper printed its final issue on February 19, 1803 from its Arch Street office in Philadelphia. Schlereth rightly points out that the large majority of newspapers during that era did not last longer than three years, so perhaps it was still generating interest despite the financial pitfalls.[77]

That December, Palmer began editing his own deist publication, *Prospect, or View of the Moral World*, but it only ran for a year. Palmer himself did not last much longer, dying of pleurisy in April 1806. He passed away in Philadelphia, which, in a tragic sense, was a fitting place for him to battle with the disease that would take his life. This was the city that presented him with so many unpleasant challenges; where he was prevented from speaking twice – by force on the first occasion – and where he lost both his first wife and his eyesight during the 1793 Yellow Fever epidemic. As if being tarnished by a final insult, an obituary in a Philadelphia newspaper referred to him as "the noted apostle of Atheism."[78]

Unlike Palmer, Driscol became less of an advocate for deism in his post-*Temple* editorial ventures. After his stint in Baltimore, he moved to Georgia in 1804 where he oversaw the growth of the *Augusta Chronicle*. When he died in 1811 his obituary merely acknowledged him as the editor of that paper, stating nothing of his deism or association

[77] *Temple of Reason* (Philadelphia), February 19, 1803; Schlereth, *An Age of Infidels*, 114.
[78] *United States Gazette* (Philadelphia), April 2, 1806.

with *Temple*. In 2010, the *Chronicle* ran a story about its long history in which Driscol is credited with increasing the paper's circulation. It commented on his rabid anti-British politics, but made no reference to his spiritual beliefs. It appears that that he remained a proud republican in his public life, but was low-key about his deism.[79] Possibly he came to feel, or was told, this was necessary due to the political climate. With the increasing Christianization of America it seemed politically unwise to make Christians feel unwelcome in the Republican Party.

This was a significant change from only a few years before. At the turn of the century, both Palmer and Driscol believed the nation was on the cusp of embracing deism. A statement from Palmer's *The Examiners Examined*, which was reprinted in *Temple* in 1801, read: "But the times are now changing; the privilege of reasoning and believing for ourselves, begins to be exercised – freedom of inquiry abounds; and the natural inherent right of speaking and acting according to the dictates of our own conscience (without injuring society) is happily enjoyed." But what appeared promising in 1801 was not so apparent down the road- at least not enough for Driscol to express in the *Augusta Chronicle*.[80]

The 'change' was that the nation was transforming from a republic to a democracy. *Temple* had been at the forefront of this trend in its efforts to bring deism to the public at large. However, as Gordon Wood observes, power was now reaching the hands of ordinary citizens who felt little or no attraction for the Enlightenment. This

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[79] *Washington Intelligencer*, March 26, 1811; Schlereth, *An Age of Infidels*, 113,116; "'Chronicle' Grew Despite Early Trials," *Augusta Chronicle*, August 29, 2010, http://chronicle.augusta.com/225/2010-08-29/chronicle-grew-despite-early-trials.

[80] Elihu Palmer, *The Examiners Examined*, 6; *Temple of Reason* (Philadelphia), December 23, 1801, p. 393.

confounded many among the country's founding generation, even though it was the result of what they themselves had set in motion during the American Revolution. All their rhetoric on equality became a reality for white males from ordinary backgrounds, drastically affecting the make-up of both civil *and* religious institutions. Opportunities for advancement availed themselves to the many. To Jefferson's dismay, and that of other deists, these common people now in positions of prominence overwhelmingly chose the God of Emotion over the God of Reason.[81]

Palmer was correct when he wrote "the privilege of reasoning and believing for ourselves, begins to be exercised," but when Americans decided for themselves most did not go in the direction he had hoped. They found great appeal in the new style of Christianity where anyone could be an expert on scripture. It was also much easier for people from humble origins to achieve status. For instance, the uneducated Methodist exhorter Peter Cartwright, by sheer talent as a dynamic performer, rose to become one of the most famous frontier preachers of the Second Great Awakening. His background was not atypical for an itinerant evangelical preacher, as most were working class people who had chosen a rigorous life for very little recompense.[82] The same sort of individuals that deist proselytizers would have happily welcomed into *their* movement.

White males were the main beneficiaries of the country's democratization, but African Americans also found ways to use this religion of the everyman to move up the status ladder. Evangelicalism had made significant inroads into their communities, with

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[81] Gordon S. Wood, *The Radicalism of the American Revolution* (New York: Vintage Books, 1993), 347, 366-69.

[82] Daniel J. Boorstin, *The Americans: The National Experience* (New York: History Book Club, 2002), 318-19; Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity*, 11, 138; Walker Howe, *What Hath God Wrought*, 176-77.

its philosophy that all were equal in God's eyes finding wide resonance. And while it was certainly true that spiritual equality did not always equal social equality within the white-dominated sects, blacks endeavored to change this condition by forming their own churches. A groundbreaking instance of this took place in federal Philadelphia, coincidentally during the same year the angry mob forced Palmer to flee that city. Following the decision of by St. George's Methodist Church to racially segregate its congregation, Absalom Jones and Richard Allen, co-founders of the Free African Society, joined forces to build St. Thomas's African Episcopal Church. It did not take long for others to follow their example, as African houses of worship quickly sprang up around the country.[83]

Just as blacks broke racial barriers by achieving success in the pulpit, women defiantly ignored gender rules by preaching in churches or becoming circuit-riders; and African American women, notably Sojourner Truth and Jarena Lee, blended their ministerial duties with anti-slavery activism. Women also put their organizational skills to work by arranging religiously affiliated benevolent activities and taking part in temperance societies. Daniel Walker Howe sees this as an early chapter in the fight for gender equality, drawing a connection between women achieving status during the Second Great Awakening and the later birth of the women's suffrage movement at Seneca Falls.[84]

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[83] Appleby, *Inheriting the Revolution*, 119, 184-85, 202; Walker Howe, *What Hath God Wrought*, 182-88; Nash, *Forging Freedom*, 119-28; Newman, *Freedom's Prophet*, 63-64; Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity*, 107-10.

[84] Walker Howe, *What Hath God Wrought*, 173, 190-1; Appleby, *Inheriting the Revolution*, 119-20, 185.

With the agency that the disaffected and disenfranchised were able to have through evangelicalism, it may appear that the Enlightenment did not stand much of a chance at winning the heart and soul of the nation. However, as *Temple* proved with its commentary on Saint Domingue and outrage over society's condemnation of unmarried women conceiving children, deists who worked to disseminate their views to audiences beyond the elite could also be progressive in their notions of racial and gender equality. This begs the question why they were not as successful as evangelicals with the disaffected and disenfranchised. After all, both sides offered a similar message of entrusting more power to the individual without the interference of a meddlesome clergy and other oppressive forces.

The most obvious reason is that the outstanding efforts evangelicals exerted in proselytizing paid off in rewarding dividends. Circuit riders were willing to make great sacrifices by leading a rugged existence, insuring that the Gospel was spread throughout as many quarters as they could reach. Evangelicals also, albeit somewhat belatedly, made extensive use of the printing press. America's first Christian newspaper did not begin until 1808, but there would be thirty in less than twenty years.[85]

However, it was more than just being overwhelmed by sheer numbers that caused deism to be shunted to the side. Another reason – among several – is that deists never quite shed the perception that the Enlightenment was only for the educated classes. [86]

[85] Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity*, 73-6, 128-30; Appleby, *Inheriting the Revolution*, 216-18.
[86] Walters, *Revolutionary Deists*, 248; May, *The Enlightenment in America*, 325.

This point, more than any other, may lead to the view that *The Temple of Reason* failed in its mission of reaching out to the middling sort and working people.

To reach such a conclusion would make as much sense as calling Paine's *Age of Reason* a failure. For while it is accurate to say the Enlightenment came to an end during the first half of the nineteenth century, deistic concepts certainly had staying-power. Religious skepticism became an integral part of the free inquiry, transcendentalist, and utopian socialist movements, and even revivalism can credit the Enlightenment with advocating the notion that ordinary people can think for themselves on topics of weighty consequence. Also, deism itself did not vanish entirely. It made a creditable resurgence during the Jacksonian era with, notably, a large working class constituency. Original pieces from *Temple* even found their way back into print when the Lithconia essays were published as a single tract in 1837. This was a time when they would have greater relevance for working class people.[87]

For over two years *Temple* was part of the ongoing conversation of spiritual matters and their connection to politics and social life. It covered a near-nationwide expanse, as newspapers from New England to Georgia took notice of it; and, if we take the paper at its word, it came into the hands of at least five hundred subscribers. [88] Much like Paine's *Age of Reason*, it played a role in passing ideas of religious skepticism along, and endeavored to do so outside the circles of the intellectual elite. It had clear strategies for attracting the middling sort and working people to its readership; such as appealing to

[87] Wilentz, *Chants Democratic*, 154, 182; May, *The Enlightenment in America*, 326; Durey, "John Lithgow's Lithconia," 693.
[88] *Temple of Reason* (Philadelphia), November 27, 1802; Schlereth, *An Age of Infidels*, 114.

the patriotic impulses of Americans proud at having overthrown a monarch, printing original pieces that were engaging and did not sink under the weight of their own scholarship, including current news items to catch the eye of the 'industrious class,' and encouraging the idea that people of any social or economic background possess the ability to better themselves without the guidance of patriarchal figures. It did tout certain individual leaders – Jesus, Jefferson, and, at least for a while, Napoleon – but as advocates of the people, not oppressive rulers. The newspaper cast them in roles designed to appeal to non-elites, as individuals who understood the struggles of ordinary people and were therefore worthy of popular support.

One may argue that the efforts of deist proselytizers were all for naught since the Enlightenment did not survive unadulterated. Meyer holds a particular grudge for how he perceives Americans bastardized the Enlightenment by "(forcing) the experimental method of reasoning into the service of traditional values."[89] The flaw of this view is that it completely misses the movement's diversity of offshoots. It should also be duly noted that Enlightenment ideology, even at its apogee, was always in constant flux, so it never transcended from one generation to the next *unadulterated*. For instance, the deism of the 1790s had evolved tremendously in the one hundred years since Toland and Clarke recorded their ideas. And if Paine, Palmer, Driscol, and Lithgow had not worked to disseminate deistic ideas to as large an audience as they could, movements that succeeded the Enlightenment would have looked very different indeed.

[89] Meyer, *The Democratic Enlightenment*, xxvi-xxvii.

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