

**The  
Stone-Campbell  
Movement**

An International Religious Tradition

Edited by

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and Douglas A. Foster

The University of Tennessee Press

Knoxville

2002

## *The Christian Movement and the Demand for a Theology of the People*

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In 1776 John Adams posed the question that would preoccupy his generation of American citizens and their children. "It is certain, in theory," he said, "that the only moral foundation of government is, the consent of the people. But to what extent shall we carry this principle?" The Revolution brought an accent of reality to a new self-evident truth, the sovereignty of the people, which Edmund Morgan has recently described as a "political fiction." For the Founding Fathers the fiction of popular sovereignty held some resemblance to the facts, but they fully expected the governed and the governors to "join in a benign conspiracy to suspend disbelief" in the new fiction, in other words, to believe it rhetorically rather than literally. The people were not so kind, however, and the shrill and unending debate that characterized American history from Adams to Andrew Jackson concerned how seriously this fiction should be taken.<sup>1</sup>

A number of scholars have recently explored the dimensions of this cultural ferment over the meaning of freedom. In the wake of their own and the French Revolution, Americans witnessed the rapid growth of voluntary organizations and popular newspapers, the formation of organized political parties amid heated and increasingly popular political debate, the armed protest of unprotected economic groups, sharp attacks upon elite professions and upon slavery, and new ideas of citizenship and representation, of old age and women's identity.<sup>2</sup> Eugene Genovese has even argued that a revolutionary ideology of liberty and equality transformed the character of slave resistance in North America and in the Caribbean.<sup>3</sup> Lamenting the awakening to political consciousness of the common man, Harrison Gray Otis gave to a Harvard audience in 1836 his view of what had happened since the Revolution: "Everywhere the disposition is found among those who live in the valleys, to ask those who live on the hills, 'How came we here and you there?' accompanied with intelligible demonstrations of a purpose in the former, to partake of the benefits of the mountain air."<sup>4</sup>

What became of American religion in these years—roughly 1780 to 1820—when traditional values were being turned upside down by what Gordon S. Wood has called a “democratization of mind”?<sup>5</sup> Despite a wealth of recent scholarship on the role of religion in the coming of the American Revolution, surprisingly little work has been done on the changing nature of popular religion after the Revolution. This imbalance stems in part from the conventional division between the era of the republics founding and that of the middle period, but it also reflects the simple fact that a quickened interest in religion as a cultural force has emerged within a broader historiographical tendency to downplay the social impact of the Revolution. The result has been that while historians have noted many links between the Great Awakening and the Revolution, they have not followed through to ask how rapid social change in the young republic affected structures of religious belief and organization.<sup>6</sup> What happened when people began to call for a strenuous application of popular sovereignty to the church? What did Christian freedom come to mean for people ready to question any source of authority that did not begin with an act of individual choice?

To explore these questions, this essay will focus on the cultural roots of a movement that assumed the name “Christian” or “Disciples of Christ.” Between 1790 and 1815 this loose network of religious radicals demanded, in light of the American and French revolutions, a new dispensation set free from the trammels of history, a new kind of institutional church premised on the self-evident principles of republicanism, and a new form of biblical authority calling for the inalienable right of common people to interpret the New Testament for themselves. The central figures in the reform movement—Elias Smith in New England, James O’Kelly in Virginia, Barton Stone in Kentucky, and Alexander Campbell in Pennsylvania—were a motley crew with few common characteristics, but they all moved independently to similar conclusions within a fifteen-year span. A Calvinist Baptist, a Methodist, and two Presbyterians all found traditional sources of authority anachronistic and found themselves groping toward similar definitions of egalitarian religion.<sup>7</sup> In a culture that increasingly balked at vested interests, symbols of hierarchy, and timeless authorities, a remarkable number of people would wake up one morning to find it self-evident that the priesthood of all believers meant just that—religion of, by, and for the people.

At the dawn of the nineteenth century, the Federalist citadel of Essex County, Massachusetts, witnessed a major assault on its well-bred and high-toned culture. Religious enthusiasm had taken hold among common people, and its rude challenge to authority dismayed even the tolerant Jeffersonian diarist William Bentley of Salem. As late as 1803, Bentley had confided smugly that Essex County remained virtually free of sects. During the next five years, he watched with dismay the lower orders of his community championing “religious convulsions,”

“domestic fanaticism,” and “Meeting-Mania.” In chronicling the parade of sects that won attention—Baptist, Freewill Baptist, Methodist, Universalist, and Christian—Bentley noted the first field meeting in the county since George Whitefield, preaching by blacks and illiterate sailors, and servants angering their employers by frequenting night lectures “as in Mother Hutchinson’s time.” What Bentley found most appalling was that “the rabble” not only noised abroad strange doctrine but actually went beyond what they were told, attempting “to explain, condemn and reveal” religious matters. The people, he groaned, were doing theology for themselves.<sup>8</sup>

Bentley saved his sharpest barbs for an itinerant preacher, the “notorious” Smith, who regularly barnstormed through Essex County, preaching in the open air, singing in the streets, and accosting people to question their spiritual state. If this was not enough to discomfit the respectable citizens of Salem, Smith kept the pot boiling by leaving behind bundles of his tracts and pamphlets.<sup>9</sup>

For all its parallels with the dissent of a Whitefield or an Isaac Backus, Smith’s gospel for the people did have one different twist. It was laced with the language of politics and reflected the experience of a man whose radical pilgrimage began with a political conversion. Until 1800 Smith filled the pulpit of the respectable Baptist Church in Woburn, Massachusetts, and gave little attention to political questions of the day. During the election of 1800, however, he fell under the influence of the radical Jeffersonian publicist Benjamin Austin Jr., who wrote regularly for the *Boston Independent Chronicle*. Smith quickly imbibed Austin’s heady wine, which made much of the right of common people to think and act for themselves. Resigning from his church—as a manifesto of his own liberty—and denouncing formal religion of every kind, Smith began to translate the sovereignty of the people to the sphere of religion.<sup>10</sup> “Let us be republicans indeed,” he declared in 1809. “Many are *republicans* as to *government*, and yet are but half republicans, being in matters of religion still bound to a catechism, creed, covenant or a superstitious priest. Venture to be as independent in things of religion, as those which respect the government in which you live.”<sup>11</sup> From Portsmouth, New Hampshire, Smith launched the first religious newspaper in the United States, a fortnightly *Herald of Gospel Liberty*, which he edited from 1808 to 1818. From that forum, and in scores of pamphlets and sermons, he and a band of fifty or so itinerants, who called themselves merely Christians, carried on a blistering attack upon Baptists, Congregationalists, Methodists, and Federalists of any religious persuasion. The *Herald of Gospel Liberty*, which by 1815 had fourteen hundred subscribers and more than fifty agents around the country, became a vehicle of communication for other individuals who were moving independently to the same conclusions as Smith.<sup>12</sup>

From Virginia came word of O’Kelly’s Republican Methodists, founded in 1794 to undo the “ecclesiastical monarchy” in the Methodist church. A prime

mover among early Virginia Methodists, O'Kelly could not abide the bishopric of Francis Asbury and withdrew with more than thirty ministers to form a connection that had as many as twenty thousand members when it merged with Smith's forces, under the name Christian, in 1809.<sup>13</sup> "Episcopacy makes a bad appearance in our republican world," O'Kelly argued in 1798. "Francis was born and nurtured in the land of Bishops and Kings and what is bred in the bone, is hard to get out of the flesh."<sup>14</sup> O'Kelly, who had taken up arms in the Revolution and served a brief stint as a British captive, argued that he was "too sensible of the sweets of liberty, to be content any longer under British chains . . . As a son of America, and a Christian," he challenged Asbury, "I shall oppose your political measures and contend for the Saviour's government. I contend for Bible government, Christian equality, and the Christian name."<sup>15</sup>

Stone was an equally interesting figure who had ventured upon much the same pilgrimage prior to the appearance of the *Herald of Gospel Liberty*. In 1802, in the wake of the Cane Ridge Revival in Kentucky, Stone decided he could no longer live under Presbyterian doctrine or church organization. A year later, he and five other ministers pushed this idea to its logical extreme and proclaimed that it was not just the Presbyterians who were wrong: all church structures were suspect. Signing "The Last Will and Testament of Springfield Presbytery," these men vowed to follow nothing but the Christian name and the New Testament.<sup>16</sup>

Scholars have generally viewed Stone's beliefs as the product of the rough-and-tumble context of the frontier and of the rampant emotionalism of the Great Revival.<sup>17</sup> Stone was a rawboned character, no doubt, but he also spent his formative years during the Revolution, and his theology of "gospel-liberty" reflected this early experience. "From my earliest recollection I drank deeply into the spirit of liberty," he confessed late in life, "and was so warmed by the soul-inspiring droughts, that I could not hear the name of British, or Tories, without feeling a rush of blood through the whole system . . . I confess their magic influence to this advanced day of my life." It was not without deep connotation that Stone characterized his break with the Presbyterians as the "declaration of our independence."<sup>18</sup>

The final member of the quartet whose democratic theology this essay analyzes is the Scottish immigrant Alexander Campbell—the only college graduate among the four and the only one not to participate in the American Revolution.<sup>19</sup> Whatever Alexander Campbell may have brought to America of his Scottish and Presbyterian heritage, he found much of it convenient to discard for an explicitly American theology. Writing to his uncle back in Scotland in 1815, he described his seven years in the United States: "During this period of years my mind and circumstances have undergone many revolutions . . . I have . . . renounced much of the traditions and errors of my early education." He described the change elsewhere in these words: "My mind was, for a time, set loose from all its former

moorings. It was not a simple change: but a new commencement . . . the whole landscape of Christianity presented itself to my mind in a new attitude and position."<sup>20</sup> By 1830 Alexander Campbell's quest for primitive Christianity led his movement, the Disciples of Christ, into union with Stone's Christians. By 1860 their denomination claimed about 200,000 adherents, the fifth largest Protestant body in the United States.<sup>21</sup> More important, for our purposes, his theology fell into an unmistakable pattern that was emerging in the early republic. Smith, O'Kelly, and Stone all knew what Campbell meant when he proclaimed that July 4, 1776, was "a day to be remembered as was the Jewish Passover . . . This revolution, taken in all its influences, will make men free indeed."<sup>22</sup>

In many ways the message of the Christians built upon the kind of radical piety that Americans had known since the Great Awakening of the 1740s. These new reformers hammered relentlessly at the simple themes of sin, grace, and conversion; they organized fellowships that resisted social distinctions and welcomed spontaneous experience; and they denounced any religion that smacked of being bookish, cold, and formal. What sets the Christians apart from earlier revivalists is the extent to which they wrestled self-consciously with the loss of traditional sources of authority and found in democratic political culture a cornerstone for new foundations. Taking seriously the mandate of liberty and equality, the Christians espoused reform in three areas. First, they called for a revolution within the church that would place laity and clergy on an equal footing and would exalt the conscience of the individual over the collective will of any congregation or church organization. Second, they rejected the traditions of learned theology altogether and called for a new view of history that welcomed inquiry and innovation. Finally, they called for a populist hermeneutic premised on the inalienable right of every person to understand the New Testament for themselves.

A zeal to dismantle mediating elites within the church, more than anything else, triggered the Christians' revolt against tradition. O'Kelly broke with Asbury when the Methodist bishop refused to put up with representative government in the church. Smith bade farewell to Backus and the Warren Association after influential colleagues criticized his plain dress and suggested that the respectable parishioners of Woburn, Massachusetts, deserved more decorum. Both Stone and Thomas Campbell—Alexander's father, who had preceded him to America— withdrew from the Presbyterians when their orthodox colleagues began to clamp down on their freedom of inquiry concerning Presbyterian standards. Before their respective separations, each of these men in his own way had offered stern opposition to received tradition; yet their dissent was contained within taken-for-granted cultural boundaries. Once they had severed organizational ties, however, mild questions reappeared as seething hostility, and suggestions for reform turned to ecclesiastical defiance.

The Christians excelled at popular communication. They ferreted out converts with an unremitting itinerancy and cranked out an avalanche of pamphlet and newspaper copy, which, in its form and content, conspired against social distinction.<sup>23</sup> Smith was aware of his innovative role when he began the first religious newspaper in the United States; he confessed on its opening page that the utility of such a paper had been suggested to him by the explosion of popular print all around. "In a short and cheap way," he asserted, "a general knowledge of our affairs is diffused through the whole." While his paper did include accounts of revivals of religion throughout the world, its overall strategy showed little resemblance to previous revival periodicals such as the *Christian History* of the Great Awakening, largely an intramural communication among the clergy. By promoting in common language the idea that "right is equal among all," Smith knew that he would incur the judgment that he was "stirring up the people to revolt" and "turning the world upside down."<sup>24</sup> Just as he expected, the established clergy found his "vulgar stories and malicious sarcasm" totally beneath them, but they could hardly ignore the popularity of his "poisoned arrows of ridicule and reproach."<sup>25</sup>

The style of Smith's communication is well illustrated in one of his early pamphlets, *The Clergyman's Looking-Glass*, a stinging attack on men of the cloth that went through at least a dozen printings. Smith juxtaposed passages of the New Testament with satirical jibes at the contemporary clergy in mock-Scripture style. After quoting from I Peter the instructions that elders were to serve God's flock "not for filthy lucre . . . neither as being lords over God's heritage," Smith gave his Petrine rendition of the modern clergy:

The reverend clergy who are with me I advise, who am also a clergyman, and a D.D. a member of that respectable body, who are numerous, and "who seek honor one of another;" and a partaker of the benefit of it; feed yourselves upon the church and parish, over which we have settled you for life, and who are obliged to support you, whether they like you or not; taking the command by constraint, for filthy lucre, not of a ready mind, as lords over men's souls, not as ensamples to them, and when commencement day shall appear, you shall receive some honorary title, which shall make you appear very respectable among the reverend clergy.<sup>26</sup>

In a similar vein, Alexander Campbell used his first newspaper, the *Christian Baptist*, to mock the pretensions of the clergy. In a burlesque "Third Epistle of Peter," a document reportedly discovered by a monk, he instructed preachers to live well, wear the best clothes, adorn themselves with high-sounding titles, drink costly wine, and fleece the people.<sup>27</sup> Evangelicals in the past had often questioned the spiritual state of individual clergymen; the Christians now took the liberty to slander the entire profession as money-grubbing tyrants.

This kind of billingsgate journalism employed two very powerful appeals. In the first place, it portrayed society as horizontally polarized: the people were arrayed against elites of all kind, military, legal, civic, and religious. In an early edition of the *Herald of Gospel Liberty*, Smith sketched a most revealing dialogue between the people and the privileged class. "The picture, is this: two companies standing in sight of each other, one large, the other small. The large containing every profession useful to society, the other small, wearing marks of distinction, appearing as though they did no labour, yet in rich attire, glittering with gold and silver, while their plump and ruddy countenances, prove them persons of leisure and riches." Seething with resentment, the people of Smith's dialogue happened to overhear what the privileged were saying to each other: "To mix and place ourselves on a level with the *common people*, would be beyond all measure degrading and vilifying. What! are they not born to serve us? and are we not men of a totally distinct blood and superior pedigree?" In response, the people insisted that they were going "to take the management of our affairs into our own hands . . . When the people declare themselves free, such privileged classes will be as useles[s] as candles at noonday."<sup>28</sup>

Abel M. Sargent, another radical figure associated with the Christians, used his paper, the *Halcyon Itinerary and True Millennium Messenger*, to present a virtual class analysis of society. Writing in 1807 to extol Thomas Jefferson as the forerunner of a new millennial age, Sargent demanded that life, liberty, and happiness be extended to "the oppressed who have been deprived of them." His images of society bristle with the ongoing conflict between the powerful and the oppressed: "How often do we see it the case in earthly courts, under the dominion of the beast, that the power and influence of money and false Agency overbalance equity and right; so that the poor have but a dull chance to obtain justice in carnal courts; and again, how often is the poor industrious and honest labourer, reduced to the absolute necessity of yielding up his rights and falling a prey to cruelty and injustice, merely for want of money enough to discharge the fees of those whose interest and livings (like the wolf and raven) depend on the ruin and destruction of others."<sup>29</sup>

For all its innovation, however, this bombast against the privileged also employed a second appeal. It appropriated the rhetoric of civil and religious liberty that the respectable clergy had made popular during the Revolution and marshaled it for an entirely new purpose, to topple its very architects. The Christians exploited to the hilt the potent themes of tyranny, slavery, and Antichrist; they delighted in regaling their audiences with the latest chapter in the saga of the beast and the whore of Babylon. Simply put, Antichrist now worked his evil machinations through elites of all kind, particularly the clergy. In a splendid example of the multivalency of language, rhetoric that had seemed benign

when used by respectable clergymen during the Revolution came to have radical connotations when abstracted from a restricted context and transferred to people who had reason to lash out at vested interests.<sup>30</sup>

But what end did the Christians have in view when decrying ecclesiastical authority? What positive implications did they wring out of the notion of religious liberty? Smith came right to the point in an early issue of the *Herald of Gospel Liberty* when he contrasted the mere separation of church and state with "being wholly free to examine for ourselves, what is truth." He argued that every last Christian had the "unalienable right" to follow "the scripture wherever it leads him, even an equal right with the Bishops and Pastors of the churches . . . even though his principles may, in many things, be contrary to what the Reverend D.D.'s call Orthodoxy."<sup>31</sup> Using the same language, Alexander Campbell pressed for "the inalienable right of all laymen to examine the sacred writings for themselves." Brimming with conspiratorial notions of how clergymen of every stripe had "hoodwinked" the people, this logic eventually led each of these Christian leaders to demand that the traditional distinction between clergy and laity be abolished and that any leadership in the local church function according to new rules: "liberty is no where safe in any hands excepting those of the people themselves."<sup>32</sup> With demands for this sort of liberation afoot, it is little wonder that Congregational and Presbyterian clergymen came to view the Christians as but another tentacle of the Bavarian Illuminati's conspiracy to overthrow authority in church and state.<sup>33</sup>

The Christian idea of religious liberty stands in marked contrast to the eighteenth-century notion that religious liberty meant the civil right to choose or not to choose affiliation with a church. The religious dissent that had come out of the Great Awakening, despite its popular sources, had never begun to suggest that power should be surrendered to the people in this fashion. The Baptists in Virginia set themselves off from the culture of gentlemen by striving for more order, more discipline, and more social control within the local congregation.<sup>34</sup> In New England, as well, Baptists and Separatists called for closed communion and a tighter discipline within the pure church. By the 1760s, they were educating their clergy, forming associations to regulate doctrine and local disputes, and, as their people began to drift away to other sects during the Revolution, actually imposing stiff creedal tests upon local churches. Backus did not long for some new order that leveled the clergy and exalted the laity; he reminisced, instead, about the pious fathers of early New England. He argued time and again that his Baptists agreed "with the most eminent fathers of New England, except in sprinkling infants upon the faith of their parents and calling it baptism."<sup>35</sup> The same point has been made about the Separatists of New England: "they were reformers, not rebels; . . . they wished to fulfill their history as Puritans, not repudiate it."<sup>36</sup>

In contrast, the Christians called for the abolition of organizational restraints of any kind. In the "Last Will and Testament of Springfield Presbytery," Stone and five colleagues dissolved their association, already a splinter group from the Presbyterian church. Only by renouncing all institutional forms could "the oppressed . . . go free, and taste the sweets of gospel liberty."<sup>37</sup> Alexander Campbell did not even want to hear the words *church government*: "We have no system of our own, or of others, to substitute in lieu of the reigning systems. We only aim at substituting the New Testament."<sup>38</sup> In a similar vein, Stone and his associates declared that the attempt "to impose any form of government upon the church . . . should be justly abandoned by every child of gospel liberty." They went on to say that any human form of government would be "like binding two or more dead bodies together" and coercing people "like parts of a machine."<sup>39</sup> The organization of Protestant churches, which in colonial culture had been seen as vibrant and alive—the very body of Christ—now smacked of being dead and mechanistic.

By their appeal to "Bible government," the Christians removed the issue of power and authority from any concrete application. They opposed all ecclesiastical names not found in the New Testament, advocated the right of the individual unilaterally to withdraw from church membership, and refused to adhere to creeds as tests of fellowship, to undergo theological examinations, or to offer a confession of faith upon joining a church. In short, no human organization could exist that did not spring from the uncoerced will of the individual. When pressed by Bishop Asbury to heed the scriptural injunction, "Obey them that have rule over you," O'Kelly responded: "Rule over, is no more than for the church to follow those guides who delivered unto them the Word of God." O'Kelly was suggesting that, by submitting to the New Testament, a Christian in 1800 never would have to doff his hat to any mere mortal.<sup>40</sup>

In a passing reference in *The American Revolution Considered as a Social Movement*, J. Franklin Jameson noted the growth in numbers and zeal of those religious bodies that were revolting against Calvinism—the Methodists, Universalists, Unitarians, and Freewill Baptists.<sup>41</sup> He might also have included the loose combination of mavericks that called themselves merely Christians. Except for O'Kelly, whose Methodist background made Calvinism a dead issue, the other primary figures in this movement—Smith, Stone, and Campbell—were all zealous Calvinists early in life and experienced a conversion to what they called gospel liberty.

On one level this revolt seems simple enough to understand. The heady concepts of liberty that had led to denunciations of institutional constraints also rendered meaningless such concepts as unconditional election and limited atonement. After great intellectual turmoil, each of these men came to the point of harmonizing theology with their social experience. As a Calvinist, Stone confessed that he was "embarrassed with many abstruse doctrines."

"Scores of objections would continually roll across my mind." What he called the "labyrinth of Calvinism" left his mind "distressed," "perplexed," and "bewildered." He found relief from this dissonance of values only as he came to attack Calvinism as falsehood.<sup>42</sup>

The revolt against Calvinism, however, becomes somewhat harder to understand when placed in its full context. The Christians were venting their hostility not against Calvinism in some narrow sense, as if they might find their niche as Methodists or Freewill Baptists, but against an entire system. "We are not personally acquainted with the writings of John Calvin," wrote Robert Marshall and John Thompson, two of Stone's colleagues, "nor are we certain how nearly we agree with his views of divine truth; neither do we care."<sup>43</sup>

This was no mere revolt against Calvinism but against theology itself. What was going on that gave Stone the audacity not only to reject the doctrine of the Trinity—Unitarians right and left were doing that—but also to maintain, "I have not spent, perhaps, an hour in ten years in thinking about the Trinity"? What made it credible for Smith, after seriously debating whether he would be a Calvinist or a Universalist, to remove the dilemma altogether by dropping them both? "I was now without a system," he confessed with obvious relief, "and felt ready to search the scriptures."<sup>44</sup> How could these men convince themselves, not to mention their followers, that the stage was set for a church without organization and a theology without theory?

Whatever else the Christians demanded, the rallying cry of their theological revolution was a new view of history. They called for a new dispensation of gospel liberty, radically discontinuous with the past. They advocated new theological ground rules that dismissed everything since the New Testament as irrelevant, if not destructive. What led Americans in the finest evangelical tradition of Jonathan Edwards, John Witherspoon, Backus, and Asbury to repudiate their heritage? Furthermore, what gave credence to the idea that they were standing on the brink of a new age?

One cannot understand the Christians apart from their deep conviction that they had witnessed in the American and French revolutions the most momentous historical events in two millennia—a *novus ordo seclorum*. The opening line of the *Herald of Gospel Liberty* proclaimed that "the age in which we live may certainly be distinguished from others in the history of Man," and Smith was quick to point out that it was the struggle for liberty and the rights of mankind that set it apart. According to Smith, the foundations of Christ's millennial kingdom were laid in the American and French revolutions. "The time will come," he said, "when there will not be a *crowned head* on earth. Every attempt which is made to keep up a Kingly government, and to pull down a Republican one, will . . . serve to destroy monarchy . . . Every small piece, or plan, of Monarchy

which is a part of the image [of Antichrist] will be wholly dissolved, when *the people* are resolved to 'live free or die.'<sup>45</sup>

The following year in Washington, Pennsylvania, Thomas Campbell published the first salvo of their movement and pointed to the same state of revolutionary and apocalyptic affairs: "Do ye not discern the signs of the times? Have not the two witnesses arisen from their state of political death, from under the long proscription of ages? . . . Who amongst us has not heard the report of these things—of these lightnings and thunderings, and voices, of this tremendous earthquake and great hail; of these awful convulsions and revolutions that have dashed and are dashing to pieces the nations like a potter's vessel?" In their view, such political convulsions spoke as the voice of providence "loudly and expressly calling us to repentance and reformation . . . Resume that precious, that dear bought liberty, wherewith Christ has made his people free; a liberty from subjection to any authority but his own, in matters of religion. Call no man father." Alexander Campbell argued that the War for Independence unveiled a new epoch that would deliver men from "the melancholy thralldom of relentless systems." America's "political regeneration" gave her the responsibility to lead a comparable "ecclesiastical renovation."<sup>46</sup> An expectancy and overt respect for novelty characterized the Christians, as Stone's two associates confessed: "We confidently thought that the Millennium was just at hand, and that a glorious church would soon be formed; we thought, also, that we had found the very plan for its formation and growth." Opponents of these men agreed, moreover, that a sense of apocalyptic urgency had fueled the movement from the start.<sup>47</sup>

If the age of democratic revolutions gave the Christians good reason to sever ties with the past, it also suggested egalitarian models for a new age. In describing the true gospel that would revolutionize the world, Alexander Campbell called it "the declaration of independence of the kingdom of Jesus." Smith and Stone chose the same term to describe their withdrawal from the Baptists and Presbyterians, respectively. Similarly, O'Kelly claimed that he broke with the Methodists because they left him no option but "unlimited submission" or separation.<sup>48</sup> The lengths to which they allowed political idioms to color their thinking are sometimes difficult to comprehend: for example, they referred to the early church as a republican society with a New Testament constitution. In 1807, however, one maverick Christian in Marietta, Ohio, outdid them all, claiming that "the great potentate of the world, in principle, is the most *genuine* REPUBLICAN that ever existed."<sup>49</sup>

From a modern viewpoint, it may seem odd that men so committed to the separation of church and state held up a given political structure as a model for the church. They endowed the republic with the same divine authority as did

defenders of the Standing Order such as Timothy Dwight and Noah Webster, but for opposite reasons. The republic became a new city on a hill, not because it kept faith with Puritan tradition, but because it sounded the death knell for corporate and hierarchic conceptions of the social order. For these radical sectarians, the constitutional guarantees of separation of church and state laid the groundwork for a new age. In sum, a government so enlightened as to tell the churches to go their own way must have also had prophetic power to tell them which way to go.<sup>50</sup>

Millennialism, then, served different functions for the Christians from those that it had during the Great Awakening. Revivals of the 1740s drew upon millennial themes to challenge traditionalists in the name of a greater commitment to traditional values.<sup>51</sup> This sense of eschatological drama, furthermore, served to define an evangelical identity over against political culture. By contrast, the democratic ferment experienced by the Christians convinced them that, in thinking about the future, they should work to erase the memory of the past and should learn from political culture whatever they could about a gospel of equality.

The Christians expressed their revolt against history most clearly in the radical way they chose to read the Bible. Amid unraveling cultural norms, they clung tenaciously to one final, unassailable authority, the ipse dixit of the New Testament. The direct propositions of Scripture became the only ground of certainty. In a letter to the *Herald of Gospel Liberty* in 1809, seventeen Christian ministers spelled out this central plank of the Christian platform: "In consequence of your receiving Christ as only head, and ruler of his church, it necessarily follows, that his law as contained in the New Testament, should be received without any addition, abridgment, alterations, or embellishments, to the exclusion of all articles of religion, confessions of faith, creeds, &c. &c. &c. composed by men." "The New Testament has been as the law once was, among the rubbish," proclaimed Smith. "Now we have found it, let us read it to the people from morning till evening."<sup>52</sup> These were fighting words, no doubt, to the genteel clergy, men accustomed to covenants being the linchpin of society and to thinking of America as the new Israel. But even more radical than dismissing the Old Testament as a priestly rag used to hoodwink the people was the approach that Christians used to interpret Scripture. "I have endeavored to read the Scriptures as though no one had read them before me," claimed Alexander Campbell, "and I am as much on my guard against reading them to-day, through the medium of my own views yesterday, or a week ago, as I am against being influenced by any foreign name, authority, or system whatever." Protestants had always argued for sola scriptura, but this kind of radical individualism set the Bible against the entire history of biblical interpretation. In this hermeneutic, no human authority, contemporary or historical had the right to advise the individual in his spiritual

quest. In order to ward off any systematic theology, these men insisted that religious discussion be limited to Bible language, as Smith put it, "to prove every particular from plain declarations recorded in the Bible."<sup>53</sup>

This fresh hermeneutic had considerable appeal because it spoke to three pressing issues. First, it proclaimed a new ground of certainty for a generation perplexed that it could no longer hear the voice of God above the din of sectarian confusion. If people would only abandon the husks of theological abstraction, the truth would be plain for all to see. Second, this approach to Scripture dared the common man to open the Bible and think for himself. All theological abstractions—such as the trinity, foreordination, and original sin—were abandoned, and all that was necessary to establish a given point was to string together texts from the King James Bible. Any Christian using New Testament words could fend off the most brilliant theological argument by the simple retort that he was using God's word against human opinion. All the weight of church history could not begin to tip the scale against the Christian's simple declaration, say, that the New Testament did not contain the word *trinity*.

This approach had a third appeal—obvious success in befuddling the respectable clergy. Smith, O'Kelly, Stone, and Alexander Campbell were to a man brilliant theological debaters, but they refused to abide by the etiquette of the opposition. Their coarse language, earthy humor, biting sarcasm, and common-sense reasoning appealed to the uneducated but left the professional clergy without a ready defense. In a pamphlet written in 1817 to combat Smith's influence in Massachusetts, the Congregationalist Thomas Andros recognized the new tactics: "Ridicule, sneer, malignant sarcasm and reproach, are the armor in which he goes forth. On this ground, and not on sober argumentation, he knows the success of his cause depends . . . If he knows the doctrine of original sin is not true, let him sit down and write a manly and candid answer to President Edward's great work on that subject . . . Were he a dignified, candid, and intelligent controversialist, there would be enough to answer him, but who would wish to attack a windmill? Who can refute a sneer?" Andros also recognized that popularity rather than virtue was the clarion call of the movement: "They measure the progress of religion by the numbers, who flock to their standard; not by the prevalence of faith, and piety, justice and charity, and the public virtues in society in general."<sup>54</sup>

Other Congregationalists and Presbyterians, less sensitive to the new measures, continued to use the language of orthodoxy to lambaste the Christians as a new form of the threadbare heresies of Arius, Pelagius, and Socinius.<sup>55</sup> The Christians merely sidestepped these attacks by putting the disputed points before their followers and letting them choose between the language of Scripture and that of metaphysical subtlety. This democratic revolution in theology wrenched the queen of the sciences from the learned speculations of Harvard,

Yale, and Princeton men and encouraged the blacksmith, cooper, and tiller of the soil not only to experience salvation but also to explain the process. Its genius was to allow common people to feel, for a fleeting moment at least, that they were beholden to no one and were masters of their own fate.

How does one explain the theology of the people that came to be championed between 1790 and 1815? What kind of cultural context gave rise to similar movements in New England, the South, and the Midwest? Many historians have imagined that these radical pietists simply continued a tradition of dissent that had rippled through American culture since the 1740s. Others have viewed the Christians as prophets of the American frontier, men who developed notions in keeping with the self-sufficient characters that pushed into the hill country of New England and made their way across the Appalachians. This was religion following the frontier par excellence. Still other scholars have linked the Christian movement to the general revolt against Calvinism that followed the American Revolution. Rigid notions of depravity and predestination simply could not stir a generation that had witnessed at home and abroad the electrifying effects of liberty and natural rights. All of these—the ongoing tradition of evangelical dissent, the surge westward after the Revolution, and the disdain for Calvinistic explanations of the world—figure importantly in any explanation of the Christian movement.<sup>56</sup>

Yet these points of reference fail to locate the most intimate link between the Christians and American culture at the turn of the eighteenth century: a pervasive collapse of certainty within popular culture. From the debate over the Constitution to the election of Jefferson, a new and explicitly democratic revolution united many who were suspicious of power and many who were powerless in a common effort to pull down the cultural hegemony of a gentlemanly few. In a complex cultural process that historians have just begun to unravel, people on a number of fronts began to speak, write, and organize against the authority of mediating elites, of social distinctions, and of any human tie that did not spring from volitional allegiance.<sup>57</sup>

This crisis of confidence in a hierarchical, ordered society led to demands for fundamental reform in politics, law, and religion. In each of these areas, radical Jeffersonians, seizing upon issues close to the hearts of the people, resurrected “the spirit of 1776” to protest the control of elites and the force of tradition. Rhetoric that had once unified people across the social spectrum now drove a powerful wedge between rich and poor, elite and commoner, privileged classes and the people. Federalists, members of the bar, and the professional clergy heard the wisdom of the ages ridiculed as mere connivances of the powerful to maintain the status quo.

The violence of politics from 1780 to 1800, more than anything else, gave sharp definition to egalitarian impulses in American society. From the Revolution

onward, republican equality became a rallying cry for people seeking to challenge all sorts of political authority. Incidents in South Carolina, Massachusetts, and New York illustrate how thoroughly the “virtue” of subjection and deference was giving way to an itching, smarting, writhing awareness of inferiority. In 1784 the South Carolina legislature threatened William Thompson, a tavern keeper, with banishment from the state for insulting the eminent John Rutledge. Thompson responded with a newspaper article that blasted the claims of “self-exalted” characters like Rutledge who had “conceived me his inferior.” Thompson refused to “comprehend the *inferiority*” and denied the right of a conspicuous few to speak for the people.<sup>58</sup> During the debate over the Constitution, Antifederalists turned repeatedly to such arguments. At the Massachusetts ratification convention, for example, the self-taught Worcester County farmer Amos Singletary denounced the Constitution as a plot to consolidate the influence of the great: “these lawyers and men of learning, and moneyed men . . . talk so finely, and gloss over matters so smoothly, to make us poor illiterate people swallow down the pill . . . They expect to be the managers of this Constitution, and get all the power and all the money into their own hands. And then they will swallow up us little fellows, like the great Leviathan.”<sup>59</sup>

A decade later the urban democratic leader William Keteltas was able to shake Federalist control of New York City by a shrewd media campaign depicting politics as a clash between rich and poor. Keteltas made into a cause célèbre the case of two Irish-born ferrymen whom Federalist magistrates punished summarily for reportedly insulting one of their number. Keteltas dramatized the issue in the popular press and eventually came to attack the New York assembly for not impeaching the responsible magistrates. This led to his own arrest by the Federalist legislature on a charge of breach of privilege. When Keteltas appeared before the assembly, a crowd of several thousand gathered in protest. His release from a brief prison sentence prompted a grand celebration in which the people pulled Keteltas through the streets in a carriage decked with American and French flags, a cap of liberty, and a picture of a man being whipped with the inscription, “What you rascal, insult your superiors?” By championing the cause of the ferrymen—what Keteltas called “‘the most flagrant abuse of [the peoples] rights’ since Independence”—he effectively mobilized the common people of New York to challenge Federalist domination.<sup>60</sup>

Such repeated attacks on the capacity of a conspicuous few to speak for the whole of society struck at the root of traditional conceptions of society.<sup>61</sup> Extending the logic of Antifederalists, radical Jeffersonians came to ridicule the assumption that society was an organic hierarchy of ranks and degrees; they argued, rather, that it was a heterogeneous mixture of many different classes, orders, interest groups, and occupations. In such a society the elites could no longer claim to be adequate spokesmen for people in general. In this climate, it

took little creativity for some to begin to reexamine the social function of the clergy and to question the right of any order of men to claim authority to interpret God's word. If opinions about politics and society were no longer the monopoly of the few, why could not anyone and everyone begin to think for themselves in matters of religion?

The 1790s also witnessed fundamental challenges to the legal profession and the common law. Richard E. Ellis has documented the strident attacks against the legal system that surfaced in the popular press and in serious political movements to reform the law in Kentucky, Pennsylvania, and Massachusetts.<sup>62</sup> Radical republicans such as Boston's Austin denounced the legal profession for needlessly confusing court cases in order to charge high fees, deliberately making the law inaccessible to laymen, bartering justice to those who could afford to pay, and monopolizing legislative and judicial posts.

Those who called for radical legal reform addressed three primary issues. First, they demanded a simplified and easily accessible legal process, "a system of laws of our own, dictated by the genuine principles of Republicanism, and made easy to be understood to every individual in the community."<sup>63</sup> Second, they attempted to replace the common law—authority by precedent—with fresh legal codes designed for the new republic. For many of these radicals, the common law conjured up images of complexity, mystery, intolerance, and bias in favor of the elite: "Shall we be directed by reason, equity, and a few simple and plain laws, promptly executed, or shall we be ruled by volumes of statutes and cases decided by the ignorance and intolerance of former times?"<sup>64</sup> Third, having jettisoned the "monkist priesthood" of lawyers and the "absurdity of the common law," those who sought root-and-branch reform exhibited great faith in the ability of ordinary citizens to ascertain and dispense justice before the law. "Any person of common abilities," said Austin, "can easily distinguish between right and wrong" and "more especially when the parties are admitted to give a plain story, without any puzzle from lawyers,"<sup>65</sup>

In retrospect, this faith in democratic, personalized, and simplified law appears hopelessly naive and utopian. Yet it reflects a moment of historical optimism, a time when many in politics, law, and religion, flushed with the promise of the American Revolution, found it reasonable to take literally the meaning of *novus ordo seclorum* and to declare a decisive expatriation from the past.<sup>66</sup>

That Smith came to jettison orthodox Calvinism through reading Austin's articles in the *Independent Chronicle* in 1799 and 1800 underscores the correlation between the Christian movement and reform efforts in politics and law.<sup>67</sup> In method, substance, and style, Smith championed the cause to which radical Jeffersonians were committed: an appeal to class as the fundamental problem of society, a refusal to recognize the cultural authority of elites, a disdain for the supposed lessons of history and tradition, a call for reform using the rhetoric of

the Revolution, a commitment to turn the press into a sword of democracy, and an ardent faith in the future of the American republic. Smith's primary interest, of course, was the spread of evangelical religion; yet he could never divorce that message from the egalitarian principles that the frantic pace of the 1790s had made self-evident.

That other individuals came to advocate virtually identical reform is further evidence that questions were raging in popular culture that popular religion simply could not avoid. While other claims to truth also flourished in this atmosphere, the Christian movement stands out as an attempt to bring some harmony between denominational traditions and egalitarian values. In lashing out at the tyranny of the clergy, the foolishness of abstract theology, and the bondage of church discipline, the Christians fulfilled a mandate for reform that was widespread in popular culture. In exalting the idea that every man was his own interpreter, they brought a measure of certainty to people committed to the principle that all values, rights, and duties originate in the individual—the principle that Alexis de Tocqueville later called individualism.<sup>68</sup>

The legacy of the Christian movement is riddled with irony. Instead of taking America by storm, the Christian Connection under Smith and O'Kelly vanished into insignificance, while the Disciples in the West grew into a major denomination only by practicing the kind of organization they had once hoped to stamp out. Instead of calming sectarian strife and restoring Edenic harmony, the Christians engendered controversy at every step and had to put up with chronic factionalism within their own ranks.<sup>69</sup> Instead of offering a new foundation for certainty, the Christian approach to knowledge, which made no man the judge of another's conscience, had little holding power and sent many early advocates scrambling for surer footing.<sup>70</sup> Instead of erecting a primitive church free from theological tradition and authoritarian control, the Christians came to advocate their own sectarian theology and to defer to the influence and persuasion of a dominant few. These ironies suggest that the real significance of the Christian movement is not to be found in its institutional development or in the direct influence of Smith, O'Kelly, Stone, and Alexander Campbell. What the movement does illustrate graphically is a moment of wrenching change in American culture that had great import for popular religion. Many followed the path even if they did not know its trailblazers.

The Christian movement illustrates, in the first place, the intensity of religious ferment at work in a period of chaos and originality unmatched, perhaps, since the religious turbulence of seventeenth-century England.<sup>71</sup> As in England a century and a half before, common folk in America at the dawn of the nineteenth century came to scorn tradition, relish novelty and experimentation, grope for fresh sources of authority, and champion an array of millennial schemes, each in its own way dethroning hierarchy and static religious forms.<sup>72</sup>

The resulting popular culture pulsed with the claims of supremely heterodox religious groups, with people veering from one sect to another, with the unbridled wrangling of competitors in a "war of words."<sup>73</sup> Scholars have only begun to assess the fragmentation that beset American religion in the period generally referred to as the Second Great Awakening, which they have too often viewed as a conservative response to rapid social change. The Christian movement serves as a helpful corrective and invites fresh appraisals of the popular culture that nourished people like William Miller, John Humphrey Noyes, and Joseph Smith. There was a religious environment that brought into question traditional authorities and exalted the right of the people to think for themselves. The result, quite simply, was a bewildering world of clashing opinion—to the sympathetic Smith, an "Age of inquiry," to the distraught David Rice, a "hot bed of every extravagance of opinion and practice." Another erstwhile pilgrim, the Presbyterian-turned-Christian-turned-Shaker Richard McNemar, took up verse to capture the spirit of his times:

Ten thousand Reformers like so many moles  
Have plowed all the Bible and cut it [in] holes  
And each has his church at the end of his trace  
Built up as he thinks of the subjects of grace.<sup>74</sup>

The Christians also illustrate the exaltation of public opinion as a primary religious authority. They called for common folk to read the New Testament as if mortal man had never seen it before. People were expected to discover the self-evident message of the Bible without any mediation from creeds, theologians, or clergymen not of their own choosing. This explicit faith that biblical authority could emerge from below, from the will of the people, was the most enduring legacy of the Christian movement. By the 1840s one analyst of American Protestantism concluded, after surveying fifty-three American sects, that the principle "No creed but the Bible" was the distinctive feature of American religion. John W. Nevin surmised that this emphasis grew out of a popular demand for "private judgment" and was "tacitly if not openly conditioned always by the assumption that every man is authorized and bound to get at this authority in a direct way for himself, through the medium simply of his own single mind."<sup>75</sup> Many felt the exhilarating hope that democracy had opened an immediate access to biblical truth for all persons of goodwill. What was difficult for Americans to realize was that a commitment to private judgment could drive people apart even as it raised beyond measure their hopes for unity.

The Christian movement also demonstrates the process by which popular culture became Christianized in the early republic. One reason that evangelical churches and sects grew so rapidly during these years was that they proclaimed value systems that endowed common people with dignity and responsibility.

People gladly accepted a theology that addressed them without condescension, balked at vested interests, and reinforced ideas of volitional allegiance and self-reliance. While such egalitarian strains were deeply rooted in the Great Awakening and subsequent revivals, historians have failed to appreciate the ways in which the founding of the American republic wrought, in Devereux Jarratt's words, "a vast alteration" in American religion. A staunch evangelical minister in Virginia prior to the Revolution, Jarratt by the 1790s had come to fear the volatile mix of things evangelical and egalitarian. Bemoaning the "levelling" spirit in "our high republican times," Jarratt recoiled from a religion "under the supreme controul of tinkers and taylors, weavers, shoemakers, and country mechanics of all kinds."<sup>76</sup> The theology that emerged between 1790 and 1815 to empower just these kinds of people certainly helps to clarify a process by which an America that had been largely Presbyterian, Congregational, Anglican, and Calvinist Baptist became a cauldron of Methodists, Disciples, Freewill, Free-Communion, and Primitive Baptists, Universalists, Mormons, and Millerites—to name a few. This new religious culture, which sanctioned the right of the individual to go his own way, would have been unthinkable apart from the crisis of authority in popular culture that accompanied the birth of the American republic.

#### NOTES

1. Charles Francis Adams, ed., *The Works of John Adams, Second President of the United States*, 10 vols. (Boston, 1850–56), 9:375; Edmund S. Morgan, "The Great Political Fiction," *New York Review of Books* 25 (Mar. 9, 1978): 13–18.

2. James A. Henretta, *The Evolution of American Society, 1700–1815* (Lexington, Mass., 1973); Richard D. Brown, *Modernization: The Transformation of American Life, 1600–1865* (New York, 1976); Richard D. Brown, "The Emergence of Voluntary Associations in Massachusetts, 1760–1830," *Journal of Voluntary Action Research*, 2 (Apr. 1973): 64–73; Jackson Turner Main, "Government by the People: The American Revolution and the Democratization of the Legislatures," *William and Mary Quarterly* 23 (July 1966): 391–407; Bernard Bailyn, *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution* (Cambridge, 1967); Richard E. Ellis, *The Jeffersonian Crisis: Courts and Politics in the Young Republic* (New York, 1971); David Brion Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Revolution, 1770–1823* (Ithaca, 1975); David Hackett Fischer, *Growing Old in America* (New York, 1977); Robert A. Cross, *The Minutemen and Their World* (New York, 1976); and Mary Beth Norton, *The Revolutionary Experience of American Women, 1750–1800* (Boston, 1980).

3. Eugene D. Genovese, *From Rebellion to Revolution: Afro-American Slave Revolts in the Making of the Modern World* (Baton Rouge, 1979).

4. Harrison Gray Otis, who had delivered the English oration at Harvard when he graduated in 1783, was asked to give the primary address at Harvard's bicentennial celebration in 1836. His speech is the lament of an old man who had witnessed the "fiery furnace of

democracy" destroy much of what he held dear. While he had hoped that the Revolution had been "completed by the establishment of independence," he lived to see a "new school" take charge that "would identify revolution with perpetual motion. They would put all ancient institutions, laws, customs, courts, colleges, and schools upon wheels, and keep them whirling for ever with the steam of their own eloquence." Josiah Quincy, *The History of Harvard University*, 2 vols. (Cambridge, 1840), 2:662-70.

5. Gordon S. Wood, "The Democratization of Mind in the American Revolution," *Leadership in the American Revolution* (Washington, 1974), 63-89; and Gordon S. Wood, "Social Radicalism and Equality in the American Revolution," *The B. K. Smith Lectures in History* (Houston, 1976), 5-14.

6. On the new scholarly interest in religion, see Henry F. May, "The Recovery of American Religious History," *American Historical Review* 70 (Oct. 1964): 79-92. The broader trend to dismiss the social repercussions of the Revolution is evident in Frederick B. Tolles, "The American Revolution Considered as a Social Movement: A Re-Evaluation," *American Historical Review* 60 (Oct. 1954): 1-12. Studies of the Second Great Awakening in New England and the Great Revival in the Southwest have generally not addressed the question of how cultural ferment might have altered religion; they have focused, rather, on how traditional religion championed the revival technique in order to impose social order upon a disordered and secularized society. See Perry Miller, "From Covenant to Revival," in *The Shaping of American Religion*, ed. J. W. Smith and A. L. Jamison (Princeton, 1961), 350; Lois W. Banner, "Religious Benevolence as Social Control: A Critique of an Interpretation," *Journal of American History* 60 (June 1973): 23-41; and John B. Boles, *The Great Revival, 1787-1805: The Origins of the Southern Evangelical Mind* (Lexington, Ky., 1972). More sensitive to the ongoing impact of the Revolution in religious affairs is Donald G. Mathews, "The Second Great Awakening as an Organizing Process, 1780-1830: An Hypothesis," *American Quarterly* 21 (Spring 1969): 23-43.

7. Luther P. Gerlach and Virginia H. Hine define a social "movement" as "a group of people who are organized for, ideologically motivated by, and committed to a purpose which implements some form of personal or social change; who are actively engaged in the recruitment of others; and whose influence is spreading in opposition to the established order within which it originated." Luther P. Gerlach and Virginia H. Hine, *People, Power, Change: Movements of Social Transformation* (Indianapolis, 1970), xvi. The Christians, like the movements of which Gerlach and Hine speak, were decentralized and segmented, their weblike structures without clear lines of authority and often dependent upon shared publications. Their unity stemmed from little more than common ideology and perceived opposition from religious and political elites.

8. William Bentley, *The Diary of William Bentley, D. D.*, 4 vols. (Salem, Mass., 1911), 3:65, 271, 503, 515.

9. In May 1805 William Bentley commented about Elias Smith that "the press has lately vomited out many nauseous things from this writer." Bentley, *Diary*, 3:157, 291, 370.

10. Elias Smith, *The Life, Conversion, Preaching, Travels, and Sufferings of Elias Smith* (Portsmouth, N.H., 1816), 341-42.

11. Elias Smith, *The Lovingkindness of God Displayed in the Triumph of Republicanism in America: Being a Discourse Delivered at Taunton (Mass.) July Fourth, 1809; at the Celebration of American Independence* (n.p., 1809), 32. Smith's colleague Abner Jones also experienced what he called a "disintegration" of his Calvinist beliefs and was quick to note the theological implications of demands for social equality. "In giving the reader an account of my birth and parentage," Jones wrote in 1807, "I shall not (like the celebrated Franklin and others,) strive to prove that I arose from a family of eminence believing that all men are born equal, and that every man shall die for his own iniquity." Abner Jones, *Memoirs of the Life and Experience, Travels and Preaching of Abner Jones* (Exeter, N.H., 1807), 3.

12. For a brief sketch of Smith's life, see William C. McLoughlin, *New England Dissent, 1630-1883: The Baptists and the Separation of Church and State*, 2 vols. (Cambridge, 1971), 2:745-49. Otherwise, no one has undertaken a serious study of Smith, despite his prominence as a religious and political radical in New England from 1800 to 1820, his scores of publications addressed to a popular audience, his newspaper that ran for a decade, and his fascinating memoir. The number of his itinerant followers is taken from one of his Congregational assailants. Thomas Andros, *The Scriptures Liable to be Wrested to Men's Own Destruction, and an Instance of This Found, in the Writings of Elias Smith* (Taunton, Mass., 1817), 18. A list of agents for Smith's newspaper is found in *Herald of Gospel Liberty*, Aug. 18, 1809, 104. For the number of subscribers, see *ibid.*, Sept. 29, 1815, 720. On Smith's movement, which became known as the Christian Connection, see Thomas H. Olbricht, "Christian Connection and Unitarian Relations," *Restoration Quarterly* 9 (Sept. 1966): 160-86.

13. The best treatment of James O'Kelly is Charles Franklin Kilgore, *The James O'Kelly Schism in the Methodist Episcopal Church* (Mexico City, 1963). See also Edward J. Drinkhouse, *History of Methodist Reform*, 2 vols. (Baltimore, 1899), vol. 1; and Milo T. Morrill, *A History of the Christian Denomination in America* (Dayton, 1912). O'Kelly's primary works are James O'Kelly, *The Author's Apology for Protesting against the Methodist Episcopal Government* (Richmond, 1798), and James O'Kelly, *A Vindication of the Author's Apology* (Raleigh, 1801).

14. O'Kelly, *Author's Apology*, 4, 21.

15. O'Kelly, *Vindication*, 60-61.

16. "The Last Will and Testament of Springfield Presbytery," in John Rogers, *The Biography of Elder B. Warren Stone* (New York, 1972), 51-53. For other primary accounts of this movement, see Barton W. Stone, *An Apology for Renouncing the Jurisdiction of the Synod of Kentucky* (Lexington, Ky., 1804); [Richard McNemar], *Observations on Church Government, by the Presbytery of Springfield* (Cincinnati, 1907); Robert Marshall and James Thompson, *A Brief Historical Account of Sundry Things in the Doctrines and State of the Christian, or, as It Is Commonly Called, the Newlight Church* (Cincinnati, 1811); Levi Purviance, *The Biography*

of Elder David Purviance (Dayton, 1848); and Robert H. Bishop, *An Outline of the History of the Church in the State of Kentucky, during a Period of Forty Years: Containing the Memoirs of Rev. David Rice* (Lexington, Ky., 1824).

17. There is a considerable body of uncritical denominational literature on Barton W. Stone by the Disciples of Christ. See William Garrett West, *Barton Warren Stone: Early American Advocate of Christian Unity* (Nashville, 1954). For emphasis on Stone's contribution to the revivalist heritage of the South, see Boles, *Great Revival*. For appreciation of Stone in his full cultural context, see Ralph Morrow, "The Great Revival, the West, and the Crisis of the Church," in *The Frontier Re-examined*, ed. John P. McDermott (Urbana, 1967), 65–78.

18. Rogers, *Biography of Elder B. Warren Stone*, 3, 47.

19. For discussions of the origins of the Campbellites, see David Edwin Harrell Jr., *Quest for a Christian America: The Disciples of Christ and American Society to 1866* (Nashville, 1966); Robert Frederick West, *Alexander Campbell and Natural Religion* (New Haven, 1949); Lester C. McAllister, *Thomas Campbell: Man of the Book* (St. Louis, 1954); and Errett Gates, *The Early Relation and Separation of Baptists and Disciples* (Chicago, 1904). In addition, see the extensive memoirs of father and son: Alexander Campbell, *Memoirs of Elder Thomas Campbell* (Cincinnati, 1861), and Robert Richardson, *Memoirs of Alexander Campbell*, 2 vols. (Cincinnati, 1913).

20. Richardson, *Memoirs of Alexander Campbell*, 1:438, 465–66. Many scholars have assumed that Thomas and Alexander Campbell applied to an American context beliefs that they had learned under the influence of Scottish reformers such as Robert Haldane and James Alexander Haldane. See, for example, Sydney E. Ahlstrom, *A Religious History of the American People* (New Haven, 1972), 448–49. The early documents of the Campbellite movement, however, manifest a keen awareness that the issues to be faced were, in their intensity at least, peculiarly American and demanded new solutions. See, for example, Thomas Campbell, *The Declaration and Address of the Christian Association of Washington* (Washington, Pa., 1809).

21. Lester G. McAllister and William E. Tucker, *Journey in Faith: A History of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)* (St. Louis, 1975), 154–55.

22. Alexander Campbell, "An Oration in Honor of the Fourth of July, 1830," *Popular Lectures and Addresses* (Philadelphia, 1863), 374–75.

23. "Elias Smith was here last week, distributing his books & pamphlets, & preached a lecture last week without sparing any of the hirelings as he calls them." Bentley, *Diary*, 3:388.

24. *Herald of Gospel Liberty*, Sept. 1, 1808, 1.

25. Stephen Porter, a Presbyterian clergyman, attempted to ward off the influence of Smith and his lieutenants among his congregation. Stephen Porter, *A Discourse, in Two Parts, Addressed to the Presbyterian Congregation in Ballston* (Ballston Spa, N.Y., 1814), 42–44.

26. Elias Smith, *The Clergyman's Looking-Glass: Being a History of the Birth, Life, and Death of Anti-Christ* (Portsmouth, N.H., 1803), 11. For examples of Smith's sensitivity to elitist codes of all sorts, even while he was still a Baptist, see Smith, *Life*, 279–80.

27. *Christian Baptist*, July 4, 1823, 280.

28. *Herald of Gospel Liberty*, Dec. 8, 1808, 29–30.

29. Abel M. Sargent founded a radical sect in Marietta, Ohio, where he published six issues of *Halcyon Itinerary and True Millennium Messenger*. The quotation is found in *Halcyon Itinerary and True Millennium Messenger* (Dec. 1807), 147–48. For a letter from Sargent to Smith, see *Herald of Gospel Liberty*, Aug. 16, 1811, 310. On Sargent, see John W. Simpson, *A Century of Church Life* (Marietta, 1896), 31.

30. Christians assailed the clergy as "tyrannical oppressors," "the mystery of iniquity," "friends of monarchy religion," "old Tories," "an aristocratical body of uniform nobility," and "hireling priests"; people who would submit to such tyrants they labeled priest-ridden, slavishly dependent, passively obedient. See Smith, *Life*, 384, 402–3; *Herald of Gospel Liberty*, Oct., 13, 1809, 117; O'Kelly, *Vindication*, 47. In 1815 Smith claimed that most people in New England from forty to seventy years old could remember the respectable clergy emphasizing apocalyptic themes such as "Anti-Christ, mystery Babylon, the great whore that sitteth on many waters, the beast with seven heads and ten horns, the man of sin &c." *Herald of Gospel Liberty*, May 20, 1815, 695. On the multivalency of language, see J. G. A. Pocock, *Politics, Language, and Time: Essays on Political Thought and History* (New York, 1971), 3–41; and Harry S. Stout, "Religion, Communications, and the Ideological Origins of the American Revolution," *William and Mary Quarterly* 34 (Oct. 1977): 538.

31. Smith, *Lovingkindness of God Displayed*, 26–27; Smith, *Life*, 352–53. See also *Herald of Gospel Liberty*, Apr. 14, 1809, 67.

32. *Christian Baptist*, Jan. 2, 1826, 209; Smith, *Life*, 402–3; *Herald of Gospel Liberty*, Sept. 15, 1808, 6. See also Richardson, *Memoirs of Alexander Campbell*, 1:382–83.

33. See David Rice, *An Epistle to the Citizens of Kentucky, Professing Christianity* (Lexington, Ky., 1805), 11–12.

34. Rhys Isaac, "Evangelical Revolt: The Nature of the Baptists' Challenge to the Traditional Order in Virginia, 1765 to 1775," *William and Mary Quarterly* 31 (July 1974): 345–68.

35. Isaac Backus, *A History of New England with Particular Reference to the Denomination of Christians Called Baptists*, 2 vols. (Newton, Mass., 1871), 2:487. For evidence of the Baptist quest for respectability in the generation after the Great Awakening, see C. C. Goen, *Revivalism and Separatism in New England, 1740–1800* (New Haven, Conn., 1962). For the reaction of Baptists to the dissent spawned by the Revolution, see McLoughlin, *New England Dissent*, 2:710.

36. James Patrick Walsh, "The Pure Church in Eighteenth Century Connecticut" (Ph.D. diss., Columbia Univ., 1964), 143.

37. Rogers, *Biography of Elder B. Warren Stone*, 51–53.

38. *Christian Baptist*, Nov. 3, 1823, 25; Richardson, *Memoirs of Alexander Campbell*, 2:63–64.
39. [McNemar], *Observations on Church Government*, 4, 9, 15. This pamphlet, the best-developed statement of Christian ecclesiology, rejects “external rules” and insists that all human organization spring from the deliberate and uncoerced choice of the individual.
40. O’Kelly, *Vindication*, 49. For similar expressions of resistance to human mediation of divine authority by Alexander Campbell and Thomas Campbell, see *Christian Baptist*, Apr. 3, 1826, 229, and Campbell, *Declaration and Address of the Christian Association*, 3. For the recurrence of this line of thought a generation later, see Lewis Perry, *Radical Abolitionism: Anarchy and the Government of God in Antislavery Thought* (Ithaca, 1973).
41. J. Franklin Jameson, *The American Revolution Considered as a Social Movement* (Princeton, 1926), 157.
42. Rogers, *Biography of Elder B. Warren Stone*, 14, 31, 33.
43. Marshall and Thompson, *Brief Historical Account*, 3–4.
44. Elias Smith, *Sermons, Containing an Illustration of the Prophecies* (Exeter, N.H., 1808), vi.
45. *Herald of Gospel Liberty*, Sept. 1, 1808, 1; Elias Smith, *A Discourse Delivered at Jefferson Hall, Thanksgiving Day, November 25, 1802, and Delivered (by Request) the Wednesday Evening Following, at the Same Place: The Subject, Nebuchadnezzar’s Dream* (Portsmouth, N.H., 1803), 30–32. The sociologist Guy E. Swanson has argued that the political forms under which a people live significantly color their theological perceptions, particularly in times of rapid change. See Guy E. Swanson, *Religion and Regime: A Sociological Account of the Reformation* (Ann Arbor, 1967), 231.
46. Campbell, *Declaration and Address of the Christian Association*, 14; Campbell, “Oration in Honor of the Fourth of July,” 374; *Christian Baptist*, Feb. 6, 1826, 213.
47. Marshall and Thompson, *Brief Historical Account*, 255. Presbyterian David Rice complained in 1803 about Stone and his followers: “Another thing that prepared the minds of many for the reception of error, was their high expectation of the speedy approach of the Millennium.” Rice, *Epistle to the Citizens of Kentucky*, 13.
48. Campbell, “Oration in Honor of the Fourth of July,” 377; Smith, *Life*, 292; Rogers, *Biography of Elder B. Warren Stone*, 47; O’Kelly, *Author’s Apology*, 52.
49. Abel Sargent, *Halcyon Itinerary and True Millennium Messenger* 5 (Dec. 1807): 146.
50. Smith devoted a sermon of more than 120 pages to the subject of how republican values should be applied to the church. See Elias Smith, *The Whole World Governed by a Jew, or the Government of the Second Adam, as King and Priest* (Exeter, N.H., 1805). On the Standing Order’s conservative use of millennial themes, see Nathan O. Hatch, *The Sacred Cause of Liberty: Republican Thought and the Millennium in Revolutionary New England* (New Haven, 1977), 97–138. See also Richard M. Rollins, *The Long Journey of Noah Webster* (Philadelphia, 1980).
51. James West Davidson, *The Logic of Millennial Thought: Eighteenth-Century New England* (New Haven, 1977), 122–41.

52. *Herald of Gospel-Liberty*, June 23, 1809, 87; Feb. 2, 1809, 47. The Christians repeatedly suggested that Americans accord the New Testament the same kind of exclusive authority that they did constitutions in civil affairs. See Smith, *World Governed by a Jew*, 114; and Campbell, *Declaration and Address of the Christian Association*, 16.
53. *Christian Baptist*, Apr. 3, 1826, 229; Smith, *Life*, 292.
54. Andros, *Scriptures Liable to be Wrested to Men’s Own Destruction*, 6, 21.
55. Porter, *Discourse in Two Parts*, 14; Rice, *Epistle to the Citizens of Kentucky*, 9–12.
56. William C. McLoughlin views the later wave of dissent as but an extension of the revivalism of the Great Awakening. McLoughlin, *New England Dissent*, 2:697–750. William Warren Sweet described the Christians as “a new denomination which arose directly out of the soil of the west.” William Warren Sweet, *Religion in the Development of American Culture, 1765–1840* (New York, 1952), 221; and Winifred Ernest Garrison, *Religion Follows the Frontier: A History of the Disciples of Christ* (New York, 1931). Sweet also links the Christians to the broader revolt against Calvinism.
57. For the importance of the idea of volitional allegiance in this period, see James H. Kettner, *The Development of American Citizenship, 1608–1870* (Chapel Hill, 1978), 173–209. See also Gordon S. Wood, *The Creation of the American Republic, 1776–1787* (Chapel Hill, 1969), 483–99; Alfred F. Young, *The Democratic Republicans of New York: The Origins, 1763–1797* (Chapel Hill, 1967); and Edmund S. Morgan, *The Challenge of the American Revolution* (New York, 1976), 211–18.
58. Wood, *Creation of the American Republic*, 482–83.
59. Jonathan Elliot, *The Debates, Resolutions, and Other Proceedings, in Convention on the Adoption of the Federal Constitution*, 4 vols. (Washington, D.C., 1827–30), 1:112.
60. Young, *Democratic Republicans of New York*, 468–95.
61. Wood, *Creation of the American Republic*, 483–99. One of the clearest calls that common people should resist the traditional distinction between gentlemen and commoners came from the pen of the uneducated Massachusetts farmer William Manning in 1798. Samuel Eliot Morrison, ed., “William Manning’s *The Key of Liberty*,” *William and Mary Quarterly* 13 (Apr. 1956): 202–54.
62. Ellis, *Jeffersonian Crisis*.
63. Benjamin Austin Jr., “Observations on the Pernicious Practice of the Law” (1786), in *American Journal of Legal History* 13 (July 1969): 258.
64. “Decius,” *Independent Chronicle*, Jan. 30, 1804, 1.
65. Ellis, *Jeffersonian Crisis*, 171, 177; Austin, “Observations on the Pernicious Practice of the Law,” 264.
66. For the importance in Thomas Jefferson’s thought of breaking the grip of custom and precedent, see Edmund S. Morgan, *The Meaning of Independence: John Adams, George Washington, Thomas Jefferson* (Charlottesville, 1976), 71–79, and Daniel J. Boorstin, *The Lost World of Thomas Jefferson* (Boston, 1948).
67. Smith, *Lovingkindness of God Displayed*, 32.

68. Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, trans. Henry Reeve, 2 vols. (New York, 1959), 1:104–5.

69. For an excellent example of the potential for factionalism within a local Christian church, see Don Harrison Doyle, *The Social Order of a Frontier Community: Jacksonville, Illinois, 1825–70* (Urbana, 1978), 157–60.

70. Smith himself left the Christian Connection in 1818 to join the Universalists, and two of his colleagues, Joshua V. Himes and Joseph Marsh, became early advocates of William Miller. David L. Rowe, "A New Perspective on the Burned-Over District: The Millerites in Upstate New York," *Church History* 47 (Dec. 1978): 408–20. Of five men who signed the "Last Will and Testament of Springfield Presbytery," two returned to the Presbyterians, two became Shakers, and only Stone retained his identity as a Christian. Alexander Campbell, similarly, saw his best preacher, Sidney Rigdon, defect to the Mormons. Mario S. De Pillis, "The Quest for Religious Authority and the Rise of Mormonism," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 1 (Spring 1966): 68–88.

71. Christopher Hill, *The World Turned Upside Down: Radical Ideas during the English Revolution* (New York, 1972).

72. J. F. C. Harrison, *The Second Coming: Popular Millenarianism, 1780–1850* (New Brunswick, 1979), 163–206.

73. The phrase is that of Joseph Smith, who reacted strongly to the sectarian competition he knew as a young man. Joseph Smith, *The Pearl of Great Price* (Salt Lake City, 1891), 56–70. In this period evangelicals were preoccupied with a sense of the transforming power of the printed word. See Joan Jacobs Brumberg, *Mission for Life: The Story of the Family of Adoniram Judson* (New York, 1980), 44–78.

74. Elias Smith, *The Age of Enquiry* (Exeter, N.H., 1807); David Rice, "A Second Epistle to the Citizens of Kentucky, Professing the Christian Religion," in *An Outline of the History of the Church in the State of Kentucky*, ed. Robert Bishop (Lexington, Ky., 1824), 354; Richard McNemar, "The Mole's Little Pathways," as quoted in De Pillis, "Quest for Religious Authority," 75.

75. John Williamson Nevin, "Antichrist and the Sect," in *The Mercersburg Theology*, ed. James Hastings Nichols (New York, 1966), 93–119.

76. Devereux Jarratt, *The Life of the Reverend Devereux Jarratt* (Baltimore, 1806), 14–15, 181.