

Deism and Its Relentless Attack on the Holy Trinity

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My interest in Deism was piqued while reading a book entitled, *Bible in Pocket, Gun in Hand*, and subtitled, *The Story of Frontier Religion*. Don't let the title trick you into thinking that this is not a scholarly work. Its 166 pages of print are peppered with quotes from 265 primary and secondary sources on the story of frontier religion at a time when America's western frontier stretched along a line from Wisconsin to Texas, namely the early nineteenth century.

The author suggests two misconceptions about religion in early America:

Because life in the new country was relatively simple, temptation weaker, and the people more humble, the erroneous conclusion was drawn that the settlers were more devout. Second, the belief that America was settled by church devotees seeking religious freedom appears to be based more on misinterpreted tradition than statistics. Indications are that the colonists may have been seeking freedom more than religion.¹

To substantiate these claims, he gives us the following documented statistics:

Of the hundred and one immigrants aboard the *Mayflower*, only twelve belonged to the first New England church. Not more than one out of five of the Massachusetts Bay colonists during the early years were members of a church. In 1760 only one New Englander out of eight was a church member. The ratio in the Middle colonies was one to fifteen, in the South, about one in twenty. The church historian William Warren Sweet said of the early days of this country that 'there came to be more unchurched people in America, in proportion to the population, than was to be found in any country in Christendom.' In 1800 only an estimated 7 percent of the population were church members. A peak was reached in 1860, when close to one fourth of the people were church affiliated.²

In the time slot between the Great Awakening (mid 1700s) and the Second Great Awakening (turn of the century), and leading up to the Great Revivals on the frontier (early 1800s), historians agree that Christianity was at a low point of influence in the United States. In its place, an ersatz religion followed the colonists across the Atlantic to New England, eventually also touching New France, but having little impact in New Spain. It was during this time slot that a new nation was born and its Constitution, along with its Bill of Rights, was written and adopted. The ersatz religion from the mother country was Deism and serves as the spring-board for our topic, Deism and its relentless attack on the Trinity.

English Deism

In his classic work, *A History of Christian Thought*, Otto Heick introduces a chapter entitled, "The English Deists," with the following paragraph:

The preceding chapters of this section have outlined the first influences leading to the confessional disintegration of Reformation theology. The next three chapters trace the first steps in radical liberalism: the English Deists, the French Naturalists, and the German Rationalists. These three movements aimed at the complete overthrow of the faith of the Reformation.³

What Heick identifies as English Deism, French Naturalism, and German Rationalism others have called English Deism, French Deism, and German Deism. This triad also represents a cancerous spread and general intensification of Deism across the continent. As Heick indicates, its goal was the complete overthrow of Reformation theology.

In England, the country of origin for Deism, the movement officially lasted about a century and a half,

from about 1626 (Lord Herbert of Cherbury) to 1776 (David Hume's death).

Lord Herbert of Cherbury is considered the father of Deism. He was a gifted man who distinguished himself in a military and diplomatic career. In addition, he was a well recognized and published poet of seventeenth century England. Toward the end of his life, he set out on a pursuit "to search for a standard and a guide in the conflicts of creeds and systems."⁴ His study led him to five points which he considered basic to all religion. These have come to be known as "The Five Points of Deism" and are presented here:

1. There is a Supreme Power, who is a Benevolent God.
2. This Sovereign Power must be worshiped.
3. The good ordering or disposition of the faculties of man constitutes the principal and best part of divine worship, and this has always been believed.
4. All vices and crimes should be expiated and effaced by repentance.
5. There are rewards and punishments after this life.⁵

Just as important as what these Five Points say is what they do not say. They do not say that, in accepting these points, the deist also denies the inexplicable and supernatural in Christianity, and other religions for that matter. Cross off their list of valid teachings such dog-ma as the Trinity, the Virgin Birth, the Miracles, the Vicarious Atonement, and the Resurrection. Only that which is rational is to be understood as part of the common religion. The rest was considered to be added by overzealous popes and prelates, priests and pastors. Deism is a religion based on a natural knowledge of God. Its basic principle is that the Creator has given all people a free will to lead a moral life by which they may honor him.

One may argue with some validity that this incipient Deism helped pave the way for the Glorious Revolution of 1688. In that year, King James II was deposed for his pro-Catholic activism as well as his political highhandedness through his newly formed Court of High Commission. Upon the exile to Paris of James II and his family, including the new Prince of Wales born in 1688, a Convention Parliament was called. This Parliament declared the throne vacant and gave it to William of Orange and his wife Mary.⁶ On the day of their coronation, William and Mary enacted "The Declaration of Rights." These rights included such things as "no levying of taxes or suspending and dispensing of laws without approval of Parliament, abolishing the Court of High Commission, establishing free elections, giving free speech in Parliament, and ending excessive bail and cruel punishment."⁷ Freedom of the press was soon added.

In the year following The Glorious Revolution of 1688, John Locke published his first deistic work, "Essay on Human Understanding." Of immediate interest to the deist was what to do with revelation. Not only did the dogmatists and the established religion lay claims to revelation, so did the sectarians and pagans. Lord Herbert had shrugged it all off by arguing that only natural religion was valid and the rest was embellishment. Locke argued that revealed religion could be valid insofar that it was made reasonable to real life situations and proved itself in human experience. Heck points out Locke's contribution, or possibly we should say compromise, to Deism. He writes, "The Deists were encouraged by Locke in emphasizing the practical identity between natural and revealed religion, making natural religion the norm and criterion for the revealed."⁸

Some have suggested that this contribution is significant enough to validate calling John Locke, "the father of Deism." Yet Heck adds, "Considering the fact that the Deists as freethinkers took a fundamentally different attitude toward religion than was the case with the serious minded and religiously inclined Locke, it would not be correct to put him with the Deists."⁹ In spite of that comment, Heck includes Locke in his chapter on English Deism.

French Deism

Visiting England from 1726-1729 was a thirty year old Frenchman by the name of Francois Marie Arouet. We know him better as Voltaire. While in England, Voltaire became a deist. Returning to France, he "popularized Newtonian science, fought for personal liberty, and spread the cult of reason."¹⁰

In his teaching on the cult of reason, or Deism, Voltaire went a step further than his deistic teachers in

England. Heick explains, “Voltaire stripped English Deism of its religious and theological interests, and reduced religion to simple morality and rational metaphysics.”¹¹

This means that Lord Herbert’s Five Points were simplified to plain morality by removing the references to the Supreme Power, repentance, and the after life. Voltaire called himself a Theist, but his god, as one observer put it, was “a vague impersonal being with no particular concern for the affairs of men.”¹²

Heick’s summary statement of Voltaire’s view of Jesus is indicative of French Natural-ism:

Jesus, to him, was a good man, but vain and enthusiastic. According to Voltaire, Jesus deceived his age by miracles. The disciples were deceived deceivers, falsifiers, and tricksters. The Christian religion received life only through its union with Platonism. The doctrinal controversies of the church produced the barbarism of the Middle Ages and the shedding of blood that marked the Reformation and post-Reformation ages. Now the Age of Reason was opening the gates for a common morality which could bring peace and harmony to all.¹³

Just as Deism ushered in the Glorious Revolution of 1688 in England, so also the introduction of Deism on the mainland cannot be separated from the French Revolution. Voltaire died in 1788, the year before the beginning of the French Revolution.

German Deism

Deism also had its proponents in Germany. In England, we might say that Deism produced a whole new religion. In France, we might say that Deism produced a whole new non-religion, a mere philosophy, with an unconcerned god sitting in the wings. In both these cases, Deism helped to usher in revolutions which expressed personal rights against tyranny from church and state. In Germany, Deism morphed itself into Rationalism, again with impact both in the church and in the state.

In the twentieth century, Albert Schweitzer published his monumental tribute to German Rationalism entitled, *Quest for the Historical Jesus*. Because of the catchy English title, it is easy to forget that the title of Schweitzer’s original German edition is, *Von Reimarus zum Wrede*. Hermann Reimarus wrote in about 1750 (d. 1768) and William Wrede wrote about 1900 (d. 1906). In his *Wolfenbuettel Fragments*, Reimarus “denied every special revelation and made natural religion the criterion of every historical religion, including Christianity. At the same time he sought critically to dissolve the historical foundation of Christianity as we have it in the Bible.”¹⁴ A hundred and fifty years later, William Wrede would write the logical outcome of German Deism: only after stripping away messianic claims, after asserting that the virgin birth, resurrection and ascension of Jesus as accretions from the ancient mystic religions of the ancient Orient,¹⁵ and dismissing one sacrament as a Jewish notion and the other as a simple farewell meal, Wrede taught that we would then be face-to-face with the historical Jesus. A single quote says more than enough to substantiate Wrede’s thought, “What Jesus thought of himself, and what significance, if any, he attached to his death, we shall never know.”¹⁶ Schweitzer’s quest covers one hundred and fifty years of German theologians’ search for the historical Jesus, who, in their opinion, is not synonymous with the Christ of the Bible. This “quest” of German liberalism has not reached its goal yet today.

German Deism would also have ramifications in the government, most notably through use of enforced church unions designed more to bring political unity than church union. The most famous of these unions is the Prussian Union of 1817, enacted in honor of the three hundredth anniversary of the Reformation.

Key to the Prussian Union of 1817 was King Frederick William III. He was both a member of the Reformed Church and a student of the Enlightenment, yet he found himself to be king in highly Lutheran Prussia with a very Lutheran wife, Queen Luise of Mecklenburg. The political independence of Prussia had been achieved by 1815 through the Wars of Liberation from 1813 to 1815. But the cultural revolution of the progressive circles Frederick lived in were not fulfilled. The solution was to introduce Deism, which had morphed into rationalism and named the Enlightenment, into society through the church. First, the territorial

church was put under the direct control of the king. Second, the Union was announced in 1817. This declaration failed to produce any meaningful union between the churches. Therefore, the Union was forcibly put into effect in 1830.

While Frederick William III is credited with the Prussian Union of 1817, the master mind behind it was Friedrich Ernst Daniel Schleiermacher. Schleiermacher grew up in the Reformed church, was influenced by the Moravians, trained in the Enlightenment, and lived among Berlin's circle of romantic liberals. He became the major spokesman for the union movement and wrote the dogmatics for the Union Church, entitled The Christian Faith according to the Principles of the Evangelical Church, Presented under an Organizing Principle. Traditional dogmatics dealt with "loci," specific scriptural passages speaking to a doctrine. Schleiermacher's dogmatics dealt with "an organizing principle." The organizing principle was "Christian experience" pure and simple. Consequently, according to Schleiermacher, the Augsburg Confession, Luther's *Small Catechism*, and the *Heidelberg Catechism*, the three confessions of the Union Church, were to be preferred before the Bible because the confessions must be regarded as the Christian experience of the churches at a given time.¹⁷

A couple of observations will serve to reflect Schleiermacher's theology:

True religion has no quarrel with science. Miracle, for example, is merely the religious name for an ordinary event interpreted religiously. Revelation is every immediate awareness of the Universum. Inspiration is simply a religious name for the freedom to transmit one's own religious experience. All religious feelings are supernatural insofar as they reflect an immediate manifestation of the Universum. Immediacy is what counts. A holy book is merely a mausoleum of religion, a monument to a great spirit no longer at work. It is not the man who believes in a holy Bible who has religion, but rather that man who needs none, and could possibly write one himself. To believe is not to believe *in* Christ, but to believe *as* Christ.¹⁸

We have mentioned only a few key players in the field of English, French, and German Deism. Time prohibits even a short overview of many others who contributed to its cause. However, these illustrate the planting, budding, and flowering of continental Deism.

Nor will we pretend that this is the final chapter in the history of Deism. This is nothing more than its historical setting and development. We will let J. P. Koehler summarize at this point in our paper, as Otto Heick did at the beginning of our study. Koehler writes, "Crass unbelief now reared its ugly head, the legitimate offspring of the excessive exercise of the mind in the period just surveyed." This crass unbelief is outlined in the story of continental Deism by Koehler as "the *work* of the Deists in England, the *popularization* of their ideas in France, and the *final reception* in Germany through so-called Popular Philosophy and Vulgar Rationalism"¹⁹ (emphasis added).

English Deism in America

In his definitive story of the church in America, *A Religious History of the American People*, Sydney Ahlstrom writes, "One of the greatest revolutions was going on quietly, even imperceptibly, in men's minds as they confronted the momentous issues of the Enlightenment."²⁰ Already in 1710, John Wise was espousing a natural law philosophy in opposition to Increase and Cotton Mathers' New England brand of Puritanism. So deistic were Wise's pamphlets against the Mathers that they were reprinted in the 1770s to bolster the Patriot cause in the American Revolution.

About the same time, Samuel Johnson, early Yale graduate and first president of King's College (now Columbia), broke from the old Puritan order offering a well reasoned treatise why it was the logical thing to do. His moderate Arminianism was tempered by a deistic ethic which "defended natural law and held morality to be 'the same thing as the religion of nature,' not discoverable without revelation, to be sure, yet 'found in the first principles of reason and nature.' Moral goodness consisted in a man's being what he is essentially."²¹

Surprising on the list of those impacting the spread of Deism in America is Jonathan Edwards. As a young man, Edwards read John Locke's "Essay Concerning Human Understanding." He said that he read it with more pleasure "than the most greedy miser finds when gathering up silver and gold from some newly found treasure."²² He was just as happy with "the incomparable Mr. Newton."²³ We mentioned Isaac Newton above in connection with Voltaire. Newtonian science rested on the premise that the world is a mechanism, which would consequently make God the mechanic. It was a man by the name of Joseph Priestly who is normally credited with picking up on this to develop the standard deistic analogy of the watch: the existence of the watch proves the existence of the watchmaker, therefore the existence of creation proves the existence of the Creator.²⁴ However, credit for the analogy belongs to Nicolaus of Oresmes in the fourteenth century.²⁵

Ahlstrom's conclusion is noteworthy:

In his (Jonathan Edward's) mature years, despite a career at the center of the Awakening—with all of its anti-intellectual tendencies, he infused the spirit of the Age of Reason into the faith of his fathers with a transforming sublimity equaled by no Reformed thinker of the century. He thus participated actively in the great spiritual transition that marks the end of a period when American culture was still recognizably medieval in its outlook and inner spirit, and the emergence of distinctly 'modern' religious ideas.²⁶

In the 1760s enlightened colonists began pulling off their shelves copies of John Locke's reasoned justification of the Glorious Revolution of 1688. Its message was basic to colonists who wanted to define their own liberties and to limit the authority of George III and Parliament. Locke had espoused that "government is not absolute, but rather the result of a 'social compact' made by free, equal, and independent men. It is instituted with the consent of the governed and should be reformed or replaced if it fails to fulfill its purpose."²⁷ Locke's rationale was based on

an abiding confidence in natural law, which, though eternal and transcendent, was yet accessible to human reason whenever the mind is freed from bondage, superstitions, and the passions. Such laws controlled the relationships of mankind as well as the natural order of things.²⁸

Ahlstrom's "revolution in men's minds," mentioned above, did not allow English Deism to be directly appropriated and applied as "the new world order". The old Puritan mind-set was too strong. With its emphasis on inward experience, American thought made its own contribution to Deism. In departing from "the traditional precepts of natural law," the Americans "shifted the emphasis from the *order* of nature and government to the *reality* of natural rights." In other words, they "interiorized the significance of natural law and rendered it more man-centered, stressing human rights rather than cosmic order, the individual rather than the state, liberty rather than obedience."²⁹ Yet, even this infusion of Puritanical verve could not change the fact that liberal Deism was in full control at the time of the American Revolution and, in fact, served as justification for it.

French Deism in America

As the colonies set themselves in opposition to England, it is natural that they would seek allies in another place. That place was France. French approval and aide was needed in the war against England. These new friends of the colonies assisted not only with money and might, but also with mind. Voltaire soon replaced Locke as the great thinker who captured the minds and the spirits of the revolutionaries, especially in the years between the signing of the Declaration of Independence and the adoption of the Constitution with its Bill of Rights. The result was full-blown secular, or French, Deism.

In 1784, Ethan Allen, self-educated rebel from the Great Awakening, hero of Ticonderoga, and controversial figure in Vermont politics, published *The Only Oracle of Man*. In it, he not only defended "natural religion", but he also attacked the Bible and "priestcraft." This book was later identified as "the first formal publication, in the United States, openly directed against the Christian religion."³⁰ Here is an example of

Allen's deistic teaching from this "oracle":

God being incomprehensible to us, we cannot understand all that perfection in which the divine essence consists. We can nevertheless (negatively) comprehend many things, in which (positively) the divine essence does not and cannot consist. That it does not consist of three persons, or of any other number of persons, is as easily demonstrated, as that the whole is bigger than a part, or any other proposition in mathematics.³¹

For sheer eloquence, none can surpass Thomas Paine's *Age of Reason*. Through these pamphlets, Paine became the undisputed champion of Deism in America. Here's what Paine has to say about God in the first installment of the *Age of Reason*, incidentally dated "The Second Year of the French Republic", as opposed to "The Year of our Lord, 1794":

It seems as if parents of the Christian profession were ashamed to tell their children anything about the principles of their religion. They sometimes instruct them in morals, and talk to them of the goodness of what they call Providence, for the Christian mythology has five deities- there is God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Ghost, the God Providence, and the Goddess Nature. But the Christian story of God the Father putting his son to death, or employing people to do it (for that is the plain language of the story) cannot be told by a parent to a child; and to tell him that it was done to make mankind happier and better is making the story still worse-as if mankind could be improved by the example of murder; and to tell him that all this is a mystery is only making an excuse for the incredibility of it. How different is this to the pure and simple profession of Deism! The true Deist has but one Deity, and his religion consists in contemplating the power, wisdom, and benignity of the Deity in his works, and in endeavoring to imitate him in everything moral, scientific (sic), and mechanical.³²

In a pamphlet entitled, "Of the Religion of Deism Compared to the Christian Religion," Paine adds this thought:

Here it is that the religion of Deism is superior to the Christian Religion. It is free from all those invented and torturing articles that shock our reason or injure our humanity, and with which the Christian religion abounds. Its creed is pure, and sublimely simple. It believes in God, and there it rests.³³

Thomas Jefferson is the most significant American political deist. He's sometimes identified as "the St. Paul of American Democracy." This title carries significant weight. For the deists, Paul of Tarsus was the key player in the corruption of the teachings of Jesus. For them, the apostle's interpretation of the significance of Jesus' life and death took the lead in changing Christianity from the morality of a common natural religion to the mysticism of a gnostic revealed religion. In calling Jefferson "the St. Paul of American Democracy," the deists were saying that they looked to Jefferson's writings, rather than Paul's, as the authoritative understanding of Jesus' life and death. In Jefferson's own edition of the New Testament, only material from the gospels is included. Even then, all references to the supernatural and miracles are removed. His version of the gospel ends with the words, "Now in the place where he was crucified there was a garden; and in the garden a new sepulchre, wherein was never man yet laid. There laid they Jesus, And rolled a great stone to the door of the sepulchre, and depart-ed."³⁴ So ends the deistic gospel – no resurrection, no divinity of Christ, no forgiveness.

How Jefferson built his "theology" around his gospel, in opposition to St. Paul, is evident. In a letter to James Smith, dated December 8, 1822, Jefferson writes,

No historical fact is better established, than that the doctrine of one God, pure and

uncompounded, was that of the early ages of Christianity....Nor was the unity of the Supreme Being ousted from the Christian creed by the force of reason, but by the sword of civil government, wielded at the will of Athanasius. The hocus-pocus phantasm of a God like another Cerberus, with one body and three heads, had its birth and growth in the blood of thousands of martyrs....The Athanasian paradox that one is three, and three but one, is so incomprehensible to the human mind, that no candid man can say he has any idea of it, and how can he believe what presents no idea? He who thinks he does, only deceives himself. He proves, also, that man, once surrendering his reason, has no remaining guard against absurdities the most monstrous, and like a ship without rudder, is the sport of every wind. With such persons, gullibility, which they call faith, takes the helm from the hand of reason, and the mind becomes a wreck.³⁵

Jefferson articulated his beliefs in a letter to Dr. Benjamin Waterhouse, a Unitarian leader, dated January 28, 1822, as follows,

I have received and read with thankfulness and pleasure your denunciation of the abuses of tobacco and wine. Yet, however sound in its principles, I expect it will be but a sermon to the wind. You will find it as difficult to inculcate these sanative precepts on the sensualities of the present day, as to convince an Athanasian that there is but one God. I wish success to both attempts, and am happy to learn from you that the latter, at least, is making progress, and the more rapidly in proportion as our Platonizing Christians make more stir and noise about it. The doctrines of Jesus are simple, and tend all to the happiness of man.

1. That there is one only God, and he all perfect.
2. That there is a future state of rewards and punishments.
3. That to love God with all thy heart and thy neighbor as thyself, is the sum of religion.

These are the great points on which he endeavored to reform the religion of the Jews. But compare with these the demoralizing dogmas of Calvin.

1. That there are three Gods.
2. That good works, or the love of our neighbor, are nothing.
3. That faith is everything, and the more incomprehensible the proposition, the more merit in its faith.
4. That reason in religion is of unlawful use.
5. That God, from the beginning, elected certain individuals to be saved, and certain others to be damned; and that no crimes of the former can damn them; no virtues of the latter save.

Now, which of these is the true and charitable Christian? He who believes and acts on the simple doctrines of Jesus? Or the impious dogmatists, as Athanasius and Calvin? Verily I say these are the false shepherds foretold as to enter not by the door into the sheepfold, but to climb up some other way. They are mere usurpers of the Christian name, teaching a counter-religion made up of the *deliria* of crazy imaginations, as foreign from Christianity as is that of Mahomet. Their blasphemies have driven thinking men into infidelity, who have too hastily rejected the supposed author himself, with the horrors so falsely imputed to him. Had the doctrines of Jesus been preached always as pure as they came from his lips, the whole civilized world would now have been Christian.³⁶

In commenting on Christianity and its Triune God, Jefferson also stated the following:

The Christian god is a three headed monster, cruel, vengeful, and capricious. If one wishes to know more of this raging, three headed beast-like god, one only needs to look at the caliber of

people who say they serve him. They are always of two classes: fools and hypocrites.³⁷

Deism reached new heights in the United States when Elihu Palmer founded “The Deistic Society of New York” in 1794. The focal group of this society was a group of enthusiasts for the French Revolution. Palmer was convinced that the “movement” known as “Deism,” also now called “Republican Religion” or “Natural Law,” could be institutionalized as any other religion. In establishing the Deistic Society, Palmer laid down “The Principles of Nature” which served as a creed for Deism. He held that all true deists would believe:

1. That the universe proclaims the existence of one supreme Deity, worthy of the adoration of intelligent beings.
2. That man is possessed of moral and intellectual faculties sufficient for the improvement of his nature and the acquisition of happiness.
3. That the religion of nature is the only universal religion; that it grows out of the moral relations of intelligent beings, and that it stands connected with the progressive improvement and common welfare of the human race.
4. That it is essential to the true interest of man, that he love truth and practice virtue.
5. That vice is everywhere ruinous and destructive to the happiness of the individual and of society.
6. That a benevolent disposition, and beneficent actions, are fundamental duties of rational beings.
7. That a religion mingled with persecution and malice cannot be of divine origin.
8. That education and science are essential to the happiness of man.
9. That civil and religious liberty is equally essential to his interests.
10. That there can be no human authority to which man ought to be amenable for his religious opinions.
11. That science and truth, virtue and happiness, are the great objects to which the activity and energy of the human faculties ought to be directed.³⁸

French Naturalism, or French Deism, also caught the fancy of the “in” crowd of the general population. It was especially the French Revolution that caught the nation’s attention in the mid to late 1790s. The liberty hat was the fad of the day, often sporting the cockade of the revolution. Instead of addressing each other as Sir or Mr. or Dr. or Rev., Americans began addressing each other as Citizen. A Citizen’s wife was addressed as Citeess, or better, Civess. Towns adopted names to reflect classic human wisdom of bygone ages – Rome and Athens, Syracuse and Utica.

The influence of French Deism was also found in the nation’s universities. William Channing, future official spokesman for Unitarianism said “that Harvard was never in a worse state than when he entered it in 1794, that the French Revolution had diseased the imagination of students and encouraged a general skepticism.” In addition, “Dartmouth reported that its students were unruly, lawless, and without fear of God. At Princeton there were only three or four students who made a profession of piety. Timothy Dwight, the president of Yale, complained of the profaneness, drunkenness, gambling and lewdness of his charges.” To this comment is added, “For the last decade of the eighteenth century the cult of irreligion was undoubtedly accentuated by an adulation of republican France.”³⁹ All this was indicative of the times when church membership dipped to its low point of seven percent of the total United States population, as mentioned at the beginning of our present discourse. French Deism was bankrupting the new nation spiritually.

In these heady days for Deism in the United States, Congress enacted the Treaty of Tripoli, in 1797, a treaty which is still in effect today. This treaty was coauthored by Joel Barlow of the United States and Hassan Bashaw of Algiers. Although it is not known why Article XI of the treaty was not included in the Arabic version, it was included in the English version as it was printed in our media, adopted by Congress without discussion or dissent, and signed by John Adams. Article XI officially says, “*As the government of the United States of America is not in any sense founded on the Christian Religion,--as it has in itself no character of enmity against the laws, religion or tranquillity of Musselmen,--and as the said States never have entered into any war or act of*

hostility against any Mohammedan nation, it is declared by the parties that no pretext arising from religious opinions shall ever interrupt the harmony existing between the two countries."⁴⁰ (Emphasis added)

Elihu Palmer and Deism were given an added impetus in 1800 with the election of Thomas Jefferson as President of the United States. Palmer used this as an opportunity to start a weekly deistic newspaper named, "Temple of Reason." Deistic societies were founded in the larger cities. Speakers were prepared "to prove that the Deluge was physically impossible, that the dimensions of the ark precluded it carrying its alleged cargo, and that such stories have an adverse effect on the Moral Temperament of Man."⁴¹ Proposals were afoot for building a Temple of Nature in New York City "to be used for the worship of the One God Supreme and Benevolent Creator of the world; and for other purposes of a literary kind."⁴² Persons of talent who wanted to celebrate the moral and civilized character of mankind were invited to join the Ancient Society of Druids.

As the extremes of the French Revolution gave way to more sensible minds on the continent, the moral sensibility of the citizens of the United States again came to the fore. By 1810 there was a perceived need for a reassertion of a traditional concern for religion. However, Puritanism had folded under the pressure of Deism. It sputtered through the second Great Awakening about the turn of the century. But an awakening was not enough to sustain the growing nation. What the nation needed was complete revival. A weakened Puritanism gave way to energetic Methodism and Baptist revivalism as the forces to revitalize the nation and tame the frontier. Soon, after the Prussian Union of 1817, the Lutherans would join them.

German Deism in the United States

It was previously mentioned that Deism took shape in Germany in the church but also had ramifications for the state. Its immediate result was the acceptance of higher critical methodology and doctrinal laxness in the church and enforced unionism by the state.

When news of the Prussian Union hit American Lutheranism, it was felt that such a union would also be good on this side of the Atlantic. However, here unionism meant first the uniting of the various Lutheran synods. In 1817, there were three American Lutheran synods, the Pennsylvania, the New York, and the North Carolina. In 1818, most of the more conservative Lutherans left the union endeavor and formed the General Conference, later known as the Ohio Synod. The proposed union group for the original three synods was formed in 1820 under the name of the General Synod. A newly formed Maryland-Virginia Synod (1820) joined ranks with only Pennsylvania and North Carolina in the General Synod. The Ohio Synod kept aloof from it, as did the newly formed Tennessee Synod (1820). So did New York. The General Synod was too liberal for Ohio and Tennessee. It was too conservative for New York.

That any synod thought the confessional stance of the General Synod was too conservative is surprising because the confessional basis for the General Synod was even less than the confessional basis for the Prussian Union churches in Germany. The General Synod accepted only part of the Augsburg Confession, and that part as only "substantially correct." In commenting on the General Synod, Sydney Ahlstrom says, "In 1820 the delegates of these (synods) drafted a constitution for the General Synod to accomplish the desired unification, but they could agree on no more than the Lutheran name to show their confessional consciousness, and they made no mention whatever of the historic standards of faith."⁴³

J.P. Koehler writes,

The general mentality had become that of Germany's unionism in principle. They didn't put much stock in the distinctive doctrines of the Lutheran church as such. The Bible alone, was their watchword, to give voice to the vaunted liberty of the Gospel. At the same time there was a legalistic streak in the synodical resolutions regarding externals similarly as in the Prussian Union. Over here the mergers and separations of synods as well derived from this emphasis on church government.⁴⁴

From this it is evident that so called "Eastern Lutheranism" was not in a position to help revitalize the spiritually bankrupt nation or play a positive spiritual role in its western expansion. However, historic

Lutheranism would have a role in America due to the enforcement in Germany, in 1830, of the Prussian Union of 1817. This triggered a massive migration of more conservative Lutheran lay people and pastors to the American Midwest, especially to the Northwest Territory, namely the future states of Ohio, Michigan, Indiana, Illinois, Wisconsin, and the northeast tip of Minnesota around Duluth, all of which have harbors on the Great Lakes, as well as to Missouri, Minnesota and other states of the Louisiana Purchase, states which had access to the Port of New Orleans via the Mississippi and Missouri Rivers. These various ports allowed the new Lutheran immigrants to bypass, in every way, their liberal counterparts in the east. The Northwest Territory was especially appealing for Lutherans, and others, seeking religious freedom. It is the only part of the United States where religion is officially encouraged by an act of Congress. Article III of the Northwest Ordinance, enacted by Congress on July 13, 1787, and still in force today, says, “Religion, morality, and knowledge, being necessary to good government and the happiness of mankind, schools and the means of education shall forever be encouraged (in this territory and ensuing states made from it).”⁴⁵

The Enduring Impact of Deism

At this time we will note that the attack of Deism against the Trinity is not always a “shock and awe” battle in the spiritual war which is waged between God and his enemies. As we have seen, Deism’s attack on the Trinity can be very open or more subtle. Very often, it’s found in the human mind, cloaked in the comfort of human reason and soothing to the human conscience. Wherever and whenever it is found, its attack is relentless. It changes itself and restructures itself to fit the times and mores at hand. It presents truths about God which can be known by nature and conscience, but will not let its advocates proceed from natural religion to revealed religion. It holds before people a Creator God, but refuses to let people know the Savior God. It holds before people a God who is one, but disallows a God who is three in one.

If we allow Deism to be defined by its demonstrated progression from English Deism to German Rationalism via French Naturalism, then we will also see that Deism impacts virtually every area in our modern lives. In a previous paper, by the name of “The Enduring Impact of Deism,” the present author listed nine areas where we see the impact of Deism today. Five of those areas were the attempt of the Jews to integrate into mainstream society; spiritism and psychic phenomena, both promoted by the Puritans as a way of proving that God exists and is active in people’s lives; the born again experience, promoted by John Wesley as a way to prove that God is active in the personal lives of people; and the influence of John Locke on educational philosophy. While they are interesting stories to be told, they do not have a direct bearing on our present topic. We will look at the other four, under three categories, where Deism shows its relentless attack on the Trinity.

The First Amendment

The first amendment to the Constitution of United States says:

Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.⁴⁶

The first freedom guaranteed in the Bill of Rights has been a point of controversy almost from the day it was passed. There is no doubt that the prevailing view on this so called “freedom of religion” comes from Thomas Jefferson who wrote in his famous “Danbury Letter,”

Believing that religion is a matter which lies solely between man and his God, that he owes account to none other for his faith or his worship, that the legislative powers of government reach actions only, and not opinions, I contemplate with sovereign reverence that act of the whole American people which declared that their legislature should ‘make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof,’ thus building a wall of

separation between church and state.⁴⁷

Jefferson's concept of "a wall of separation between church and state" became the criterion upon which issues of religion and government would be considered and decided. Therefore, it is profitable to examine Jefferson's understanding of this "wall of separation between church and state."

It is clear that Jefferson was no Christian, in spite of the fact that he attended church regularly, even though he held no church membership. It is also clear that Jefferson did not write these words in defense of deistic thinking, even though it fit well with it. The framers of the Constitution had another issue they were working with, namely that many of the thirteen states already had some form of established religion. O.J. Brown writes,

By saying 'Congress shall make no law respecting AN establishment of religion, the framers were saying: 'We have religious establishments already set up in the individual states and, for that reason, we want no laws from Congress to interfere with an establishment of religion.' Of the thirteen original states ratifying the Constitution six...had clearly delineated "Establishments." Delaware and Maryland insisted on Christianity. Pennsylvania required a belief in the inspiration of the Bible, as well as a belief in heaven and hell. Massachusetts called for "Christian Protestantism." Thus, ten of the thirteen states approving the Constitution had some form of 'establishment of religion' into which they wanted no Federal meddling.⁴⁸

That this was Jefferson's understanding of the First Amendment is made clear in his Second Inaugural Address:

In matters of religion I have considered that its free exercise is placed by the Constitution independent of the powers of the General Government. I have therefore undertaken on no occasion to prescribe the religious exercises suited to us, but have left them *as the Constitution found them* under the direction and discipline of the church and state authorities acknowledged by the several religious societies.⁴⁹ (Emphasis added)

Jefferson stated it even more clearly in a letter to a friend, "Certainly, no power to prescribe any religious exercise, or to assume authority in religious discipline, has been delegated to the General Government. *It must then rest with the states.*"⁵⁰ (Emphasis added)

The words of the Constitution are clear. Congress could not enact any laws pertaining to the religious establishments within the states, nor could Congress in any way enact a law to prohibit the free exercise of any religion, including by those within the government itself. Even though waves of disestablishmentarianism and antidisestablishmentarianism toward the established churches went through the states, the practice of established churches survived for decades.

Lacking an established religion and yet permitted to freely exercise religion, it is evident from the historical development noted above that the religion exercised within the Federal Government at the time of the adoption of the Constitution was Deism. It was identified as "The Republican Religion." It was exemplified in the involvement by many of the Founding Fathers in the Masonic Lodge. Since the new nation did not have a noble or peasant class, the Founding Fathers viewed the Masonic Lodge as the American nobility, the aristocracy who would live a noble life of loyalty to God and goodwill to men as an example to the common man.⁵¹ The influence of the Masonic Lodge is ingrained on American culture. It is pictured in George Washington taking the Oath of Office in Federal Hall in New York City with his hand placed on a Bible from St. John's Lodge of Freemasons.⁵² It is found in the image of George Washington laying the foundation for the U.S. Capitol trowel in hand and Masonic apron "girding the loins." It is exemplified in the symbolism of the United States. England has three superimposed crosses as its symbol. The United States has the eagle, the unfinished pyramid, and the eye.⁵³

Such a deistic approach to religion in government allowed for "nature's law" to be used as the

underpinnings of the American nation. Since the Ten Commandments were nothing but a summary of natural law, they could be touted as the ethic by which the nation would thrive. At the same time, the deistic approach would not have thought of chiseling John 3:16 in marble in any of the federal buildings, not because it would have been considered unconstitutional to do so, but because it did not reflect the sentiments of Deism which permeated the Federal Government. That's why no eyebrows were raised by pastors who opened Congress with prayers addressed to "our Heavenly Father" and prayed in "the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior." The chaplain was simply freely exercising his religion as the First Amendment allowed. At the same time, the states could and did do whatever they wanted with religious establishments because Congress had no authority over religious matters in the states.

Without a doubt, this deistic understanding of the First Amendment has fallen by the wayside. It was doomed by the popularization of evolution. A century after Deism became "The Republican Religion," progressives asked that the nation be considered "a living thing and not a machine."⁵⁴ The death blows to the influence of Deism's understanding of the First Amendment came under the supervision of Supreme Court Chief Justices Charles Hughes and Earl Warren. Already in 1787 the Founding Fathers expressed a concern over the potential for a tyrannical judiciary. In the case of Hughes and Warren, both believed that "the intent of the authors (of the Constitution) was not controlling; the words of the constitution take on new meaning as society progresses and matures."⁵⁵ Consider these words of Charles Hughes, spoken in 1920, "We are under a Constitution, but the Constitution is what the judges say it is."⁵⁶ In 1958, Earl Warren wrote, "The Constitutional Amendment must draw its meaning from the evolving standards of decency that mark the progress of a maturing society."⁵⁷ To bring this philosophy more up to date, we listen to Supreme Court Justice Brennan, writing in March, 1993, "It is arrogant to use the Constitution as the founding fathers intended, it must be interpreted in light of current problems and current needs."⁵⁸ These courts are responsible for the complete separation of the state from all "church," including Deism.

The result of the destruction of Deism as "The Republican Religion" left a vacuum to be filled. The Reformed branch of Christianity has always been anxious to inject some of Ulrich Zwingli's idea of a church state into the American democracy. Even today, the likes of Pat Robertson and Jerry Falwell try to inject Trinitarian fundamentalism into the veins of the American Republic. But the issue of the "religion" of the nation has already been established by the court system. Religious Deism has been ousted and secular democracy has become the national religion. Here is how one man describes this new national religion, "Liberal democracy was the first great secular religion in Western history—the first ideology which became divorced from traditional Christianity and at the same time took over from traditional Christianity both its sense of the sacred and some of its major values."⁵⁹

If one has any doubts whether secular democracy has become the new religion of the Republic in the minds of many, consider these words of Henry Estabrook, a leading New York attorney,

Our great and sacred Constitution, serene and inviolable, stretches its beneficent powers over our land--over its lakes and rivers and forests, over every mother's son of us, like the outstretched arm of God himself....O Marvellous Constitution! Magic Parchment! Transforming Word! Maker, Monitor, Guardian of Mankind!⁶⁰

To this one man responded,

To be sure, Americans continue to share a rather lofty range of affinities for the Constitution, often viewing that 'Magic Parchment' as a sacred document. Now, if one accepts the concept of religion as 'a collection of beliefs, symbols, and rituals with respect to sacred things and institutionalized in a collectivity,' then there is a civil religion in this country and its clergy are those black-robed, high-benched members of the United States Supreme Court, domiciled in Washington, D.C., as the Pope is in Rome.⁶¹

No wonder every liberal moral cause worships at the altar of the Supreme Court in-stead of seeking

legislation from “the people” in Congress. No wonder every liberal moral cause worships at the altar of the Supreme Court instead of at the altar of the God whose law and gospel are absolute truth. There was no better way for abortion to be “legalized” and there will be no better way for homosexuality to reach its goal of legally recognized marriage than to have the Supreme Court give the final word. Congress never had to do the dirty work of enacting a law allowing abortion. Chances are that Congress will enact no law regarding homosexual marriages. The Supreme Court will speak and it will be done. You may remember during the John Ashcroft confirmation hearings for Attorney General of the United States that one continually asked question was “Do you accept abortion as established law?” The plain fact is that Congress has never enacted a law legalizing abortion. You may remember Tom Daschle’s mantra during the midterm elections in 2002. His repeated reason for all the questionable election “strategies” of his party was to protect the court system from nominees who might interfere with a woman’s “right to choose.” As you know, the current filibuster over more conservative federal judicial nominees is, among other things, meant to be a fair warning about the way a more conservative Supreme Court nominee will be considered. There is no better way to promote the counter culture than through the ultimate authority of the Supreme Court which admits that it does not follow the original intent of the Constitution but interprets it in light of current problems and needs. One of the more recent issues involving the First Amendment is the use of what have now come to be known as “ceremonial deisms.”⁶² These include public nativity displays, invocations and prayers said at public gatherings, mottos such as “In God we Trust” on our currency, the phrase “under God” in the Pledge of Allegiance, and the like. Last year there was a court test on the Ohio state motto taken from the New Testament, “With God all things are possible.” We are all aware that the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals in San Francisco has declared unconstitutional the words “under God” in the Pledge of Allegiance. We can look for more such decisions in the future.

A man by the name of Jeremy Patrick comments on what he sees as the issues involved:

Some courts uphold ceremonial deisms because they believe there is no real harm done. These courts, however, overlook the fact that the existence of ceremonial deisms is used to support other unconstitutional practices. As legal scholar Steven Epstein put it, ‘The implications of ceremonial deisms are far-reaching because courts frequently employ this amorphous concept as a springboard from which to hold that other challenged practices do not violate the establishment clause.’ Religious conservatives have also realized this and often invoke ceremonial deisms to justify other laws. For example, according to the Associated Press, when the Colorado Board of Education considered whether to display “In God We Trust” in public schools, supporters said they “believe the courts cannot object to a phrase that appears on U.S. currency.” Advocates of displaying the Ten Commandments in public schools, placing nativity scenes on public property, and having prayers at graduation ceremonies have all used similar arguments. The line between church and state isn’t always easy to draw. It doesn’t require government hostility toward religion. But the free exercise rights of citizens don’t include the right to use the government as a vehicle to spread their beliefs. Supreme Court precedent indicates that the government cannot use a religious means to accomplish a secular end. There is nothing served by ceremonial deisms (such as rendering an occasion “solemn”) that cannot be accomplished by nonreligious invocations. The harm ceremonial deisms cause, on the other hand, is very real: they marginalize religious minorities and add strength to those who advocate even more entanglement between religion and government. And if ceremonial deisms are really so nonreligious in character, who do religious conservatives fight so strongly for their preservation?⁶³

Those supporting such “ceremonial deisms” need to be careful that their promotion and use does not backfire on them. This spring much was made out of the fact that, for the first time, an “out of the closet” homosexual minister opened a session of Congress with prayer. We can expect to see more political activism in the choice of those leading, or deciding on the language and religion of, these “ceremonial deisms” as long as they are allowed by the courts.

Throughout this discourse on the First Amendment, we can see the intensifying attack of Deism on the Trinity. The First Amendment was written to protect the established churches of the colonies, all of which were

Trinitarian. By extension, the First Amendment would protect any future religious establishments, Trinitarian or not. However, the federal Constitution set off a flurry of disestablishmentarianism in the state legislatures and courts, finally bringing down the last such establishment of religion in Massachusetts in 1833. The Deism of the Founding Fathers, which preceded the adoption of the constitution, came to the fore. Deism now showed itself especially in a tolerance of any religion which believed in a benevolent Creator, of which Christianity was one and often the foremost in people's minds. However, the courts systematically have been active in removing any tolerance of these minimal deistic principles from official federal polity. The spiritual void has been filled with the religion of Americanism, with the allowance of so called ceremonial deisms. Now these ceremonial deisms are under attack by the courts. Throughout this process, people have become confused about the difference between Deism and Christianity, as well as about the difference between the God of Deism and the God of Christianity, not to mention fellowship issues involved. This has often resulted in an attack on the Trinity. Consider the current debate in the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod.

In support of their pastor, Dr. David Benke of St. Peter's Lutheran Church (LC-MS) in Brooklyn, New York, the leaders of the congregation write in an article entitled, "A Serious Problem":

The Wisconsin Synod Website, www.wels.net, contains a section called Questions. If you use the search mode and punch in Boy Scouts, or Oaths, you will find out these things from the WELS/ELS point of view: For a Lutheran to participate in the Boy Scouts is wrong and sinful because scouting has religious elements that imply a scout can do his duty to God no matter what religion he belongs to. The motto "In God We Trust" is not endorsed by the WELS/ELS. The claim "One nation under God" in the Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag is not endorsed by the WELS/ELS.

Lutherans are told they can only take oaths in court if they are to the Triune God.

Why in the world would Lutheran Christians hesitate to endorse "In God we trust?" These are concepts that come from the Wisconsin and Evangelical Synods, not the Missouri Synod. **These concepts separate people from opportunities to participate productively in society.**

Christians are actually kept from rejoicing in and tackling their responsibilities according to the First Article of the Apostles Creed. Isn't our participation in the world as citizens something that is good? How could any say it is wrong to understand the joys and responsibilities of participating in God's World?

These strange ideas, these doctrinal errors, are being **imported** into the Missouri Synod. It seems to us like an attempt at what they call in the corporate world a **hostile takeover**. There are solutions. Perhaps the folks within the Missouri Synod who hold these beliefs should join one of the other groups. Perhaps everyone would be happier if we went our separate ways. But that can't be the first solution. The first and best solution is to find ways to encourage the WELS and ELS to follow a better path in doctrine.⁶⁴

It is interesting that the leaders of St. Peter Lutheran Church (LC-MS), Brooklyn, New York, blame the problems their pastor is experiencing on the WELS and ELS. The fact of the matter is that Pastor Behnke was legitimately suspended from his office by his own synod for his participation in and defense of a joint prayer service with Muslims and Jews as well as with other Christians at Yankee Stadium following the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks. It is also interesting that the above defense of Pastor Behnke follows traditional deistic thinking, rather than confessional Lutheran teaching. We would be kidding ourselves if we did not think that such deistic thinking also infects the thinking of many of our own people.

However, the bigger question is whether the God of Islam and the Jews is the same God as the Trinity of Christianity. The above mentioned article by the leaders of St. Peter's Lutheran Church refers to another article by Dr. Donald Matzat of Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne. This article is entitled, "How Many Gods (or gods) Are There?" Listen to some of his logic:

One of the questions that has come to the surface in the Behnke matter is whether or not Christians and Muslims believe in the same God. I understand the reality of false gods or other

gods when it comes to an idol or graven image. One can behold the idol or image, point to it and say, ‘This is a false god!’ I do not understand the concept of a false god or “other gods” within a theistic con-text. To claim that non-Christians who believe in one invisible God, the creator of the universe to whom they are responsible, believe in a false god or “other” god raises the question: how many Gods or gods are there? When we speak about “other gods” based upon erroneous definitions within the context of the-ism we create much confusion and leave the impression that there are many gods. Creating such an impression is itself contrary to the First Commandment.⁶⁵

One recognizes that there are some lines to draw here. The God who reveals himself in nature and conscience is indeed the true God, even though he does not reveal his Trinitarian essence or his forgiving personality through either nature or conscience. However, this does not mean that everyone, including the deist, who worships the God he finds in nature and through his conscience, worships the true God. Why? Because of what Paul said in and of what deists demonstrate according to Romans 1:18-23:

The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness, since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities--his eternal power and divine nature--have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse. For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles.

Since Paul mentions “images” which look “like mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles,” some might conclude the Matzat is right, namely that a false god always involves a visible idol. However, “the fools” whose “thinking became futile” and whose “foolish hearts were darkened” when they “suppress the truth by their wickedness” are incredibly ingenious when it comes to making images. An image is any product of the imagination. When what the mind imagines God to be, instead of whom God reveals himself to be (whether in nature, con-science, or Scripture), becomes God, there is a false god. We agree with John Schaller who wrote:

We think of the great throng of arrogant men who think that the great God must be measured by the short span of human brainpower. They build for themselves a god after their own philosophy and become vain in their imaginations; their foolish hearts sink into darkness; they lose even what was left over of their natural knowledge of God. And so they fall into deism [a religion based on reason rather than revelation. Since the eighteenth century it has denied that God has any role in governing this world], lost themselves in pan-theism, and finally end up in the foolishness of atheism (the denial of God's existence).⁶⁶

I would like to conclude this section with some words of wisdom from Robert Preus,

The Lutheran teachers were really only trying to be faithful to the Biblical data in presenting their doctrine of the natural knowledge of God. They were convinced that Scripture taught a natural knowledge of God. And they exercised extreme caution against making extravagant claims concerning the extent or benefit of the natural knowledge of God. For all of them the most important concern was to confute the ideas of Zwingli and particularly Lord Herbert of Cherbury that certain noble heathen might be saved.

Lutheran theology never divorced the natural knowledge of God from repentance. Rather the very purpose of God's revelation in nature was to establish to all men their inexcusability before God, to convince them that they were sinners under God's wrath. According to Lutheran dogmatics the faith of Christians and the knowledge of the heathen

concerning God do not differ merely quantitatively; rather there is a radical qualitative and formal difference between Christian faith and a *notitia Dei naturalis*.⁶⁷

There is a point at which the true God who reveals himself in creation and conscience is exchanged for a false god in sinful human minds. But that point in the digression becomes moot when we remember that neither those who have only the natural knowledge of God or a false image of him will be saved. Salvation comes only through gospel truth as it is revealed in the Bible.

Lodges and Scouting

We have already noted that the Founding Fathers, precluding a noble class of citizens in the United States, looked to the Masonic Lodge to fill the role of nobility as far as setting the standard for ethical and moral citizenship. Masonry's other adoptive rites, such as the Eastern Star, also viewed themselves this way. In the *Ritual of the Eastern Star*, we read, "The aspirant is informed that the order was destined to render human society as perfect as possible."⁶⁸

The basic religious tenets of Masonry are easily demonstrated. The Louisiana Monitor of the Masonic Lodge, printed in 1988, says: "To the altar of Freemasonry all men bring their most votive offerings. Around it all men, whether they have received their teachings from Confucius, Zoroaster, Moses, Mohammad or the founder of the Christian religion--just so long as they believe in the universality of the fatherhood of God and universality of the brotherhood of man--meet upon a common level. The Jew returns to his synagogue, the Mohammedan to his mosque and the Christian to his temple-- each better prepared for the solemn duties of life by the associations in this universal brotherhood."⁶⁹

The Masonic Manual of Minnesota, printed in 1998, says,

Masons believe that there is one God and that people employ many different ways to seek and to express what they know of God. Masons primarily uses (sic) the appellation, 'Grand Architect of the Universe,' and other non-sectarian titles, to address Deity. In this way, persons of different faiths may join together in prayer, concentrating on God rather than on differences among themselves. Masonry believes in religious freedom and that the relationship between the individual and God is personal, private, and sacred.

When addressing the Deity in prayer it should never be done in a way that excludes Brothers of other faiths and of necessity should be inclusive and universal, not sectarian or denominational.⁷⁰

Even against this background, many within the Masonic community try to bring out a Christian slant to the movement. For example, Malcolm Duncan, in the notes of his *Masonic Ritual and Monitor*, subtitled, "Guide to the Three Symbolic Degrees of the Ancient York Rite," explains:

This (third) Degree has a reference to the Christian dispensation, when the day of salvation is more fully revealed; atonement is made for sin; and *the resurrection of the dead* plainly communicated and confirmed by the resurrection of Christ from the grave.⁷¹

There is also a book entitled *The Fourth Gospel and the Eighteenth Degree* which claims to be "the first book to interpret any Masonic degree from an exclusively Christian viewpoint."⁷² In this book, Arthur Brown says,

The eighteenth degree, the degree of a Prince Rose Croix, in the British Isles at any rate, is the first specifically Christian degree of the Ancient and Adoptive Rite. If a brother is proposed and seconded as a candidate for the degree, he has to express his willingness to take an obligation in the Name of the Holy and Undivided Trinity before the ballot for his reception can be taken. The teaching and the symbolism of the degree are centered on the focal point of the Christian gospel. A practicing Christian who has received his Masonic upbringing in the non-committal deism of

the Craft can find in the Rose Croix that his religion and his Freemasonry have become reconciled; and a very satisfying realization that is.⁷³

One appreciates this Mason's honesty in saying that normal Masonic upbringing is in non-committal Deism. One also appreciates his honesty in saying that the bulk of Freemasonry is not reconcilable with Christianity. One also appreciates the honesty that the god of Free-masonry is not the Trinity. One also learns through a scanning of his book that his idea of "the Christian gospel" is not salvation by grace but acceptance by works.

The arguments of such commentators fall under the weight of the seventh degree of Masonry which is called "one of the most guarded secrets throughout all the Masonic Lodge rituals and degrees."⁷⁴ In this degree, also known as the "Royal Arch Degree," the Masonic name for their god is given. While he is commonly called "The Great Architect of the Universe" (GAOTU), this is not the official name of the Masonic god. In the seventh degree ceremony, three lecturers lead the service. At one point they say together,

As we three agree, in peace, love and unity, the sacred word to keep. So we three do agree, in peace, love and unity, the sacred word to search. Until we three, or three such as we shall agree, this Royal Arch Chapter to close.⁷⁵

They then reveal, the 'sacred word' - 'Jah-Bal-On.' This is given in low breath and is performed three times by three lecturers, taking turns to pronounce a name each:

- (1) "Jah" (2) "Bal" (3) "On"
- (2) "Jah" (3) "Bal" (1) "On"
- (3) "Jah" (1) "Bal" (2) "On."

The candidate is then told that 'It is the name of Deity in three languages, Chaldee, Hebrew and Syriac, which is the long lost master Mason's word, and has now become the GRAND OMNIFIC ROYAL ARCH WORD'⁷⁶

To this, one observer adds,

The Masonic Lodge, thus, blasphemously unites the God of the Bible - Jehovah - with the pagan gods of Syria - Baal - and of Egypt - On - into a man-made anti-scriptural trinity. The Irish lecture explains the names by which the Supreme Being was known to the three leading nations of antiquity, Chaldean, Syriac and Egyptian:

1. Jah - is the Chaldean name of God, and signifies, 'His essence in Majesty - incomprehensible.' It is also a Hebrew word, signifying, "I am and shall be" thereby expressing the actual future and eternal existence of the Most High.
2. Bal - is a Syriac word which signifies 'Lord or Powerful' also 'Lord in heaven on high.'
3. On - is an Egyptian word signifying 'Father of all' as is expressed in the Lord's prayer.⁷⁷

It is interesting that official Masonic ritual guides and handbooks leave out the names of the Trinity and of Jesus, even though they include the names of other gods. One must agree with Edmund Reim when he wrote:

When lodge rituals therefore carefully omit any reference to Christ, it is not merely because it might precipitate a controversy, perhaps by offending some Jewish member who does not accept Jesus as Messiah. It is rather because for the authors of these rituals it was a matter of principle, a part of their Deistic philosophy, that Christ is not to be thought of, honored, or worshiped as God. They claimed for themselves a higher, clearer perception of God than that of Scripture.⁷⁸

Prof. Reim continues with a similar paragraph about scouting. He says,

And when Scouting is perfectly willing to leave the religious training of boys to their respective religious organizations, and shows itself broad-minded enough to include not only the various denominations of Christianity, but also any number of non-Christian religions, it is again acting in

perfect agreement with Deistic views and principles, namely that Christ is only one among many religious leaders and teachers and that there are others which are also sufficiently ethical and noble to serve for the moral betterment of their followers. But it is this very view which, as we have seen, denies to our Lord the divine honor which is his rightful due.⁷⁹

That this is not Lutheran paranoia can be demonstrated by citing Lord Baden-Powell, founder of the scouting movement. He says,

There is no religious side to the [Scout] movement. The whole of it is based on religion, that is on becoming aware of God and His Service. "By Religion I mean not just a formal homage tributed to a Divinity, but a deeper acknowledgment of God as a Being perpetually inside and around us, and the consequent higher level of thought and action in his service. "Scout activities are the means by which you can lead the most accomplished street urchin to nobler feelings, and have the faith in God start in him.

Religion, briefly explained, means: First, know who God is. Second, use to the best the life He gave us, and do what He expects from us. This means mostly doing something for others. "I have been asked 'Why must religion enter in it?' My answer has been that religion needn't enter, because it's already inside. It is already the fundamental factor pervading Scouting and Guiding.⁸⁰

That scouting has not changed from this deistic religion can be demonstrated by numerous recent citations, including the following:

Religion is how we express our Faith. Faith is what we believe; Religion is how we live out what we believe daily. Some people go to hockey games religiously. From the most solemn high Catholic Mass to sitting on a hill in front of a blazing sunset and whispering 'Thanks Lord' we are expressing our faith in a religious way. It is acknowledging a power greater than ourselves. Whenever a Scouter helps a child to go "wow" and acknowledge that God is at work in their world, they are expressing their faith.

That doesn't mean we are always shouting 'Praise God' at every turn in the path. My dad taught me to ride a bike. 'Turn this way. Lean into the turn.' Now when I ride a bike I don't praise dad every time I lean into a turn but I still appreciate his instructions and love him dearly for all he did for me. Religion in Scouting has a lot to do with helping kids become 'appreciators.'⁸¹

A more deistic expression on religion can not be found.

Organized Deism Today

During our discourse we have had occasion to mention natural law. The concept of natural law came to the fore in July, 1991 when President George H.W. Bush nominated Clarence Thomas to a seat on the Supreme Court. Thomas' writing had been spattered with references to natural law. Natural law is "the idea that there existed a higher, or God-given law that superseded all laws of man."⁸² Thomas first stumbled on the idea of natural law while trying to resolve the legal dilemma for blacks, a dilemma which was inherent in the Constitution. The Constitution had avoided the topic of slavery and had said that, for purposes of census, a black man would be counted as three fifths of a white man. The dilemma was brought to the fore by Justice Thurgood Marshall at the 1987 bicentennial celebration of the ratification of the Constitution. Marshall said, "There is little for blacks to celebrate about the document."⁸³ Thomas found the solution to his dilemma in the Declaration of Independence where Jefferson had placed fundamental deistic thoughts, namely, that there are some "self-evident truths." In calling some truths "self-evident," Jefferson was expressing the deistic thought that these are truths which are plainly known to reason without revelation. The self-evident truths germane to making the United States an independent nation were "that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness."

Oliver Wendell Holmes, considered by many to be the greatest Supreme Court Justice of all time, called natural law “that brooding omnipresence in the sky.”⁸⁴ Thomas saw it, not only as a rational explanation for the founding of the nation and its view on blacks; he also saw it as the justification for conservatism. This helps explain why the liberal establishment did not want someone who espoused natural law to serve as a justice on the United States Supreme Court. There was no way that it would want to be party to an erosion of the Supreme Court activism of the entire twentieth century. Just consider a few ramifications of this natural law debate.

Historically, natural law had been used to defend property rights, even the owning of slaves. The demise of natural law under the courts of the twentieth century allowed the government some control over individual property rights, namely to regulate business, to oversee commerce, and to redistribute wealth in the private and public sector. The Senate hearings over Thomas’ nomination revealed the fear of the Senate Judiciary Committee that property rights could go back completely to the individual and thus take away the government’s modern usurped rights. The hearings also revealed the fear that the most basic “property right,” namely “the right to life,” would also return to the status of an innate right, rather than a right defined by constitutional law.

One would have thought that the concept of natural law as a political force was dead after the Clarence Thomas’ hearings. Constitutional law had certainly won the day. However, the publicity involved in the Clarence Thomas hearings gave natural law a new impetus. In March of 1992, a new political party was formed called “The Natural Law Party.” It is now active in over eighty countries, including the United States. It is also active on the state level. In the 2000 election, one million, four hundred thousand people cast their vote in the United States for candidates of the Natural Law Party. Its candidate with the highest vote count in the nation was John Eastman of Ohio, for the office of Senator, with 69,152 votes. Its candidate with the largest percentage of votes was Nancy Miller of Ohio, running for Green County Commissioner. The states with the highest number of Natural Law Party votes cast were California at number one with 380,000 votes, followed by Ohio with 176,000 votes, and then Michigan with 125,000 votes.

The party introduces itself with these words, words which define the god of Deism in modern terms,

“The most fundamental level of Natural Law is the Unified Field of Natural Law, the Constitution of the Universe. Both modern science and ancient Vedic Science, locate the source of Nature’s perfect order in a single, self-interacting Unified Field of pure intelligence. This field sequentially creates, from within itself, all the diverse Laws of Nature governing life at every level of the manifest universe.”⁸⁵

Incidentally, we ought to mention that the Natural Law Party’s unofficial founder and official guiding light is Maharishi Mahesh Yogi. Watch for it. It’s the first “third party” in the United States to qualify for matching federal election dollars.

Deism has also organized itself into religious organizations. Some of these more religious organizations are simply meant to be anti-Christian while others are meant to be a positive expression of Deism’s tenets. Even then, they must, by definition, be anti-Christian. A deistic organization which seems to exist for no other reason than to attack Christianity is “The World Union of Deists” headquartered in Franklin, Kentucky. Headlines on their website include such things as “Tax Religions,” “Bible Monsters,” “A Deistic Take on the Garden of Eden,” and “Religion is Killing Children—Help Us Stop Them.”⁸⁶

Presenting a more positive view of Deism is an organization which calls itself “The World Church of Deism.” The church’s statement of belief is summarized in the following “Nine Tenets,” which are nothing more than a refinement and modernization of Lord Herbert of Cherbury’s “Five Points of Deism” with which the movement started:

1. God exists.
2. God is good.
3. God gave people free will.
4. God designed people to have rational minds, inclined toward reason rather than blind faith.

5. Since God is good, It would not incline Its creation toward reason with the intention to punish us if we acted reasonably. As such, other religions that one must “believe” or “have faith” in order to be “saved” or go to “heaven” are false.
6. When we combine reason with our free will in deciding how to act, the decisions we make are the best approximation we have for the will of God. To act rationally is to act divinely.
7. A person’s perception of reason may be relative. Each mind is a unique culmination of the myriad forces let loose by God’s very creation of the universe and the laws of nature.
8. Each person must take into account the uniqueness of their own mind when acting, and respect the rights of others. When we are true to reason as we know it, we are blameless in the eyes of God, but we may not be by our fellow man. To take the will of others into account when making a decision is reasonable and warranted.
9. The tenets of all other religions than Deism, such as the existence of Heaven and Hell, or of an afterlife at all, are the subject of investigation by the members of the World Church of Deism. Using their God-given reason, each member of the World Church of Deism is encouraged to explore both the known and unknown world in the continuing search for what is true.⁸⁷

Shortly after Lord Herbert of Cherbury formulated Deism, John Locke espoused a compromise between natural religion and revealed religion, between Deism and Christianity. We see the same reaction to the renewal of organized Deism today. In order to make it more acceptable to Christians, it is often wrapped in Christian terms. Here is a section of the “Articles of Faith” of one so-called Christian Deist:

- Jesus was a human being who discovered that God’s laws are planted like a seed “in the heart” of each person.
- Jesus believed that he had been “anointed” to preach the “gospel” (good news) that the “Kingdom of God” becomes a reality on earth as human beings obey God’s basic laws of love for God and each other.
- Jesus taught that causing human suffering or being indifferent toward human suffering are violations of God’s laws of love (see parable of Good Samaritan). A violation of God’s law is called “sin,”
- Jesus called for people “to repent” (turn away) from sin and “believe in the gospel” (good news) that “the kingdom of God is at hand” on earth as God’s laws are obeyed by individuals.
- By obeying God’s laws of love, a person experiences life on a higher level which Jesus described as “abundant” and “eternal.”⁸⁸

Yet the deists have noted that the Christian Church has been more influenced by Deism than Deism has by the Christian Church. One deist commented, “It is astonishing how many of these deistic principles persist today and how many of our present values, even within the functioning of relatively orthodox religious groups, suggest the spirit of rationalistic natural-ism as set forth by Elihu Palmer.”⁸⁹

Thus the cycle of Deism begins again, as it has done so relentlessly since its inception by Lord Herbert of Cherbury. As it spread from England to France and then to Germany, so it spread in similar waves to the United States. As it developed from nation to nation and adapted from situation to situation through the centuries, so it continues to modify itself according to the desires and needs of its adherents. But one thing never changes. That is the comment made by Otto Heick at the beginning of our paper. Deism is aimed at the complete overthrow of Reformation theology. Foundational to Reformation theology is the Doctrine of the Holy Trinity and at its center is the related teaching of Christology. Thus Deism, however and wherever it manifests itself, has been relentlessly attacking the God of the Bible, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, the one undivided Trinity and his work for our salvation.

The tenets of Deism will always be with us. They will be with us as long as sinful human nature persists in following reason instead of faith. They will be with us as long as people continue to look for answers to life

and hope in death in places other than the Bible. They will be with us until the end of time because they are the principles of the natural knowledge of God. Deism is a religion based on the best man can do with the world God created for him. As such, Deism will never be viable because man's best is never good enough before a holy God. How blessed we are as believers in Jesus, for in him we have the best God has done. The atoning work of Christ, planned by the Father and proclaimed by the Spirit, remains the only power of God unto salvation and the only compelling force for godly living. This truth still stands among us, unshaken and immovable. To God alone be the glory!

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 - 2 *Ibid*, p. 2.
 - 3 Otto W. Heick. *A History of Christian Thought, Volume II*. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1966), p. 93.
 - 4 Utm.edu/research/deismeng.htm#Lord Herbert of Cherbury.
 - 5 lonestar.texas.net/~mseifert/amlit2.html.
 - 6 Hence the popularity of William and Mary in the colonies including the naming of a university after them.
 - 7 Donald Wilkes and Matthew Kraemer. "The Glorious Revolution of 1688." (lawsch.uga.edu/glorious, 1997).
 - 8 Heick. *Op.Cit.*, p. 103.
 - 9 *Ibid*, p. 103.
 - 10 Bruce Shelly. *Church History in Plain Language*. (Dallas: Word Publishing, 1995), p. 316.
 - 11 Heick. *Op.Cit.*, p. 119.
 - 12 C.T. McIntire. "Voltaire." *The New International Dictionary of the Christian Church*. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1974), p. 1023.
 - 13 *Ibid*, p. 120.
 - 14 Heick. *Op.Cit.*, p. 126.
 - 15 For examples, see *Bible Myths and their Parallels in Other Religions Being a Comparison of the Old and New Testament Myths and Miracles with Those of Heathen Nations of Antiquity Considering also Their Origin and Meaning* by T.W. Doane, (New York: The Truth Seeker Company, 1910).
 - 16 Heick. *Op.Cit.*, p. 250.
 - 17 Heick. *Op.Cit.*, p. 182.
 - 18 *Ibid.*, pp. 171, 178.
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 - 22 *Ibid*, p. 351.
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 - 28 *Ibid.*, p. 363.
 - 29 *Ibid.*, p. 363.
 - 30 Timothy Dwight, President of Yale, quoted in *Ibid*, p. 367.
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 - 33 infidels.org/~godlessheathen/Founders.html.
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 - 36 *ibid*.
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 - 39 *Ibid.*, pp. 57-58.
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 - 41 Willard Sperry. *Religion in America*. (New York: MacMillan, 1946), p. 57.
 - 42 *Ibid.*, p. 57.
 - 43 Ahlstrom. *Op.Cit.*, p. 520.
 - 44 J.P. Koehler. *Op.Cit.*, p. 25.
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- 47 Kent Kelley. *The Separation of Church and State*, (Southern Pine, NC: Calvary Press, 1980), p. 50. (Quote source: “Church and State, the Rising Conflict, Part I, John Zarling, 1984).
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- 50 Patrick B. McGuigan and Randall R. Rader. *The Blueprint for Judicial Reform*. (Washington, D.C.: Free Congress Research and Education Foundation, Inc., 1981), p. 324. (Emphasis added.) (Quote source: *ibid*).
- 51 Notes from a PBS documentary aired on August 19, 2001, entitled, “Secret Brotherhood of Freemasonry.”
- 52 This Bible was used because there was none in Federal Hall. One of the organizers knew the Masonic Lodge would have one and ran to get it so the ceremony could start on time.
- 53 The eye above the pyramid on Great Seal of the United States was the original symbol for God in the Masonic logo. The eye was later replaced with the letter “G,” signifying God for some Masons and geometry for others.
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