

Never before in
history essay



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

The founding principles on which the United States were established belong to the ongoing human quest for political and religious liberty. That quest has been the central theme of Western civilization. When the Pilgrims landed at Plymouth in 1620, they were seeking religious freedom. When the American Revolution was fought, it was fought for political freedom. The American Revolution is inconceivable in the absence of the context of ideas, which have constituted Christianity, such as Martin Luther's 95 theses, John Calvin's Institutes of the Christian Religion, as well as the social theory from the Puritan Revolution.

The leaders of the Revolution in every colony were imbued with the precepts of the Reformed faith. The American Revolution might be said to have started, in a sense, when Martin Luther nailed his 95 thesis to the church door at Wittenberg in 1517. Martin Luther held one of the largest parts in the Reformation. The Protestant reformation provided the socio-political context in which the United States was established. When the pope expelled Luther from the Roman Catholic Church in 1521, a trial was set, in which Luther was to defend his religious beliefs. When Luther stood before the court and told the authorities that it was wrong for anyone to go against his or her conscience in religious matters, a seed was planted for a future society based on Liberty of Conscience.

That society would emerge over the next three centuries and culminate in the founding of the United States. Luther's call for religious freedom unleashed the forces responsible for that new nation. Through the Protestant Reformation, liberty of conscience would become a fundamental principle of

the American nation. Luther believed that a man's life is divided into two spheres.

One sphere deals with a person's physical life in society as he or she interacts with other human beings and the world at large. This part a person's life relates to God as creator. The other sphere deals with a person's spiritual life as someone made in God's image and needing redemption. This part of man's life relates to redeemer, who through Christ brings salvation from sin. According to him, God governs both spheres differently. God governs one sphere through law of creation, the other through the law of redemption.

Luther describes the creator/redeemer distinction this way, " God has ordained two governments: the spiritual, which by the Holy Spirit under Christ makes Christians pious people; and the secular, which restrains the unchristian and wicked so they are obliged to keep the peace outwardly. " After Luther, the next major Protestant movement occurred in Geneva, Switzerland. Here a society of Christians, often called the Presbyterians, struggled to establish a community under the leadership of John Calvin (1509-64). Calvin shared many of Luther's concerns about liberating Europe from church and state oppression. Read also Salem Witch trials questions and answers Calvin wrote a famous set of volumes called the Institutes of the Christian Religion.

Calvin's Institutes exerted a tremendous amount of influence on the founders of the United States. Many of them acquired their worldview from the Bible in one hand and Calvin's Institutes in the other. Calvin's theology

profoundly influenced John Hancock, Samuel Adams, John Adams, Benjamin Franklin, Alexander Hamilton, and James Madison to name only a few.

Calvin's theology also had weighty impact on the key political thinkers who influenced America's founders such as, Algernon Sydney, Samuel Rutherford, and John Locke. Through their political writings, Calvin's ideas shaped the founder's political views.

The final pages of Calvin's Institutes were highly influential in America's birth. They addressed the limits of authority. The last paragraphs discuss whether in religious matters a person ought to obey one's conscience or the dictates of royal authority. Citing Daniel's outward disobedience of the king's orders, Calvin implies that a subject may disobey any king who mandates a religious practice, which the subject does not conscientiously believe. As for authorities who abuse their subjects, Calvin writes: " They dishonestly betray the freedom of the people of which they know that they have been appointed protectors by God's ordinance.

" Another work titled *Vindiciae Contra Tyrannos* [The Legal Claim Against Tyrants] appeared in 1579 among the French Huguenots and used Calvin's theory to support resistance against corrupt monarchs. As you can imagine this document was very significant for America's birth. The *Vindiciae* set forth an idea that was to become the very foundation of America's political theory. In the 1640's Samuel Rutherford, the Scottish Presbyterian theologian, adopted Calvin's resistance theory to defend the people's rejection of King Charles I. In the 1680's appealing to Rutherford and other Christian scholars, Algernon Sydney and John Locke in turn defended the people's rejection of King James II. From there we find Sidney and Locke

influencing Thomas Jefferson and his colleagues as they defended the American people's rejection of King George III in 1776.

The American Revolution has clear roots in Calvin's resistance theory. Roman Catholicism was the religion of Western Europe throughout the medieval era. Henry VIII, the second Tudor king of England, changed that. Henry wanted a divorce with his wife Catherine of Aragon, because she would not provide him with a male heir. However, the Pope was the only one with the authority to give a divorce. As a result, Henry VIII renounced England's attachment to Rome and established the Church of England with himself at the head.

After Henry VIII died in 1547 his son, Edward VI was enthroned. Young Edward was a friend to the Reformation minded Protestants. During his reign, the Reformation cause greatly expanded in England. However, Edward died young and his sister Mary I rose to the throne. Mary I, daughter of Catherine of Aragon, was completely at odds with her brothers theological views. She decided to bring all of Roman Catholicism back into England and rid it of Protestants.

To accomplish this she had many Protestants executed, thus her nickname, "Bloody Mary." When Mary I died, her Protestant sister Elizabeth I assumed the throne. During Elizabeth's reign, Puritans grew in number, but neither she nor her successors, the Stuart kings, would be friendly to their efforts. Two revolutions took place in the 1600's, the English Civil War of 1641, and the Glorious Revolution of 1688. These two seventeenth-century revolutions prefigured the American Revolution of 1776. To adequately grasp America's

founding, we need to understand these earlier revolutions and the ideas that set them in motion.

Samuel Rutherford, John Locke, and Algernon Sydney gave the particularly suitable expression to the ideas responsible for these revolutions. Their views complemented each other and were crucial in the birth of the United States of America. Just prior to 1644, a clergyman named John Maxwell wrote a very influential book claiming that the kings ruled by “ Divine Right” were completely free from any legal restraint. In response, many Puritans and Presbyterians wrote pamphlets and books refuting Maxwell. Perhaps the most famous of these was a book written by Samuel Rutherford.

Rutherford published *Lex Rex* (The Law is King) his book in 1644.

Rutherford’s book reflected the theological and political ideas of Calvin as they were transmitted through the French Huguenots to the Scottish Presbyterians and English Puritans. Rutherford’s book had sixty-four chapters in each chapter he stated the Divine Right argument, and then refuted it using Presbyterian and Puritan theology. Although Rutherford wrote with great precision and force his ideas were not actually unique. His voice was one among many. However, Puritans and Presbyterians quickly embraced the ideas in *Lex Rex* as well as the Westminster Confession, which he helped to author.

The founding fathers in America used much of his theology from *Lex Rex* as well as in the Westminster Confession. The civil war of 1641 was generated when Charles I began to impose his religion throughout his kingdom, including Scotland. In the previous century, under the leadership of John

Knox, the people of Scotland had rejected Roman Catholicism and embraced Calvin's ideas and political reform. In the spring of 1637 Charles I insisted that his Scottish subjects begin using the English worship book, which required them to worship in ways that they found offensive. For the Scottish people this was like pushing Roman Catholicism on them once again. Their reaction was quick and deliberate.

The ministers of Scotland met and drew up a National Covenant, reclaiming their religious and civil liberties, and reassuring their Presbyterianism. In response Charles I called together the Parliament to organize a military campaign against the offending Scots. Charles had not gathered the Parliament together for twelve years; it would be his ultimate downfall. The Parliament, once gathered, refused to let the king dismiss them, which is why the session has the title of the Long Parliament for it lasted 1640-1660. John Locke (1632-1704) was the son of a Puritan who fought with Oliver Cromwell in the 1640's.

Locke's views of on the church and state followed those of Martin Luther. Locke also insisted on liberty of conscience and creator/redeemer distinction. Locke also had a great influence on the United States, considering that Charles II enlisted him along with Lord Shaftsbury to draft a constitution for the new colony, Carolina. Although Locke may not have been an orthodox Puritan like his father, there is no question that he was a true Christian.

Locke believed that the Bible was infallibly true. He explicitly relied on the Bible for all his political theories: " The Holy Scripture is to me, and always will be, the constant guide of my assent; and I shall always hearken to it, as

containing the infallible truth relating to things of the highest concernment... And I shall immediately condemn and quit any opinion of mine, as soon as I am shown that is contrary to any revelation in the Holy Scriptures. ” In the late 1670’s it became apparent to parliament that Charles II was getting old, and that according to the rule of royal succession his brother James, Duke of York, would soon inherit the throne. However, James was a Catholic. This frightened the many Puritan leaders who feared England would face another civil war if James were to become king. They did everything thing in their power to prevent it.

The most out spoken representative of the Puritan cause at this time was Algernon Sydney (1623-83). Sydney had fought in the English Civil war and been a member of the Long Parliament. By the 1670’s he had become a seasoned political philosopher. Responding to a treatise defending the divine right of kings, Sydney wrote his best-known book, *Discourses Concerning Government*.

This book reiterated many of the arguments and conclusions of Rutherford’s *Lex Rex*. Sydney developed the resistance theory of the earlier Puritans and carefully presented the social contract theory of government. According to Sydney, a government’s legitimacy derives from the consent of the people; moreover, both the law of God (the Bible) and the law of nature (in creation) permit, and even demand, resistance to a government that betrays the people’s consent. Sydney was a thoroughgoing Protestant who in his *Discourses* used the Bible extensively to defend the theory of the Social contract. Although Locke remains the key figure who shaped the founders political thought, Sydney’s writings were extremely influential.

Sydney's Discourses Concerning Government has been called the textbook for the American Revolution. In 1683, Sydney conferred with Charles II's son about a plan to take the throne by force once Charles was dead and thereby prevent his Roman Catholic brother from assuming the throne. When Charles discovered this conspiracy, Sydney was put on trial for treason. When he was executed, he took satisfaction in the fact that he was being martyred for the Protestant cause in which he had enlisted as a young man.

Locke was likewise accused but went into hiding, and thus avoided execution. Sydney and his Political allies had ties to the earlier "Roundheads," who had made a pact with the Scottish Presbyterians in the English Civil War. That association earned them the title "Whigs"- a slang term commonly used for Scottish thugs. Sydney and his allies embraced the would be insult, and made an acronym- We Hope In God.

In response, they titled the supporters of the Duke of York, "Tories," a slang term used to define Irish hoodlums. However, they apparently could not think of a clever phrase for "Tories," so Tories they remained. The insults stuck, and this ideological conflict set the stage for the famous party divisions during the American Revolution. When Charles II died in 1685, his brother James II ascended the throne. James revived his grandfather's views of "Divine Right of Kings.

" James revoked the protections that the Protestants had enjoyed, especially liberty of conscience. Neither Parliament nor the people were happy with James. In 1688, the Parliament forced James from the throne and replaced

him with William of Orange without violence. This event is called the Glorious or the Bloodless Revolution.

They based this decision mainly on Locke's political beliefs (that a people have the right to depose an unjust ruler). In essence, Locke's political theory is that people set up civil government to protect their rights of life, liberty, and property. Any government that betrays these rights is tyrannical, and the people have the right to overthrow it. This theory however was not original with Locke; he simply articulated the views of his Whig colleagues.

In fact, most of Locke's political ideas were found in Rutherford's *Lex Rex*.

Locke's political theory helped inspire America's founding. The English Revolutions of the seventeenth century foreshadowed the American Revolution, which looked to the same Protestant resistant theories.

Consequently, the royal forces in England called the American Revolution "the Presbyterian Rebellion."

" Now, we must rewind a bit in time. During the fear and discontentment with the absolutism of Charles I, a large group of English Puritans followed the earlier pilgrims to America so that they could enjoy " the liberty of conscience and exercise of their own persuasions. They believed their faith could be best nurtured in a new land, away from the persecution of the king and his demanding Church of England. When the Puritans landed on Cape Cod, they realized that they were now in territory where no existing government had the power to govern them. This made them question each other, what would keep the law and order? To address this problem they gathered aboard the Mayflower and drew up a document, now called the

Mayflower Compact, which pledged their mutual submission to each other and to the just law. The Puritans maintained a government that originated in the consent of the people because they did not believe that any society, civil or religious, into which men did not enter of themselves, was worthy of their belief.

Consequently, the social theory of Puritanism, was based upon the law of God, and therefore demanded absolute submission from its subjects. The Puritan commitment to “ free consent of the governed” played a crucial role in America’s founding. In fact, the United States was explicitly founded on this principle. Having experienced religious persecution back in their homeland, the Puritans made sure that they would not again be subject to any absolute human ruler. They decided that God was to be their ruler. However since God was not physically among them, they judged everything, and based all things on the word of God, the Bible.

The Bible was consulted on all matters, church and civil. Although human leaders could be capricious, the Word of God was seen as eternal, unchanging, reliable, and true. Moreover, God himself is merciful and just. God is the perfect king, and the perfect expression of his will is the word of God. Christianity in America’s early development was not always positive. Protestants quickly forgot Luther’s emphasis on liberty of conscience and the creator/redeemer distinction once they themselves wielded the power of government.

This confusion first began in Geneva under John Calvin. Although Calvin agreed with Luther that the conscience was free, in practice he had difficulty

balancing church and state. Calvin had two official responsibilities in Geneva; he was the city's mayor as well as its chief pastor. As head of both church and state, Calvin was unable to keep the jobs separate. As a pastor, he agreed that religious beliefs should not be forced.

However, as politician, he oppressed those who differed in beliefs.

Eventually, it came to be when Protestants were in control the Catholics were oppressed, and like wise when the Catholics were in control. This was ironic! They were now practicing the very thing they had tried to escape from in England. Both sides were in a dilemma.

If the government had the power to control religion and suppress false beliefs, then government would exercise that power whether by Protestant or Catholic. We struggle with Calvin's dilemma even in today. Even though America prides itself on being committed to freedom of religion, children are not allowed to pray in public schools. (However, I personally believe that as long as there are tests and papers in schools, there will be prayer.)

Nevertheless, some issues are quite clear; we do not right extend freedom a man's religion if it requires him to sacrifice his first-born.

However, whether it is abortion, legalization of drugs, etc, we always come back to Calvin's dilemma, how free is this country? Anxiety among Puritan leaders over a declining state of religion in Massachusetts created a climate of tension and distrust. This climate made the colony ripe for a witch-hunt. Why? Their community was slowly collapsing and in their minds, only one perpetrator could be responsible: the devil. When a West Indian servant maid named Tituba was observed engaging in her Native American

practices, a terrible crisis ensued. A group of teenaged girls who witnessed Tituba's practices accused her of witchcraft to avoid being suspected themselves.

The attention the girls received gave them a sense of power. They began accusing others of witchcraft, perhaps for amusement. The judges at the court of Salem were Puritans looking for a scapegoat to blame for the decline of society. The notorious trials and executions of Salem became a permanent blot against the Massachusetts Puritans. The witch trials had a profound influence on the founders of our nation.

The way the trials were mishandled pressed hard on the minds of the founders. The trials showed the founders what they needed to protect against if they were to preserve liberty and justice. During the early eighteenth century, the English monarchs treated the American colonies with indifference. After James II was deposed from the throne in 1688, he and his family tried to gain it back by force. Besides this trouble, England was also at war with France.

The problems in England left the American colonists to do what they wish to pursue with all their hearts. What do they want? For the Puritans who left England in search of freedom, it was summed up in the words of Calvin. "The principal care and solicitude of our life should be to seek God and to aspire to him with all affection of heart." This goal was inscribed upon the hearts of most Americans by the time they could talk. After the Salem witch trials, however, many hearts were turned away from God, and many and they were indifferent to the Puritan vision.

Americans were steeped in Christianity, the Bible, and church politics. The outward evidence of Christianity was everywhere. At the same time, however, religion was becoming obligatory and not from the heart. The colonists seemed to have lost their zeal for the faith.

God showed his evident displeasure of the colonist's lack of faith by giving a diphtheria outbreak in the 1730's. What is more, doubts were being raised about whether the majority of clergy were themselves Christians. Amidst this turmoil, America experienced a religious revival. This blessed event is usually called the Great Awakening.

In the late seventeenth century, a group of Lutherans called pietists emphasized joyful devotion to God. A seminary student named Theodore Frelinghuysen caught the spirit and he carried it to New Jersey where he preached among the settlers in the 1720's. He inspired a family of preachers from Scotland named the Tennents, who spread the movement among the Scotch-Irish immigrants. Ministers at Oxford University in England also experienced a burst of energy at this time. Led by John Wesley, they were first called the Holy Club, but eventually their disciplined method of doing things labeled them the Methodists. Among them was a compelling orator named George Whitefield.

He traveled from New England to the Deep South preaching wherever he could. Whitefield's voice was so strong that Benjamin Franklin calculated that 30, 000 people could hear him at any given time. During Whitefield's stay in America, he became the close friend of Jonathan Edwards. Edwards

had been a child genius. Entering Yale at age 12, he immediately began unraveling complex philosophical theories.

Upon his conversion, he became to two ideas: 1) True Christianity always penetrates and affects the heart, and 2) God exercises full control over the universe. Edwards pastored a Massachusetts church and here he became a central figure in the Great Awakening. There he preached his most famous sermon, "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God." In it, he emphasized the urgency of God's redemption and humanity's utter dependence on God's grace. That sermon marked the highest point in of a tremendous religious awakening that swept the colonies between 1735 and 1750. People would literally fall down, over come by emotion at the gravity of their sin and the forgiveness of offered by God.

There is a close connection between the Great Awakening and America's founding. The Great Awakening produced a social climate necessary for the revolution, the theology of the awakening supplied the political theory that was responsible for the revolution, and the Christian message of sin and of redemption provided a common reference point for all Americans. The awakening was the first successful intercolonial event. It united thee colonies in a common bond. This bond would eventually become the union declared in Philadelphia in 1776.

The political and religious freedom that has been searched for by all humankind has been found. The founding fathers achieved their dreams, as well as the dreams of the many that came before them. The seed that was planted by the reformers starting with Martin Luther nailing the 95 theses on

the Wittenberg church door in 1517 was finally harvested in Philadelphia in Independence Hall in 1776 when 55 men signed the Declaration of Independence. Moreover, America today continues to harvest the fruits of their blood, sweat, toil, and tears.