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Converting Tories to Whigs: Religion and Imagined Authorship in Thomas Paine's *Common Sense*

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Thomas Paine's Common Sense *has been of abiding interest to scholars due to its profound effect and fascinating relationships between author, text, and audiences. But why, in what has been considered a secular text, would a self-proclaimed deist adopt the persona and argument style of an evangelical to promote political independence? Reading* Common Sense *as employing an "imagined author" strategically constructed to voice religious arguments directed to an "imagined community" helps us understand Paine's approach to a challenging rhetorical problem and illuminates polemic communication practices in colonial America.*

On January 10, 1776, Thomas Paine published *Common Sense* and added yet another voice to the public debate over strained British-American relations. While many political leaders were demanding that the British king and Parliament rescind recent changes in tax structures and economic policies to facilitate reconciliation,[1] within the pages of *Common Sense* Paine bluntly encouraged Americans to reject the British monarchy and declare independence. However, a majority of colonists preferred reform within the British system to independence. When the Second Continental Congress met in the fall of 1775, even after the breakout of armed hostilities, 5 of the 13 colonies instructed their delegates to support reconciliation, while a mere third favored independence. The rest were undecided.

The public response to *Common Sense* was overwhelming.[2] Fifty-three reprints in its first year made it the first national runaway bestseller as it far surpassed the

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publication breadth of other Revolutionary pamphlets. Additionally, colonial newspapers carried selected portions, permeating the public sphere with its ideas and disseminating its influence well beyond the reach of the full published versions.[3] J. Michael Hogan and Glen Williams labeled Paine the "key charismatic leader of the American independence movement, and *Common Sense* its most important revolutionary manifesto."[4] Indeed, David Hoffman ascribes a strong rhetorical agency to Paine, whose rhetoric tipped the scales in the national debate, convincing many undecided colonists and converting a healthy portion of reconciliationists into rebels.[5] When the supporters of independence brought the motion to a vote in July of 1776, only one colony voted against it, a shift Scott Liell attributes to Paine's polemic as it was digested by colonists in subsequent months.[6]

But in spite of the pamphlet's political impact, John Adams suggested that *Common Sense* actually added few arguments to the case for independence, pointing out that Paine borrowed most of his ideas from others and merely repeated what had "been frequently urged on the floor of the Continental Congress."[7] So how did *Common Sense* produce its radical impact and what can we learn that is relevant today? Historians and other scholars, presuming that contextual features of the publication held the greater import, have fruitfully explored many aspects that might otherwise have been unnoticed. But reading the text from the perspective of a particular colonial community can illuminate an additional reason for its success.

The central claim of this essay is that Thomas Paine successfully indoctrinated a robust community of religious colonists into republican perspectives by constructing an "imagined author" who used the language and argument style of a Dissenting (non-Anglican) minister. By "identifying" with this audience through his imagined author, Paine presented arguments from a "credible source." Paine blended religious arguments and scriptural allusions with radical politics in his blunt effort to "convert" reconciliationists, suggesting that Paine felt many colonists could understand political realignment in terms of religious conversion. The following pages survey the evolving colonial worldview with regard to religion and apply its unique perspective to the text of *Common Sense* to elucidate the interplay of religious arguments with the other features of the pamphlet. From the perspective of a "public" of religious-minded colonists, Paine provided a necessary link in the collective argument for independence and crafted the ideal voice with which to voice such arguments, allowing his audience to eschew British authority and participate wholeheartedly in ironic and sinful rebellion.

A deeper understanding of the rhetorical work performed by Paine's text can greatly benefit contemporary scholarship. First, we can analyze a fine example of successfully overcoming a major objection to a proposal that is rooted in the deepest sensibilities of an audience. Smith and Windes taught us that an "innovational movement cannot appear to be in conflict with the dominant groups in society."[8] Paine overcame this challenge through his authorial device, appearing to be an enlightened member of the very group he was trying to persuade. Additionally, we see Paine's discourse actively transforming political views by reshaping religious premises, a situation that "secularization theory" would have precluded in colonial America.

Paine's radical impact suggests that colonists conflated their religion and politics to a greater extent than many modern historians have admitted.

Charisma and Substance

Various writers have offered reasons for the rhetorical success of *Common Sense*, generally minimizing the dialectical substance of the pamphlet. Thomas Jefferson noted that "No writer has exceeded Paine in ease and familiarity of style, in perspicuity of expression, happiness of elucidation, and in simple and unassuming language."[9] Philip Davidson concluded that Paine was sensitive to the thought and temper of Americans and had the ability to "express to people what they themselves thought and felt in striking popular language."[10] Bernard Bailyn emphasized that *Common Sense* lacked the close argumentation displayed by writings of other revolutionary leaders and found its real force consisted of tapping into the anger and frustration of colonists through its emotive language and slashing attacks on British leadership.[11] More recently, Hogan and Williams contend, "the deficiencies of *Common Sense* as classical deliberative argument should be obvious" and they conclude that throughout its pages "passion supplanted reason" and that "vituperation . . . substituted for engagement."[12] Indeed, Paine's style has been the most salient feature of his rhetoric. As Hoffman showed, Paine repeatedly employed the term "prejudice" when framing negative perceptions of independence, while he conversely framed positive perceptions of the British system with the phrase "the force of custom and habit," terms that implicate a lack of "reason" in reconciliationist's arguments.[13]

A widespread colonial assumption, which Paine viewed as a roadblock to actually achieving reform, was that reform must occur *within* the British system.[14] The validity of monarchial authority was clearly a central issue in the debate. Even though some colonists had minimized the issue,[15] Eric Foner explained that it was essential to strip the monarchy of scriptural authority before independence could be embraced.[16] Scott Liell shows that *Common Sense* focused responsibility for abated liberties in the colonies directly on the British monarchy. Encumbering the British king with liability for the ongoing oppression, the colonists were asked to question the ability of the British system to ever provide stability for the practice of liberty.

John Adams called Paine's scriptural arguments against the monarchy "ridiculous," likely steering historical and rhetorical analysis away from argumentative substance and toward other features and sections of the pamphlet. Thomas Clark concluded that Paine created a persona "of a self-reliant, straightforward, and daring individualist, a rhetorical personality that embodied moral and practical sentiments with which many colonists favorably identified."[17] Extending Clark's view, Hogan and Williams theorized that Paine introduced an innovative manifestation of "republican charisma"—a personality situated in the text rather than in an author—to depict a prototype of egalitarian leadership that would continue to serve American politicians in the coming decades. This study extends their view of "republican charisma" by showing that this type of leadership included a hefty religious foundation in addition to its other elements—a foundation essential to fully

understanding the strategies revolutionary area rhetoric and the citizens that considered its claims.

Additionally, Edward Larkin explains how Paine had been deeply involved in shaping a public through previous publications, providing a constituency conversant in Whig philosophy. Larkin argues that Paine invented a language that represented the common people as "legitimate participants" in community and national issues.[18] Paine's efforts coincided with the rise of an extensive reading community that burgeoned in the decades preceding the revolution.[19] As Benedict Anderson explained, "imagined communities" of settlers were constructed as authors and readers exchanged ideas in the colonial print media, creating a sense of collective identity that greatly contributed to the "Americanization" process. It is the interaction of Paine's imagined charismatic author with the imagined community of colonists that arrests our attention. Arguably, the person speaking in *Common Sense* did not really exist. Yet, by placing *Common Sense* in the mainstream of that reading public, Paine engaged them with a person whom they could visualize and hear—a fiery preacher dedicated to the revolutionary cause—sensible, rational, articulate, and not afraid to risk all by publishing his seditious thoughts.

Religion and Colonial Culture

Viewing Paine's religious overtures as a noteworthy feature of the pamphlet requires an audience for whom religion was a central aspect of their lives. Many working class Americans in 1775 had been influenced by a religiously flavored conceptual system that emanated from the Great Awakening—a period of intense outpouring of religious fervor marked by emotional expression and controversy (1740–1743).[20] The Awakening unfolded as "revived" ministers asserted that that true religion could not conferred by tradition or heritage and that genuine Christianity required a personal conversion experience—the "new birth." Prior to the Enlightenment's permeation of colonial theology, Puritan Calvinism provided an influential paradigm for American churches. As represented by the Synod of Dort (1618), Calvinism espoused five major doctrines: (a) total depravity of man, i.e., original sin, (b) unconditional election, (c) limited atonement, (d) irresistible grace, and (e) preservation of the saints.[21] As many understood, it could be summed up in the notion of "predestination"—that God predestines, from depraved humans, a select few who will be saved, appoints their conversion time, irresistibly pulls them into his fold, and holds the elect in his care forever.[22] While several counter-theologies emerged during the prerevolutionary decades that increasingly challenged this strict Calvinism, the powerful notions of "depravity" and "predestination" lingered.

Leonard Levy and Alfred Young labeled the Great Awakening (1739–1743) as one of the "essential primary sources of the American experience, especially of American thought."[23] And Nathan Hatch concluded that "Historians have traced more roots or anticipations of America's future identity to evangelical revivals than to any other single eighteenth-century source."[24] But did the Awakening influence survive into the next generation? In recent decades, a lively debate among historians has failed

to reach widespread consensus over the extent of religious influence in the life of colonial society of the mid-1770s. While J. C. D. Clark labeled the American Revolution as the "last great war of religion in the Western world," historian Jon Butler asserted that "at its heart, the Revolution was a profoundly secular event."[25]

Gordon Wood insists that a strictly secular view of the revolution is a retrospective "optical illusion" caused by looking for religion in the wrong places. Arguing that Whig ideology was not intended (nor was it able) to displace the religious beliefs from which most colonists explained their world, Wood concluded that "One kind of American religion may have declined during the revolution, but it was more than replaced by another kind."[26] Patricia Bonomi observed that religious sentiments were more robust before the Awakening than previously thought and that Americans only grew in their religiosity thereafter. Contending that a majority of adults were habitual churchgoers in the decades preceding the revolution, Bonomi explains that their church participation was driven by a "quest for community" where denomination was less important than convenience.[27] She adds that "The church, offering spiritual succor and cultural reinforcement, became a primary means of reconstituting immigrant communities in the New World."[28] Additionally, a "popular religion" burgeoned throughout the yeoman classes of colonial society that drew on doctrinal traditions of established denominations while rejecting its authority structure. While the orthodoxy and piety of these "believers" could be questioned, they held a steadfast belief in a worldview that had been instilled by their "awakened" parents.

Paine was not the first revolutionary writer to intermingle religious ideas with political efforts. As early as 1745, well-known ministers began linking French plots with millennial theology to energize their sermons. Thus began a blending of religion and politics that evolved into what Hatch terms "civil millennialism," an "amalgam of traditional Puritan apocalyptic rhetoric and eighteenth-century political discourse."[29] By 1760, as George III took his throne, American ministers had connected "an extensive French-Catholic conspiracy . . . directly to an apocalyptic interpretation of history in which the French were accomplices in Satan's designs to subjugate God's elect in New England."[30] This combination helped forge a tenacious link between piety and liberty often cited by Whig polemicists as James Otis or Samuel Adams. By 1775, the notion of civil millennialism inflamed the zeal of Protestant colonists against Great Britain herself. Rumors circulated that Prime Minister Lord North embraced Catholicism and that Parliament and the king intended to establish Roman Catholicism over the entire American continent.[31] As Wood pointed out, "There is simply too much fanatical and millennial thinking even by the best minds" in order to "view the Revolution as merely a conservative defense of constitutional liberties."[32] This fanaticism would present both an opportunity and a challenge to the revolutionary cause by providing strong beliefs in "religious freedom" as well as "submission to God-appointed authorities."

Hindering the embrace of independence, as Schlesinger noted, the British monarchy stood as an important "link with the Empire which . . . the patriots continued to acknowledge."[33] In spite of rhetoric that criticized the British legal system and Parliament, "Loyalty to the King" emerged as the single stubborn connection

between the British colonists and the mother country that 20 years of argumentation failed to undermine and, in fact, had tacitly supported. Many colonists felt that George III should reform his ways and all would be well again. In fact, the possibility of reconciliation had been gaining momentum in the public debate in the months just prior to the release of *Common Sense*.[34]

Colonial monarchial loyalty was warranted by three distinct doctrines founded in Puritan Calvinism. The first was the *divine right to rule*, which asserted that all Kings were appointed by God and to oppose that king—whether good or evil—was to oppose God. The second was *hereditary succession,* which passed that right to rule on to the king's descendants. The third was the notion of *unlimited submission*, which served to enforce loyalty even to an insufferable monarch like George III. Paine understood the depth of these beliefs among traditional churchgoers as well as communities infused with "popular religion," and he presented arguments designed to overcome these obstacles.

Common Sense Bursts on the Scene

By the time *Common Sense* was published and disseminated, armed hostilities had already erupted. The colonial debate evolved into a choice between reconciliation with (submission to) Great Britain or complete independence. Yet, dampening any rebellious impulses, colonists had been saturated with "unlimited submission" sermons for decades exhorting them to "Submit to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake."[35] Paine's rhetorical challenge was to undermine the scriptural rationale for monarchial loyalty before proceeding with any practical arguments on the advantages of independence or the distant possibility of actually winning the war.

As the pamphlet opens, Paine asserts that American reconciliation would be either impossible or ill-considered. His goal—that readers be "converted"—is revealed at the end of the first paragraph: "Time makes more converts than reason." The structural parallels of religious and political conversion had become sufficiently ingrained in the colonial mind by this date that both political orators and ministers explained "conversion" in terms of the other.[36]

A prior publication by Thomas Jefferson (*A Summary View*) held the king's administrators responsible for instigating the colonial crisis but stopped short of reproving the king. In contrast, Paine, places blame for the colonial crisis squarely on the shoulders of George III whose "abuse of power" becomes a central motivation for conversion:

> As the king of England hath undertaken in his own right, to support the parliament in what he calls theirs, and as the good people of this country are grievously oppressed by the combination, they have an undoubted privilege to inquire into the pretensions of both, and equally to reject the usurpations of either.

In a direct challenge to monarchial as well as Parliamentary authority, Paine empowers his American colonists with an implication of self-rule by employing the terms "pretensions" and "usurpations." Yet, before unpacking his challenge to the monarchy, he digresses into a narrative section intended to educate his readers

in British political history and the foundations of democracy in general. As his lesson unfolds, showing his immersion in the "enlightened" intellectual movement of his time, Paine explicitly constructs his reasoning upon natural principles while he implicitly presumes religious belief, setting various scriptural stones to lay his foundation. His dual epistemic approach allows him to use arguments of "natural reason" without alienating religiously minded publics, following a clear argumentative strategy ministers had been using for several decades to construct homilies.[37] Continuing, he maintains an implicit religious foundation, allowing it to surface at various points to reassure readers of his philosophical and theological commitments.

Setting the first stone of his foundation, Paine reminds his readers that since "nothing but heaven is impregnable to vice," governments are required to "supply the defect of moral virtue." A few pages later he bemoans "the inability of moral virtue to govern the world." These statements presume a belief (likely genuine on Paine's part) in the inherent depravity of humanity—a defining Calvinist doctrine. He quickly adds to his religious presumptions with the enlightened view that "the simple voice of nature and of reason will say, it is right."

Paine then boldly critiques the present situation by arguing that Britain's government is "incapable of producing what it seems to promise," that is, security and prosperity. He blames that failure on an "exceedingly complex" political apparatus that had evolved from the "base remains of two ancient tyrannies," monarchy and territorial lordship. Implicitly then, Paine questions whether a "good" government can evolve from two oppressive ones by the mere addition of a House of Commons, which would not greatly detract from the hegemony of either the King or the House of Lords. Continuing, Paine employs a number of charged terms in his critique. The reciprocal balance of power is labeled a "farcical contradiction" as Paine points out the logical inconsistency in the system. From here, employing a scriptural metaphor applied to demonic hierarchies, Paine glances at the relationship between the House of Lords and the House of Commons and concludes that since one branch looks to the interests of the king and the other to the interests of the people, the entire system is "an house divided against itself."[38] Paine's use of the allusion condemns the status quo either way: If the British government truly is divided, it should be rejected; if it is not, then Parliament, including the House of Commons, must be allied with the king against the liberties of colonists as recent actions had evidenced. The scriptural allusion operates much the same way as a metaphor, inviting intellectual assent to the entire concept if the portion highlighted in the allusion seems sensible. The word "house" nicely coincides with British Parliamentary nomenclature while "divided" depicted the divergent interests of the Lords and Commons.

Paine concludes the section stating "the whole affair is a *felo de se*" (a crime against oneself) and paints an arresting metaphorical image to nudge reconcilliationists into reconsidering their allegiance to the monarchy: "And as a man, who is attached to a prostitute, is unfitted to choose or judge of a wife, so any prepossession in favor of a rotten constitution of government will disable us from discerning a good one." The embedded advice to leave the prostitute in order to discern a good wife

resonated deeply in this religiously influenced society that publicly disdained the trade and consistently encouraged long-term prosperity over temporal pleasure. A sexual metaphor leaves the religious reader with a memorable image that clearly implies a ''right'' decision as well as commitment.

Thus far, Paine's arguments have proceeded largely from logical reasoning with important presumptions based in both common sense and orthodox beliefs. Throughout section one, Paine discredited the king and argued for the inefficacy of the British constitution. But the love and loyalty British subjects traditionally felt for the king (that Paine has likened to the superficial passion one has with a prostitute) and their belief that God had established George III remained as a roadblock for embracing independence. From here Paine will launch into his appraisal of monarchial government. As his comments continue, the reliance on a scriptural foundation increases.

Divine Right and Hereditary Succession

Paine is addressing colonists for whom the notions of the ''divine right of kings,'' ''hereditary succession,'' and ''unlimited submission'' demanded unquestioning loyalty to the monarchy. Controversy around these doctrines began to circulate in earnest throughout Britain's prior political upheavals and continued through the establishment of the Hanover line. The notion of ''submission'' had moved to the fore in America as Whigs sought increased Parliamentary control that brought them in conflict with Tory supporters of monarchial control. Traditional Tory arguments cited St. Paul's injunction for citizens to submit themselves to the government that God placed over them.[39] But the literal interpretation of the mandate persisted even though Jonathan Mayhew, a prominent Boston minister who embraced the colonial cause, had challenged it in 1750, arguing that the principle of unlimited submission was negated in the case of the corrupt kings of the House of Stuart.[40] One might expect Paine to address the issue of monarchial control with arguments founded in natural reasoning, as he argued in the previous section against the British political system in general, but instead he shifts to religion.

Beginning with the character of kings in general, Paine applies a Calvinistic ''depravity'' view to assert that ''a thirst for absolute power is the natural disease of monarchy,'' making any king ultimately unfit to lead a pious nation. Addressing the issue of divine right directly, Paine expresses an argument that avoids any interpretive scriptural wrangling with Tory ministers, transcending their arguments for ''unlimited submission'' by undermining the notion altogether:

> As the exalting one man so greatly above the rest cannot be justified on the equal rights of nature, so neither can it be defended on the authority of scripture; for the will of the Almighty, as declared by Gideon and the prophet Samuel, expressly disapproves of government by kings.

Paine characterizes the origin of Israel's first king as a *concession* by God in response to their rejection of the theocratic government instituted in the time of

Moses. Neither, in Paine's view, does the New Testament authorize a kingship that Christians are obligated to respect: "Render unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's is the scriptural doctrine of courts, yet it is no support of monarchial government, for the Jews at that time were without a king, and in a state of vassalage to the Romans." Paine relies on lengthy biblical quotes freely interspersed with his own additions as the sole repository of evidence for his argument. In closing the section, Paine repeats the essence of his position with an appeal to scriptural authority:

> These portions of scripture are direct and positive. They admit of no equivocal construction. That the Almighty hath here entered his protest against monarchial government is true, or the scripture is false. And a man hath good reason to believe that there is as much of kingcraft, as priestcraft in withholding the scripture from the public in Popish countries. For monarchy in every instance is the Popery of government.

Paine is literally saying that the hegemonic, corrupt religious system of Rome, from which the British had broken during the reign of Henry VIII, was still structurally manifest in the monarchy. For the strict religious mind of that day, scripture certainly could not be false. For the less pious "Christians" who retained a regard for scripture, this argument could still be persuasive. Any theological differences about how to interpret the biblical injunction to submit oneself to governing authorities—whether wise or foolish—was transcended by Paine's argument that such an "authority" was of corrupt human origin rather than divine.

However, Paine did not stop with establishing that kingship was "sinful." His intent was to forever undermine the supposed "right" of a royal family to head the government. Paine wrote: "To the evil of monarchy we have added that of hereditary succession; and as the first is a degradation and lessening of ourselves, so the second, claimed as a matter of right, is an insult and an imposition on posterity." His first argument (and most frequently quoted) proceeds from natural reason: "One of the strongest natural proofs of the folly of hereditary right in kings, is, that nature disapproves it, otherwise she would not so frequently turn it into ridicule by giving mankind an ass for a lion." Paine follows with several more "natural proofs" and heaps on several other notorious labels to characterize the first British monarch, including "principal ruffian" and "French bastard." By reminding his religious readers of the original British king's dubious lineage, he undercuts support for his "divine right" to conquer and rule the Saxons in the eleventh century. He then declares that hereditary succession "hath no divinity in it."

Then returning to biblical examples for further evidence, Paine writes: "If the first king was taken by lot, it establishes a precedent for the next, which excludes hereditary succession. Saul, the first king of Israel, was chosen by God, yet the succession was not hereditary, neither does it appear from that transaction there was any intention it ever should." If the Bible is to set an example for how pious colonist should live, then Paine notes that Britain has rejected that example. Paine extends his

arguments, returning to the doctrine of "original sin" (a twist on "depravity"), connecting it with the institution of the British monarchy:

> [B]ut of a family of kings for ever, hath no parallel in or out of scripture but the doctrine of original sin, . . . it unanswerably follows that original sin and hereditary succession are parallels. Dishonorable rank! Inglorious connection! Yet the most subtle sophist cannot produce a juster simile.

Paine sketches a parallel between the devil and the king, linking the human inheritance of sin to monarchical government. The distinction between good and evil, upon which Paine relies, does not require elucidation. For its success, this argument required an audience acutely sensitive to distinctions between good and evil, between the kingdom of heaven and the kingdom of the devil. Paine's logic draws upon the tangible concrete acts of George III who had been oppressing and mistreating the colonists. His rhetoric functions in the ephemeral spaces of the mind, linking George III's actions with the kingdom of darkness. Yet, his attack cannot easily be separated into its constituent parts. Each makes the other meaningful. His use of enlightenment rationality supports his scriptural proofs, intertwining foundational premises derived from both sources for colonists who felt that science served as a proof for biblical truth.

From this point Paine refutes arguments supporting the monarchy: Retorting that it thrusts unqualified men into the office, and that minors who ascend to the throne and kings nearing death can be manipulated by "miscreants" who tamper with government to the detriment of the nation. To the contention that hereditary succession provides stability, Paine replies, "were this true, it would be weighty; whereas, it is the most barefaced falsity ever imposed upon mankind." He evidences the point with a quick summation of British civil wars and power struggles between claimants to the throne. In recent memory, the Jacobite rebellion of 1745 in which the advancing Stuart-led Scottish army stopped only 60 miles from London hardly needed mentioning.

Paine sums up his views on the monarchy concluding that kings have little business except to cause trouble for the nation rather than look after its interests. "In short, monarchy and succession have laid (not this or that kingdom only) but the world in blood and ashes. Tis a form of government which the word of God bears testimony against, and blood will attend it." Here Paine provided a memorable "soundbyte" for the mind to embrace and repeat.

Paine's effort to convince religious-minded colonists, who would bear the brunt of martial hardships, that opposition to George III was not "sinful" was clearly an essential step in converting their political sentiments. Paine's other arguments concerning the inevitability of independence and the ability of America to wage war, though critical, are impotent without a religious justification to reject the monarchy. Pious or quasi-religious Americans would not oppose God by rebelling against God's established king. This was especially true of the Quakers, who may have supported the Crown only because of their desire to remain "passive."[41] If Paine removes "God's blessing" from the king, the injustices and hardships caused by British policies quickly outweigh loyalty to the British crown.

Paine's attempt at conversion relied not merely in bringing the king down to earth but putting him below. If Paine can rhetorically construct the king into an incarnation of evil, the Tory position becomes untenable for a "Christian." Conversion is then mandated by religious duty. The "civil millennialists" could then (and they did) apply their conspiracy theories against Britain. *Common Sense* transformed the proposed revolution from a rebellion against God's chosen monarch into what J. C. D. Clark described as a "civil war of religion" against a satanic tyrannical oppressor, with God supporting the American colonists.[42]

Refuting the Reconciliationists

Paine opens the third section by mentioning that his comments above were "preliminaries" that needed to be settled before discussing the current state of affairs. But reason still might suggest that independence, while a lofty ideal, was pragmatically foolish due to disunity in the colonies, the strength of Britain, and the stakes of defeat. Even if the reader has accepted Paine's ideas up to this point, Paine must still tear down what remains in support of reconciliation and address the practical ability of America to succeed with a war for independence, a task he adequately performs.

As the pamphlet continues, Paine deemphasizes his reliance on religious beliefs for a while and returns to arguments founded upon "natural reason." Opening a series of refutations against the likely success of reconciliation by assuming a conceptual distinction of "dependence/independence," Paine posits a choice for his auditors. He then maintains pressure to convert by citing the hardships that the current system is harboring and the unlikelihood of positive change brought by a passive approach to the crisis. Paine points out that war has already begun and the time for negotiation is over. Passivity is the chief danger as future generations would recall with "detestation" those who do not look beyond their lifetimes in the decision.

To the claim that Britain has protected America, Paine sardonically replies that it would have protected Turkey (an Islamic state many then saw as antithetical to the Christian west) if it were in Britain's financial interest. Moreover, Paine suggests that America would have peace with France and Spain were it not for its relationship with Britain. Paine also contests the "filial" relationship with Britain that many colonists were unwilling to break, instead pointing out that Britain as well as other European nations had driven out many who sought "civil and religious freedom" to America where these achieved a "brotherhood with every European Christian." Further downplaying British ancestry, Paine reminds the reader that merely "one third of the inhabitants . . . are of English descent." Continuing his deployment of the word "dependence," as the section continues, Paine challenges the reader to name a "single advantage" that the continued relationship affords. He then recounts the disadvantages, climactically noting that Britain's wars with other European nations will damage American economic interests. Paine finally takes a full turn away from reconciliation. After gently calling it a "dream" before this point, he now labels it a "dangerous doctrine" that affords the king the opportunity to achieve by "craft and subtlety" what could not be gained by force.

His list of refutations then returns to religious argumentation by citing that the great distance across the Atlantic is "proof" that it "was never the design of Heaven" for Britain to rule America. As the section concludes, Paine offers a fresh view of kingship, clearly hoping to appease his religious readers and to offer them something palpable in the king's stead:

> But where says some is the king of America? I'll tell you Friend, he reigns above, and doth not make havoc of mankind like the Royal of Britain. Yet that we may not appear to be defective even in earthly honors, let a day be solemnly set apart for proclaiming the charter; let it be brought forth placed on the divine law, the word of God; let a crown be placed thereon, by which the world may know, that so far as we approve of monarchy, that in America the law is king.

Paine seems to be sensitive here to a reader's feelings of "emptiness" at not having a king. A pure republican government was largely unknown in that day; having a king seemed "right" for people who had never been without one. Whereas modern Americans would raise a clamor at a national ceremony placing a crown on the Bible, Paine offers God as the king and suggests that the Bible not only synecdochically stand in for God but that it would provide the legal code for the proposed republic. Finally, in closing out section three, Paine waxes eloquent with a biblical language style (couching his notion in archaic words of "ye," "hath," and "O") that assumed scriptural authority as its aesthetic value unfolded in the reading:

> O ye that love mankind! Ye that dare oppose, not only the tyranny, but the tyrant, stand forth! Every spot of the old world is overrun with oppression. Freedom hath been hunted round the globe. Asia, and Africa, have long expelled her. Europe regards her like a stranger, and England hath given her warning to depart. O! receive the fugitive, and prepare in time an asylum for mankind.

Paine personifies freedom as he laments its rejection from the various parts of the world. His poetic device mimics a biblical passage where "wisdom" is similarly personified. Of course, Paine takes occasion to oppose the "tyrant," meaning the king of Britain. But more importantly Paine begins calling for the reader to act, to transcend a "mere" declaration of independence and improving economic conditions in the colonies, to create a homeland for "freedom" from which the entire world will benefit—a powerful reason in support of conversion. In a sense, Paine is calling America back to the Puritan vision of a "shining city on a hill" where early colonists dreamed of creating a devout civilization free from the corruption of Europe. It is for all mankind that the colonists will be fighting, not just themselves or their children.

After arguing that America really could win the war, Paine concludes with a request for conversion and commitment with the strength of a forceful simile: "[U]ntil an independence is declared, the continent will feel itself like a man who continues putting off some unpleasant business from day to day, yet knows it must be done, hates to set about it, wishes it over, and is continually haunted with the thoughts of its necessity." This resonant comparison added weight to the religious arguments Paine emphasized in section two, drawing upon traditional Puritan sentiments that praised diligence and condemned procrastination. Each

day that independence would be delayed would make the inevitable task even more difficult.

Conclusions

An apparent inconsistency between the imagined author of *Common Sense* and Paine's personal religious beliefs did not escape the attention of his contemporaries or modern historians. John Adams was careful not to condemn Paine, yet he stopped just short of suggesting that his argumentative strategy proceeded "from willful sophistry and knavish hypocrisy."[43] Foner commented that "It may seem ironic that Paine, who twenty years hence condemned the authority of the Bible in *The Age of Reason*, would use such arguments."[44] Paine's success was deeply indebted to his choice to remain anonymous and to hide the inconsistency. So, why does Paine succeed with this apparent departure from his character?

Anonymity was a common colonial practice with polemic writing. While some neglected a name altogether, others assigned a name to their writings that suggested a character type making the case. Samuel Adams used a plethora of pseudonyms in his own polemic efforts, including names like "Methodistus." Several benefits were gained by the use of pseudonyms—a tactic employed by writers on both sides. By pretending to be another, the colonial writers adopted the most credible voice possible for the particular arguments being made to a specific public. The practice shielded one from offended government officials or from raucous mobs. Yet the anonymity allowed each reader (or hearer) to imagine the author while it then directed readers' attention to the arguments instead of allowing any personal biases to infiltrate the issues. Paine's action went well beyond simply adapting a message to an audience. He rhetorically constructed a persona ideally suited to present the scriptural challenge to the legitimacy of the monarchy. Enhancing his challenge, a species of credibility accretes from the nature and quality of argumentation, from epistemological assumptions, and from the fair or unfair manner in which the polemicist presented the case. The "reader" constructs the author's character from such evidence and fragments of the author embedded in the text, seeking both an internal and external consistency. Internally, the persona must fit the arguments and manner of argumentation. Externally, the persona must appear "realistic," stylistically displaying (in this case) the voice of an actual citizen who could have composed the text. If the constructed personality is beyond the realm of possibility, the arguments may appear contrived and the device will backfire.

After Paine recognized the popularity of *Common Sense* and he began to publicize his authorship, people still did not know the man.[45] At that point in his life, it is not certain to what degree his Deist theology had developed. Moreover, Deism was not completely inconsistent with the "popular religion" of that day. On many issues even an orthodox Calvinist and Paine could agree. On further theological issues, Paine publicly remained silent until after publishing *The Age of Reason* (1793–1795), at which point he was challenged in print by John Gemmil, a challenge that Paine felt was based in misunderstanding.[46] Yet his Quaker background allowed Paine to cite

the "word of God" with genuine deference even though he may have equally trusted his "inner light" and his education regarding ontological and epistemic assumptions. One should not hastily judge him as manipulative, hypocritical, or sophistic if his arguments originated from within.

While Paine created his persona on paper at his writing desk, modern political leaders construct a persona in the media with the aid of campaign consultants, make-up artists, speechwriters, and other image professionals. Yet, has the essence of "image construction" really changed in two centuries? Who is the real person behind carefully managed media constructions? Modern voters must make decisions and select leaders often without the benefit of a history of their views and records. Sizable publics can rarely get to know social leaders and have always relied on preferred constructions of a persona to make decisions about character in leadership.

When modern instructors tout audience-centeredness as a key to persuasive success, we typically do so in Aristotelian terms of selecting the right arguments. Yet if the premises of a group lead to a conclusion contrary to a desired position (reconciliation with England, in this case), the rhetor is faced with a profound challenge. Paine's solution, as Jorgensen-Earp described in another context, was to "gain control over the images . . . and . . . influence the power they, in turn, have to define societal need."[47] *Common Sense*, in light of a rhetorical strategy described by John Angus Campbell, "presents itself as a continuation of and owes its cultural intelligibility to" the older tradition of Puritan Calvinism.[48] In revolutionary America, the biblical premises that empowered the monarchy demanded obedience and precluded revolution. Paine elegantly challenged these with a rhetoric that drew upon a religious prophetic tradition rooted in the Puritan vision for the colonies. Inasmuch as Thomas Paine's imagined author held the voice of a "prophet," Darsey's general observations are particularly applicable:

> The prophet is simultaneously insider and outsider; he compels the audience, but only by use of those premises to which they have assented as a culture. The discourse is, then, both of the audience and extreme to the audience. It might be said that the prophet shares the ideas of his audience rather than the realities of its everyday life.[49]

Here, then, Paine both identified with and achieved an apparent consubstantiality with this audience in order to provide a visionary leader for his time. Arguably, Paine found this leader within his own personality and connected with the reading community of both orthodox and popular Christians, inviting, even demanding, political conversion in order to reconcile religious and political beliefs.

This study also provides some data for historians of the colonial period seeking deeper and more finely nuanced conclusions about the nature of the "American Mind." Paine's success indicates that sizable portion of the colonial population changed their position on the independence issue with the insertion of religion-based arguments into the public debate. Such a strong effect mitigates recent estimates that only about 10% of colonists were active in church.[50] At a minimum, we can conclude that numerous others held a deep regard for traditional Christian doctrine. While

many today would consider the historical discussion merely academic, we still regularly see conservative factions who debate liberal counterparts over the claim that American was founded as a "Christian nation" and should remain so. While the relevancy of the past to modern choices may be debatable, this study does support Gordon Wood's indictment that historians have been looking for religion in the wrong places.

Finally, Paine's efforts in *Common Sense* continued the constitutive development of the American people. By "translating" Whig philosophy into notions that religious communities could appreciate, Paine contributed to establishing the "we-ness" of the colonists. The community that embraced revolution had been coalescing for decades, yet it required the reasons for rejecting monarchial government to be manifest into a form that would challenge, even overcome, the rhetoric that empowered the British political tradition. Without inducing colonists to embrace the Whig rationale for republicanism, the widespread agreement required for entering a war, transforming a society, and creating a new "people" could not have been fully achieved and indeed the revolution would have died.

While Paine's legacy has been marginalized to exclude him from America's traditional founders, his work was essential to the revolutionary cause. His "willful sophistry" and reputation as a mercenary polemicist has likely caused that marginalization, yet, considering his work from a distance suggests that his creativity and community-building rhetoric be appreciated on its own terms. America needed Thomas Paine. Today's world desires leaders with similar skills, able to not simply adapt messages to target audiences, but to enter the world of the other with a vision that inspires people to bridge their differences. Such an approach is sorely lacking in modern society where "liberals" and "conservatives" make little effort to understand the other's position. Today's rhetoric on controversial issues tends to polarize groups instead of uniting them; slogan-centered rhetorical strategies clamor for undecided ears, hoping to win just a few more votes that will swing the next election while leaving the issue unresolved and hostilities intact. We need Paine's approach today to increase hope of settling our most divisive issues, to provide true understanding, and to achieve a genuine democratic consensus that will lead to solutions that all can embrace.

Notes

[1] Scott Liell, *46 Pages: Thomas Paine,* Common Sense, *and the Turning Point to American Independence* (New York: Running Press Book Publishers, 2004), 70–71.

[2] Liell, *46 Pages*, 70.

[3] Philip Foner, *The Complete Writings of Thomas Paine* (New York: Citadel Press, 1945), xiv. See also David C. Hoffman, "Paine and Prejudice: Rhetorical Leadership through Perceptual Framing in Common Sense," *Rhetoric & Public Affairs* 9 (2006): 375.

[4] J. Michael Hogan and Glen Williams, "Republican Charisma and the American Revolution: The Textual Persona of Thomas Paine's *Common Sense*," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 86 (2000): 6.

[5] Hoffman, "Paine and Prejudice," 374.

[6] Liell, *46 Pages*, 105–109.

[7] John Adams, "*Autobiography*" *in The Life and Work of John Adams*, vol. II (Boston: Charles C. Little and James Brown, 1850), 509.
[8] Ralph R. Smith and Russell R. Windes, "The Innovational Movement: A Rhetorical Theory," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 61 (1975): 143.
[9] Thomas Jefferson, "Letter to Francis Eppes, 19 January, 1821," in *The Writings of Thomas Jefferson*, 15:305 (Washington: The Thomas Jefferson Memorial Association, 1903).
[10] "Popular" here refers to a less erudite, common manner of discourse. Philip Davidson, *Propaganda and the American Revolution 1763–1783* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 1941), 14.
[11] Bernard Bailyn, *Faces of Revolution: Personalities and Themes in the Struggle for American Independence* (New York: Random House, 1990), 65–87.
[12] Hogan and Williams, "Republican Charisma," 11.
[13] Hoffman, "Paine and Prejudice," 374.
[14] Liell, *46 Pages*, 76–77.
[15] Adams, "*Autobiography,*" 508.
[16] Eric Foner, *Tom Paine and Revolutionary America* (Oxford University Press: London, 1976), 81.
[17] Thomas Clark, "Rhetorical Image-making: A Case Study of the Thomas Paine-William Smith propaganda debates," *Southern Speech Communication Journal* 40 (1975): 261.
[18] Edward Larkin, "Inventing an American Public: Thomas Paine, the Pennsylvania Magazine, and American Revolutionary Political Discourse. *Early American Literature* 33 (1998): 252.
[19] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983), 6.
[20] Jon Butler, *Awash in a Sea of Faith: Christianizing the American People* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990), 164–165.
[21] J. I. Packer, "The Faith of the Protestants," in *Eerdmans' Handbook to the History of Christianity*, ed. T. Dowley, 374–375 (Herts, England: Lion Publishing, 1977).
[22] See Mark A. Noll, *America's God: From Jonathan Edwards to Abraham Lincoln* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 7–8. See also Charles Lloyd Cohen, *God's Caress: The Psychology of Puritan Religious Experience* (London: Oxford University Press, 1986), 14–15.
[23] Leonard Levy and Alfred Young, "Foreword," in *The Great Awakening: Documents Illustrating the Crisis and its Consequences,* ed. Alan Heimert and Perry Miller, vi (New York: Bobbs Merrill company Inc., 1967).
[24] Nathan O. Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 221.
[25] J. C. D. Clark, *The Language of Liberty, 1660–1832: Political Discourse and Social Dynamics in the Anglo-American World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 305; Butler, *Sea of Faith*, 195.
[26] Gordon S. Wood, "Religion and the American Revolution" in *New Directions in American Religious History*, ed. Harry S. Stout and D. G. Hart, 175–177 (London: Oxford University Press, 1997).
[27] Patricia U. Bonomi, *Under the Cope of Heaven: Religion, Society, and Politics in Colonial America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 73, 87.
[28] Ibid., 74.
[29] Nathan O. Hatch, *The Sacred Cause of Liberty: Republican Thought and the Millennium in Revolutionary New England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977), 54.
[30] Ibid., 46–47.
[31] Davidson, *Propaganda*, 128.
[32] Gordon S. Wood, "Rhetoric and Reality in the American Revolution," *William and Mary Quarterly* 23 (1966), 25.

[33] Arthur M. Schlesinger, *The Birth of the Nation: A Portrait of the American People on the Eve of Independence* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1968), 240.
[34] Liell, *46 Pages*, 70–71.
[35] Davidson, *Propaganda*, 85–86, 300.
[36] Alan Heimert, *Religion and the American Mind* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1966), 354.
[37] Alexander Garden, and Anglican Commissary in Charleston, described the ''ordinary Ways and Means of attaining the Knowledge of our Religious Duty, viz. Natural Reason and the written Word of God.'' Alexander Garden, ''To the Inhabitants of the Parish of St. Philip, Charles-Town, Nov 24, 1740,'' in *The Great Awakening: Documents Illustrating the Crisis and its Consequences,* ed. Alan Heimert and Perry Miller, 46–61 (New York: Bobbs Merrill company Inc., 1967).
[38] Paine cites Matthew 12:25 where Jesus responded to criticism for helping people with demonic possession by rhetorically suggesting that the devil's kingdom could not be divided.
[39] Jonathan Boucher, *A View of the Causes and Consequences of the American Revolution* (London, G. G. & J. Robinson, 1797), 560.
[40] Jonathan Mayhew, *A Discourse Concerning Unlimited Submission and Nonresistance to the Higher Powers* (Boston: D. Fowle, 1750).
[41] Paine did not ask the Quakers to fight, only not to hinder those who would. Later editions of *Common Sense* included an addendum directly addressed to the Quakers.
[42] J. C. D. Clark, *The Language of Liberty*, 305.
[43] Adams, ''*Autobiography,*'' 507.
[44] Foner, *Tom Paine*, 81.
[45] Liell, *46 Pages*, 92.
[46] John Gemmil, *Paine versus Religion; or, Christianity Triumphant . . . Letters of Sam. Adams, Tho. Paine, and John Gemmil* (Baltimore, Douglass, 1803).
[47] Cheryl R. Jorgensen-Earp, ''The Lady, The Whore, and The Spinster: The Rhetorical Use of Victorian Images of Women,'' *Western Journal of Speech Communication* 54 (1990): 94.
[48] John Angus Campbell, ''Scientific Revolution and the Grammar of Culture: The Case of Darwin's Origin,'' *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 72 (1986): 368.
[49] James Darsey, *The Prophetic Tradition and Radical Rhetoric in America* (New York: New York University Press, 1997), 202.
[50] Rodney Stark and Roger Finke, ''American Religion in 1776: A Statistical Portrait,'' *Sociological Analysis* 49 (1988): 51.