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The Religious Opinions of Thomas A Jefferson

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THE RELIGIOUS OPINIONS
OF THOMAS A. JEFFERSON

A Thesis Presented to
the Faculty of Concordia Seminary
Department of Church History
in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of
Bachelor of Divinity
As Defined in Accord with the
Armed Services Commission
Done in Absentia

by

Herbert Fritze, Chaplain

St. Cloud, Minnesota

1949

Approved by:

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THE RELIGIOUS OPINIONS
OF THOMAS A. JEFFERSON

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Introduction

Thomas Jefferson, the third child of ten, was born of Peter Jefferson and Jane Jefferson, nee Randolph, on the second day of April, 1743. Like most of the enterprising people of the day, Peter Jefferson was a land owner. In addition to managing his estate, Peter Jefferson became a practical surveyor. Together with Joshua Fry, professor of mathematics at William and Mary College, he surveyed for the boundary line between Virginia and North Carolina. Both men were later employed to make the first map of Virginia. Other activities of the elder Jefferson consisted of being a colonel in the local militia as well as serving as a member of the House of Burgess. Often described as an individual of "gigantic stature and strength," Peter Jefferson was an ambitious, energetic, tender, and warm-hearted individual. "Even the Indians found Peter Jefferson their friend."

Peter Jefferson's wife, Jane Randolph Jefferson, came from one of the wealthiest and most aristocratic families of Virginia. With money, land, and an aristocratic background, the Peter Jefferson household suffered no social and economic privation. As far as education was concerned, both Peter Jefferson and his wife had more than the average Virginian. The library of their home also indicated that this couple was interested in the finer things of life. Worn sets of the "Spectator," copies of Shakespeare, Swift, Pope, and King James version of the Bible adorned the library of the Jefferson home.

Chapter I

Religious Training

A. Home

The Jefferson home was a religious home, in fact, surprisingly puritanical. Young Tom was baptized in the Anglican Church. At an early age he became acquainted with the liturgical rites of that body. Peter Jefferson taught his son to say prayers at an early age. He also made it a point to encourage young Tom to find his spiritual strength in the Bible.

Discipline of mind and body were principles which Peter Jefferson vigorously encouraged upon his son who later came to resemble him in face and figure. From the elder Jefferson, young Tom was taught the rudiments of reading and writing as well as to keep an accurate account of things. To work along systematic lines was another feature inculcated. One maxim Thomas Jefferson never forgot of his father was, "Never ask another to do for you what you can do for yourself."

B. Grammar School

Thomas Jefferson's first formal education was under the guidance of the clergy.

He placed me at the English school at five years of age and at the Latin at nine where I continued until his death. My teacher, Mr. William Douglas, a clergyman from Scotland...with the rudiments of these languages taught me the French, and on the death of my father, I went to the Reverend Mr. Maury, a correct¹ classical scholar, with whom I continued two years.

Young Tom did not care too much for the Reverend William Douglas. He preferred the Reverend James Maury, a Whig clergyman of Huguenot ancestry who came to America to tutor the Monroe family and preferred

1. Ford, Autobiography, Vol. I, p. 3.

him because of his broad and liberal views. The Reverend James Maury supervised a boarding school fourteen miles from the Jefferson home. For this boarding-school education, young Tom paid twenty pounds a year.

If the two clergymen followed the traditions of the old schoolmasters, and we have every reason to believe that they did, then Jefferson studied Greek, Latin, French, the Bible, and Anglican dogma. Perhaps a few of the English classics were read if the schoolmasters had a library, and if they opened that library to the students, which they seldom did.

After completing school with the Reverend Mr. Maury, Thomas Jefferson returned to Shadwell. Although his father had died two years before, Jefferson did not realize fully his position and responsibility as head of the Jefferson household. (Tom was the first male child.) On recalling this particular part of his life in later years, Jefferson remarked in a letter:

When I recollect that at fourteen years of age the whole care and direction of myself was thrown on myself entirely without a relation or friend qualified to advise or guide me and recollect the various sorts of bad company with which I associated from time to time, I am astonished I did not turn off with them and become as worthless to society as they were.¹

It is unusually strange that Jefferson never refers to his mother during this time. His complete silence about Jane Jefferson casts an "oblique reflection" on her, whom, we are inclined to believe, he did not judge qualified to assist or advise him.

At the age of seventeen, Jefferson began to think about higher education. His father had left specific instructions and provisions

1. "To Jefferson Randolph," 24 November, 1808, Memorial Edition XII, page 197.

for such training. To John Harvey, his guardian, Jefferson accordingly wrote:

Sir-

I was at Colonel Peter Randolph's about a fortnight ago, and my schooling falling into discourse, he said he thought it would be to my advantage to go to college, and was desirous I should go, as indeed I am myself for several reasons. In the first as long as I stay at the mountains the loss of one-fourth of my time is inevitable by company's coming here and detaining me from school, and likewise my absence will a great measure put a stop to so much company, and by that means lessen the expenses of the estate in housekeeping. And on the other hand by going to college I shall get more universal acquaintance, which may hereafter be serviceable to me; and I suppose I can pursue my studies in Greek and Latin as well as here, and likewise learn something of the mathematics. I shall be glad of your opinion, and remain, Sir, your most humble servant, Thomas Jefferson, Jr.¹

C. College

John Harvey replied in the affirmative and in December of 1759 we find Jefferson leaving Shadwell to attend William and Mary College at Williamsburg, Virginia, a distance of 120 miles. On the way to this capital, he stopped off for the Christmas holidays at Hanover, a little village on the Pananky river. Here, Jefferson met Patrick Henry for the first time, an unusual individual who played a prominent role in arousing Jefferson to study and action on the matter of the separation of church and state. It is interesting to hear Jefferson's first impression of the famed orator:

During the festivity of the season, I met him in society every day, and we became well acquainted although I was much his junior....his manners had

1. To John Harvey, Ford, Vol. I, p. 340

something of coarseness. His passion was music, dancing, and pleasantry. He excelled in the last, and it attached everyone to him. ¹

After the holidays, Jefferson continued the journey to Williamsburg. Records of the college indicate that he enrolled as a student at William and Mary on March 25, 1760. The college was by no means comparable to our modern colleges today. Like most of the colony schools, William and Mary had been established primarily "to the end that the church of Virginia may be furnished with a seminary for the ministers of the gospel, and that the youth may be piously educated in good letters and manners, and that the Christian faith may be propagated amongst the western Indians to the glory of the Almighty." ²

The faculty of William and Mary was made up of clergymen. A certain Reverend Mister Dawson for two hundred pounds sterling per year assumed the office of president; was head of the commissary; a member of the council, and served as the rector of Bruton parish, the local town church. The Reverend Emmanuel Jones was master of the English school. The Reverend Thomas Robinson had charge of the grammar school. Moral philosophy was taught by the Reverend William Preston. Theology instruction came under the supervision of the Reverend John Canna. The Reverend Richard Graham held classes in natural philosophy. One instructor, William Small, was not a clergyman. He was a Scot "of great learning" who taught science and mathematics. Jefferson enjoyed his company. It is evident from the faculty and curriculum that Jefferson came into an academic atmosphere in no wise suited to his taste. Although there is no evidence that Jefferson openly rebelled against the heavy emphasis put on moral philosophy and Anglican theology, we do know that he was

1. Ford, Vol. IX, p. 339.

2. Chinard, p. 9.

largely interested in the sciences.

There was little evidence of brotherhood among the faculty members of William and Mary. Dissension and discontent was rife, and probably was so because the members of the teaching staff "mixed ruthless politics with acrid theology." To give the reader an idea of the prevailing atmosphere, there is the incident of the time the colleagues of President Dawson accused him of acting as a stooge for Fauquier, acting governor of the colony, and which was very likely true. When President Dawson was found drunk, and not infrequently, his colleagues reported the incident to higher authorities. Governor Fauquier defended the president, as he often did, on the grounds that the intrigues of his long-faced and black-gowned faculty drove him to it.

Into this Anflican atmosphere Jefferson entered on becoming a student at Williamsburg. He became disillusioned. Interested primarily in the studies of mathematics and science, young Tom grew weary of moral philosophy and theology. When considering further that there was so little evidence of Christian charity and brotherhood among the teaching staff at the college, there is no wonder that Jefferson yielded to the temptations of the town of Williamsburg:

"He was often thrown into the society of horse races, card players, fox hunters, and at the end of the first year in college it appeared to him that he had spent more than his share of the income of the estate. He, therefore, wrote to his guardian to charge his expenses to his share of the property. 'No,' Colonel Walker is reported to have said, 'if you have sowed your wild oats thus, the estate can well afford to pay the bill.'" ¹

1. Thomas Jefferson, The Apostle of America, Chinard, p.11.

Chapter II

Change in Religious Thought

A. Cause

After approximately a year of frustration at William and Mary College, Thomas Jefferson found three friends, whom historians say, had a profound influence in the moulding of his career, character, and thought. They were: Dr. William Small, George Wythe, and Francis Fauquier.

1. Small

Dr. Small was a Scotsman and served as professor of mathematics and science at the college. He was also a philosopher and thinker. No one seems to know what circumstances brought him to Williamsburg; neither does anyone seem to know why he left the college so quickly in 1762 to return to Scotland. The general opinion as to the reason he returned to Scotland is summed up by one Jefferson author thus:

He seems quickly to have had enough of a disolute time-serving clergy of riotous students and of prevailing incompetence, indolence, and wrangling.¹

Dr. Small, on return to the old country, became the great Dr. Small of Birmingham. Later he became a friend of the elder Darwin and also assisted James Watt in developing the steam engine. On various occasions we read of the Established Church challenging his orthodoxy.

While at Williamsburg, Jefferson became attached to Dr. Small and the professor soon took a personal interest in the young, red-haired Virginian. The influence which the professor had over the young man is evidenced from Jefferson's own words:

1. Allan & Nerk, Jefferson, p. 7.

"It was my good fortune and that probably fixed the destinies of my life that Dr. William Small was the professor of mathematics—a man profound in most of the useful branches of science, with a happy talent of communication, correct and gentlemanly manners, and an enlarged and liberal mind. He, most happily for me, became soon attached to me and made me his daily companion when not engaged in the school; and from his conversation, I got my first views of the expansion of science, and of the system of things in which we are placed. Fortunately, the philosophical chair became vacant soon after my arrival at college, and he was appointed to fill it per interim: he was the first who ever gave in that college regular courses in ethics, rhetoric, and belles-lettres." ¹

2. Wythe

In addition to snatching Jefferson from a useless life and directing him to serious thinking, Dr. Small introduced the young man to George Wythe, "the foremost jurist in Virginia....a man of classic mould, thoughtful, ethical, and above all, a believer in a republican form of government." (Padover, page 12) Of George Wythe, Jefferson said: "He was firm in his philosophy, and neither troubling nor perhaps trusting anyone with his religion." On meeting Jefferson, George Wythe accepted him as a student of law, and thus, introduced him to his life's work. Fourteen years later it was this same George Wythe who signed his name to a document written and conceived by Jefferson, the Declaration of Independence.

3. Fauquier

George Wythe and Dr. Small were so impressed by the eighteen-year-old lad that they introduced him to a third person, the biggest and most colorful man in the whole colony, Francis Fauquier, acting governor of Virginia. Governor Fauquier was the son of the director of the Bank

1. Ford, Autobiography, Vol. I, p. 3.

of England. As one-time director of the South Sea Company, Fauquier received recognition of his accomplishments by being accepted into membership of the Royal Academy. His treatise "An Essay on Ways and Means of Raising Money For the Support of the Present War without Increasing the Public Debt" had been hailed as scholarly and enlightening. Governor Fauquier's fondness for lavish merriment including gambling and gaming made him a colorful figure in early Virginia history.

It was a rare privilege for a young man of Jefferson's age to be admitted into this cultured group. He must have shown some promise. The "parties corries," as Jefferson called it, would meet periodically at the home of the governor, and over the dinner table and after the meal, discuss subjects of interest in an atmosphere of intellectual informality.

What did the parties corrie talk about? Fauquier "spoke of old England, the treaties of London, the monuments and works of art, of his colleagues of the Royal Society, or discussed a problem of taxation or a recent meteorological phenomenon." (Chinard, page 12) He probably told also of other lands and people for his past position as president of the South Sea Company had brought him into intimate contact with the sea-going men of the day.

Dr. Small, learned as he was, talked science, philosophy, travel, poetry, drama, art, and architecture. Lawyer Wythe, being the great jurist that he was, no doubt delved into politics, law, government, and related subjects.

Was religion discussed? If so, did the discussion influence in any way young Jefferson's change of opinion about the Established Church and its dogmas? There is no doubt but that the subject was introduced

on occasions but that it became the central topic for discussion is improbable. Jefferson's eulogy above, on George Wythe, refers to the jurist's deep silence on the subject.

Gilbert Chinard says, "the passage of George Wythe already quoted mentioned his reticence on religion. Whatever may have been the propensity of Fauquier to gaming, he was never accused by his contemporaries of being a religious libertine. It is also very doubtful whether any of the group would mutually have discussed such subjects, particularly in the presence of a young student whose education had been deeply religious. Finally, it must be remembered that in Virginia as well as in New England there always existed some 'reserved questions' that it was not good form to criticize established institutions and current beliefs. It is quite possible that Fauquier may have lent to Jefferson certain volumes of Shaftsbury and Bowlingbroke, but in spite of the contrary opinion expressed by some biographers of Jefferson it seems very unlikely that any of these older men should have undertaken to shake the foundations of his faith."¹

The parties carries could not have lasted very long as Dr. Small returned to England in 1762. Jefferson maintained an intimate friendship with both George Wythe and Francis Fauquier until their deaths. On recalling these gatherings at the governor's house years later, Jefferson said:

"I have heard more good sense, more rational and philosophical conversation than in all my life beside. There were truly attic society."²

A definite change of thinking regarding the faith of his youth took place in Jefferson around the years 1764 and 1765. The incidents and events surrounding such change lies probably in no one circumstance or even a combination of circumstances. On reviewing Jefferson's life

1. Thomas Jefferson, The Apostle of America, Chinard, p. 12.

2. Memorial, Vol. XIV, p. 231.

up to this time and picking out the dynamic incidents which would seem to have changed his religious thinking, we find no evidence that such events changed his religion. At the impressionable age of fourteen, he lost his father. This event caused no spiritual disturbance. As late as July of 1763, when Jefferson saw the possibility of being rejected by a girl with whom he had fallen in love, Rebecca (Belinda) Burwell, he wrote a letter to John Page in which no deistic leanings are reflected whatsoever but contain good evidence of the Anglican training he had received at home and under the tutelage of the Reverends Mr. Douglas and Mr. Maury. Noteworthy, too, is the fact that this letter was written three years after meeting Small, Fauquier, and Wythe.

"Perfect happiness, I believe, was never intended for the deity to be the lost of one of his creators in this world; but that he is very much put in our power, the nearness of our approaches to it is what I have steadfastly believed.

"The most fortunate of us in our journey through life frequently meet with calamities and misfortunes which may greatly afflict us: and, to fortify our minds against the attacks of these calamities and misfortunes should be one of the principal studies and endeavor of our life. The only method of doing this is to assume a perfect resignation to the divine will, to consider that whatever does happen, must happen: and that by our uneasiness we cannot prevent the blow before it does fall but we may add to its force after it has fallen. These considerations and such others as these may enable us in some measure to surmount the difficulties thrown our way: to bear up with a tolerable degree of patients under this burden of life: and to proceed with the pious and unshaken resignation till we arrive at our journey's end when we may deliver up our trust into the hands of Him who gave it, and receive such reward as to Him shall seem proportioned to our merit. Such, dear Page, will be the language of the man who considers his situation in life, and such should be the language of every man who would wish to render that situation as the nature of it will admit. Few things will disturb him at all: nothing will

disturb him much." ¹

This note of Christian stoicism fits Anglican dogma. It appears, at the time of this letter, that Jefferson did not even consider that there might even exist a code of morality and ethics resting on a different basis. If Dr. Small helped him find his relation to "the system of things in which we are placed," Jefferson was satisfied that complete resignation to divine will was eternal truth.

4. French Philosophers

There is no evidence either to indicate that the "infidel French philosophers" influenced Jefferson's religious opinions. Gilbert Chinard, noted Jefferson student, has gone into this subject very thoroughly. The volume of extracts published by Professor Chinard under the title "The Literary Bible of Thomas Jefferson" does not contain a single quotation from Voltaire, Diderot, or Rousseau. French literature, according to Gilbert Chinard, is represented in Jefferson's early writings only by a few insignificant lines from Racine. The greater part of Jefferson's reading in college consisted of the fiction of Swift, Addison, Steele, and Fielding. Outside the English, Jefferson read Bil Blas and Cervantes. In the more serious branches, Jefferson "thought more highly of Greeks than of the Romans. Found Demosthenes much greater an orator than Cicero, but thought Cicero a greater philosopher than Socrates or Epictetus. He eagerly thumbed the pages of Thucydides and Tacitus and while at first disappointed with Plutarch came to like him too. Among the English historians he was pleased with the style but disgusted with the principle of Hume. Among the ancient classics, he favored Homer

1. To John Page, Memorial, Vol. IV, p. 10.

and the Greek dramatists. He admired Virgil but Petrarch wearied him. He knew in his youth Shakespeare, Milton, Dryden, and Poe. He also read Dante and Moliere." (Jefferson, Bowers, page 23)

5. Bolingbroke

It is likely that the first doubts on Christian dogma as set down by the Anglican church were injected into Jefferson's mind by the reading of Bolingbroke. Whether the book came from Governor Fauquier or the libraries of the day, the fact remains that sometime while still a student but after 1764, Jefferson had come to question the authenticity of the Bible as God's Word and as an historical document. He put into practice at this time the same advice he gave his nephew Peter Carr, some years later:

Religion. Your reason is now mature enough to examine this object. In the first place divest yourself of all bias in favour of novelty and singularity of opinion. Indulge them in any other subject rather than that of religion. It is too important, and the consequences of error may be too serious. On the other hand shake off all the fears and servile prejudices under which weak minds are servilely crouched. Fix reason firmly in her seat, and call to her tribunal every fact, every opinion. Question with boldness even the existence of a god; because, if there be one, he must approve of the homage of reason, than that of blindfolded fear. You will naturally examine first the religion of your own country. Read the Bible then, as you would Livy or Tacitus. The facts which are within the ordinary course of nature you will believe on the authority of the writer, as you do those of the same kind in Livy and Tacitus. The testimony of the writer weighs in their favor in one scale, and their not being against the laws of nature, must be examined with more care, and under a variety of faces. Here you must recur to the pretensions of the writer to inspiration from god. Examine upon what evidence his pretensions are founded, and whether that evidence is so strong as that its falsehood would be more improbable than a change in the laws of nature

in the case he relates. For example in the book of Joshua we are told that the sun stood still several hours. Were we to read that fact in Livy or Tacitus we should class it with their showers of blood, speaking of statues, beasts, etc. But it is said that the writer of that book was inspired. Examine therefore candidly what evidence there is of his having been inspired. The pretension is entitled to your inquiry, because millions believe it. On the other hand you are astronomer enough to know how contrary it is to the law of nature that a body revolving on its axis as the earth does, should have stopped, should not by that sudden stoppage have prostrated animals, trees, buildings, and should after a certain time have resumed its revolution, and that without a second general prostration. In this arrest of the earth's motion, or of the evidence which affirms it, most within the law of probabilities? You will next read the new testament. It is the history of a personage called Jesus. Keep in your eye the opposite pretensions 1. of those who say that he was begotten by god, born of a virgin, suspended and reversed the laws of nature at will, and ascended bodily into heaven; and 2. of those who say he was a man of illegitimate birth, of a benevolent heart, enthusiastic mind, who set out without pretensions to divinity, ended in believing them, and was punished capitally for sedition by being gibbeted according to the Roman law which punished the first commission of that offense by whipping, and the second by exile or death in furca. See this law in the Digest Lib. 48. tit. 19 pg. 28.3 and Lipsius Lib. 2 de cruce sap. 2. These questions are examined in the books I have mentioned, under the head of religion, and several others. They will assist you in your inquiries, but keep your reason firmly on the watch in reading them all. Do not be frightened from this inquiry by any fear of it's consequences. If it ends in a belief that there is no god, you will find incitements to virtue in the comfort and pleasantness you fell in it's exercise, and the love of others which it will procure you. If you find reason to believe there is a god; a consciousness that you are acting under his eye, and that he approves you, will be a vast additional incitement; if that there be a future state, the hope of a happy existence in that increases the appetite of deserve it; if that Jesus was also a god, you will be comforted by a belief of his aid and love. In fine, I repeat that

you must lay aside all prejudice on both sides, and neither believe nor reject anything because any other persons, or description of persons have rejected or believed it. Your own reason is the only oracle given you by heaven, and you are answerable not for the rightness but uprightness of the decision. I forgot to observe when speaking of the New Testament that you should read all the histories of Christ, as well of those whom a council of ecclesiastics have decided for us to be Pseudo-evangelists, as those they named Evangelists. Because these Pseudo-evangelists pretended to inspiration as much as the others, and you are to judge their pretensions by your own reason, and not by the reason of those ecclesiastics. Most of them are lost. There are some however still extant, collected by Fabricus which I will endeavor to get and send to you.

B. Effect

Jefferson studied Bolingbroke systematically. Of him the young man learned methods of historical criticism. Once the whole superstructure of his past beliefs and collapsed, Jefferson undertook to rebuild his own philosophy of life, his own religion. Jefferson decided to take no man's opinion and plunged into a study of comparative philosophies and religions, a study which continued throughout the greater part of his life. Jefferson studied the old philosophers in order to find the moral props which the established dogma could no longer give him. In his old age, he came back to the morals of Jesus, but a Jesus stripped of all divinity.

1. To Peter Carr, Ford, Vol IV, pp. 428-432

Chapter III

Sources For Opinions Historical Background

From the voluminous amount of letters, documents, and speeches of Jefferson, we have found specific portions which deal with the theme of our paper. We feel it wise to record these sections with some amplification so the busy reader may have ready access to the sources without having to plough through pages of impertanent material.

A. The Common Place Book contains a repository of Jefferson's ideas on government. Religion and the Separation of Church and State is barely mentioned. Out of the 905 entries in the book, approximately 550 were written when Jefferson was a student.

B. The Notes on Religion, written in 1776 and endorsed by Jefferson as "scraps early in the revolution," contain notes for his speeches in the House of Delegates on the petitions for the disestablishment of the Church. Because of the rebinding of these papers, it is practically impossible to say if any order was intended. Although these Notes give us little information as to Jefferson's personal beliefs, nevertheless, it does give evidence of the deep research into historical Christianity and religious dogma that the man made. Using historical Christianity and a basis, Jefferson proceeds to point out in the Notes the historic basis for the separation of church and state.

C. In his Notes on Virginia of 1782, Jefferson reviews the religious conditions of the Virginia Colony from the time of its inception up to and including the time of the establishment of the Bill for Religious Freedom. These Notes were written at the request of the French government. A set of question requesting information on many subjects in-

cluding religion was sent to the governors of the various states. Jefferson, being then governor of Virginia, answered the questions by collecting into memoranda form notes which he had been collecting for quite sometime. It is interesting to note how the governor drifts from factual information and reviews the philosophy behind the movement which climaxed into the disestablishment of the Church.

H. The most subjective writing we have on Jefferson's personal opinions on religion is contained in a Syllabus which he prepared at the request of Dr. Benjamin Rush. It was written in 1789. Jefferson broke his silence on this matter in hopes of convincing his most intimate friends that he was not the infidel that his enemies had made him out to be. He took great care to keep the Syllabus from the public. When his enemies discovered it, Jefferson denied that he was writing a book on religion and ceased to develop the Syllabus. He then turned to a compilation of what is known today as the Jefferson Bible.

E. The Jefferson Bible was written during the same year that the Syllabus was written. In its first form it consisted of 46 pages containing excerpts from the Gospels dealing with Christ's teachings. Jefferson pasted these sayings in a book in what he believed was the true chronological order. All references to Jesus' divinity and miracles were omitted. Later Jefferson informed William Short that he spent two and three evenings a week preparing this Bible. It was called "The Philosophy of Jesus of Nazareth." Jefferson was never satisfied with this compilation. His desire was to add to it the Greek, Latin, and French texts together with an original translation of Epictetus and the doctrines of Epicurius as found in Pierre Gassendrs' "Syntagma." Jefferson

also intended to prepare a similar book for the Indians. The latter two plans were never carried out.

F. It was after October 31, 1819 that Jefferson put together his famous eighty-two page quadrilingual Bible entitled: "The Life and Morals of Jesus of Nazareth." Along with the Greek, Latin, French, and English texts in parallel columns. there appeared maps of Palestine and the ancient world. The Bible was bound in red leather and gilded. This work in content is not identical as the first Bible. "The Life and Morals of Jesus of Nazareth," begins with Luke 2, 1-7, the story of the journey made by Mary and Joseph to Bethlehem. It ends with Matthew 27-60 on the account of the rolling of the stone before Christ's tomb. Eighty-one incidents are recorded in this Bible. Jefferson's family knew nothing of this work. From a letter to a friend, the family later learned that it was Jefferson's custom to read large sections of it before retiring. In 1904 the congress authorized the printing of 9000 copies of this "Bible" to be distributed to libraries and other educational institutions. In this "Bible," like the first, all reference to the divinity of Christ and the miracles is omitted.

G. A few remarks on religion and government are found in the Anas, a portion of Jefferson's writings which have no chronological order. Probably started in 1791 and extending to 1806 with a preface added in 1818, and the Anas was intended to be a unit. It never reached that end.

H. Jefferson's Autobiography contains a section pertaining to the history of the struggle for the separation of the church from the state in the Virginia colony, and also a description of the conditions which

led up to such action.

I. Among the many law cases which Jefferson handled as a jurist, there are two of a religious nature, briefs and notes of which give the reader some knowledge of the extent of Jefferson's exploration on the subject of Christianity. In the case of the Bishop of Lincoln, the question arose whether Christianity was a part of the Common Law. Jefferson skillfully and eruditely contended that it was not and went as far back in English History as the Normans to prove his case.

A second case, Argument In Godwin et. vs Lunan, found Jefferson wrestling with the subject of the ecclesiastical jurisdiction of a civil court. Plaintiffs in the case were churchwardens and vestrymen of a county parish. Against their profligate priest, these men filed a libel suit in the General Court as court of ecclesiastical jurisdiction. At the time Jefferson took the case for the plaintiffs and believed beyond a doubt that a General Court had ecclesiastical jurisdiction but doubted whether this court could deprive the defendant of his parish because deprivation, Jefferson believed, was not a part of the office of an ecclesiastical judge.

J. And finally, scattered throughout the many letters which Jefferson wrote, there are pithy statements as well as long paragraphs on religion and religious matters. Of special interest in the letterwriting field is his correspondence with John Adams between 1812 and 1826. Both the Sage of Monticello and John Adams, mellowed in years, exchanged ideas on many subjects including religion. Both men were frank and open.

Of particular significance, and mention this fact again for emphasis, is this that Jefferson rarely spoke subjectively on religion. He would speak about religion but rarely of his own beliefs.

Chapter IV

The Religious Opinions Of Jefferson On:

A. Bible

Jefferson was an enthusiastic student of the Scriptures. He read it both for knowledge and inspiration. In times of great sorrow Jefferson turned to the Books of Books. The death of Maria, his daughter, shook the sixty-year-old man as he had not been since the death of his wife. For hours after the young woman died, the stricken Jefferson remained in his room with a Bible in his hand.

In 1808, Jefferson became interested in Charles Thompson's translation of the Septuagint and wrote several letters concerning it. On hearing that there were families in Virginia who did not have a Bible Jefferson, in a letter to Samuel Greenhow dated January 31, 1814, expressed shock at such a situation and enclosed a gift of fifty dollars for the distribution of the Scriptures.

Jefferson could never join the orthodox in saying that the Bible was literally inspired. He agreed that its teachings were incomparable for the development of the inner life but steadfastly maintained that the Book was written fallible man.

Several direct references are found in Jefferson's writings on the topic of inspiration. In the Notes on Religion, after reviewing the contents of the Gospels and Epistles, he said:

But yet every sentence in them (though the writers were inspired) must not be taken up and made a fundamental without assent to which a man is not to be admitted a member of the Christian church, here, or to his kingdom hereafter.¹

1. Notes On Religion, Ford, Vol. II, p. 94

We do not believe that at this time (1776) Jefferson held to the theological concept of inspiration. He merely used the term thus in the Notes to advance his arguments for the separation of the Church and State.

To his nephew, Peter Carr, Jefferson wrote:

Read the Bible then, as you would Livy or Tacitus. The facts which are within the ordinary course of nature you will believe on the authority of the writer, as you do those of the same kind in Livy and Tacitus. The testimony of the writer weighs in their favor in one scale, and their not being against the laws of nature, must be examined with more care, and under a variety of faces. Here you must recur to the pretensions of the writer to inspiration from god. Examine upon what evidence his pretensions are founded, and whether that evidence is so strong as that its false hood would be more improbable than a change in the laws of nature in the case he relates. For example in the book of Joshua we are told that the sun stood still several hours. Were we to read that fact in Livy or Tacitus we should class it with their showers of blood, speaking of statutes, beasts, etc. But it is said that the writer of that book was inspired. Examine therefore candidly what evidence there is of his having been inspired. The pretension is entitled to your inquiry, because millions believe it. On the other hand you are astronome enough to know contrary it is to the law of nature that a body revolving on its axis as the earth does, should have stopped, should not by that sudden stoppage have prostrated animals, trees, buildings, and should after a certain time have resumed its revolution, and that without a second general prostration. In this arrest of the earth's motion, or of the evidence which affirms it, most within the law of probabilities? You will next read the new testament. ¹

That Jefferson had a knowledge of the Scriptures is not only evidenced from the many quotations therefrom in his writings but also from his own description of the content of both the Old and New Testament.

1. To Peter Carr, Ford Vol. IV, P. 431.

As to that part of mankind who never had the gospel preached to them, they are 1. Jews,—2. Pagans, or Gentiles. The Jews and the law of works revealed to them. By this therefore they were to be saved; & a lively faith in god's promises to send the Messiah would supply small defects. 2. The Gentiles. St. Pa. says—Rom. 2.13. 'the Gentiles have the law written in their hearts,' i.e. the law of nature: to which adding a faith in God & his attributes that on their repentance he would pardon them, they also would be justified. This then explains the text 'there is no other name under heaven by which a man may be saved,' i.e. the defects in good works shall not be supplied by a faith in Mohomet Foe, (?) or any other except Christ. ¹

The fundamentals of Xty as found in the gospels are 1. Faith, 2. Repentance. That faith is every (where?) explained to be a belief that Jesus was the Messiah who had been promised. Repentance was to be proved sincerely by good works.

The Epistles were written to persons already Christians. A person might be a Xⁿ then before they were written. Consequently the fundamentals of Xty were to be found in the preaching of our Saviour, which is related in the gospels. These fundamentals are to be found in the epistles dropped here & there, & promiscuously mixed with other truths. But these other truths are not to be made fundamentals. They serve for edification indeed & explaining to us matters in worship & morality, but being written occasionally it will readily be seen that their explanations are adapted to the notions & customs of the people they were written to. (Writings of Thomas Jefferson, Vol. 2, Page 94)

Emphasizing further his opinions of the Bible, Jefferson adds these words on comparing the doctrines of Jesus with those of other philosophers:

In a comparative view of the Ethics of the enlightened Nations of antiquity, of the Jews and of Jesus, no notice should be taken of the corruptions of reason among the ancients, to wit, the idolatry and superstition of the vulgar, nor of the corruptions of Christianity by the learned among its professors.

1. Notes on Religion, Ford Vol. II, p. 94.

Let a just view be taken of the moral principles inculcated by the most esteemed of the sects of ancient philosophy, or of other individuals; particularly Pythagoras, Socrates, Epicurus, Cicero, Epictetus, Seneca, Antoninus.

I. Philosophers. 1. Their precepts related chiefly to ourselves, and the government of those passions which, unrestrained, would disturb our tranquillity of mind. In this branch of philosophy they were really great.

2. In developing our duties to others, they were short and defective. They embraced, indeed, the circles of kindred and friends, and inculcated patriotism, or the love of our country in the aggregate, as a primary obligation: towards our neighbors and countrymen they taught justice, but scarcely viewed them as within the circle of benevolence. Still less have the inculcated peace, charity and love to our fellow man, or embraced with benevolence the whole family of mankind.

II. Jews. 1. Their system was Deism: that is, the belief in one only God. But their ideas of him and of his attributes were degrading and injurious.

2. Their Ethics were not only imperfect, but often irreconcilable with the sound dictates of reason and morality, as they respect intercourse with those around us; and repulsive and anti-social, as respecting other nations. They needed reformation, therefore, in an eminent degree.

The disadvantages under which his (Jesus) doctrines appears are remarkable.

1. Like Socrates and Epictetus, he wrote nothing himself.

2. But he had not, like them, a Xenophon or an Arrian to write for him. I name not Plato, who only used the name of Socrates to cover the whimsies of his own brain. On the contrary, all the learned of his country, entrenched in its power and riches, were opposed to him, lest his labors should undermine their advantages; and the committing to writing his life and doctrines fell on unlettered and ignorant men; who wrote, too, from memory, and not till long after the transactions had passed.

3. According to the ordinary fate of those who attempt to enlighten and reform mankind, he fell an early victim to the jealousy and combination of the altar and the throne, at about thirty-three years of age, his reason having not yet attained the maximum of its energy, nor the course of his preaching, which was but of three years at most, presented occasions for developing a complete system of morals.

4. Hence the doctrines which he really delivered were defective as a whole, and fragments only of what he did deliver have come to us mutilated, mis-stated, and often unintelligible.

5. They have been still more disfigured by the corruptions of schismatizing followers, who have found an interest in sophisticating and perverting the simple doctrines he taught, by engrafting on them the mysticisms of a Grecian sophist, frittering them into subtleties, and obscuring them with jargon, until they have caused good men to reject the whole in disgust, and to view Jesus himself as impostor. ¹

Jefferson's opinion on the inspiration of Scriptures as stated in the Notes on Religion and in the letter to Peter Carr were written from an objective viewpoint. The latter quotation above as taken from the Syllabus is subjective and can be regarded, without qualification, Jefferson's belief about the Bible.

1. Syllabus, Memorial, Vol. X, p. 385.

Chapter V

B. Opinions on God

Jefferson believed in God, and based this belief on the evidence of God in Nature as well as the fact that such belief has been embraced by mankind since the dawn of history. To John Adams, he wrote in April of 1812:

When we take a view of the universe, in its parts, general or particular, it is impossible for the human mind not to perceive and feel a conviction of design, consummate skill, and indefinite power in every atom of its composition. So irresistible are these evidences of an intelligent and powerful agent, that of the infinite number of men who have existed through all time, they have believed, in the proportion of a million at least to a unit, in the hypothesis of an eternal pre-existence of a Creator, rather than in that of a self existing universe. ¹

Jefferson was not a Deist, that is, if by deism is meant a God withdrawn from His creation. Jefferson may have had deistic leanings during the crisis year of 1764-65, but that was short-lived. Jefferson's God was one of benign goodness, harsh justice, personal, and influential in the affairs of men collectively and individually. The approach to God came through the channel of prayer. In his second inaugural address, Jefferson says:

I shall need the favor of that Being in whose hands we are, who led our forefathers, as Israel of old, from their native land, and planted them in a country flowing with all the necessaries and comforts of life; who has covered our infancy with his Providence, and our riper years with his wisdom and power, and to whose goodness I ask you to join me in supplication. ²

In his comments on the yellow fever plague raging so violently

1. To John Adams, Memorial, Vol. XV, p. 427.

2. Second Inaugural, Memorial.

in Philadelphia in 1800, Jefferson wrote these words to Dr. Rush:

When great evils happen, I am in the habit of looking out for what good may arise from them as consolations to us, and Providence has in fact so established the order of things, as that most evils are the means of producing some good. ¹

Complete resignation to the will of God was an essential norm for living. The thoughts contained in the letter to John Page in 1763 is what Jefferson held to all his life and certainly is the antithesis of deistic thought.

"Perfect happiness, I believe, was never intended for the deity to be the lost of one of his creators in this world: but that he is very much put in our power, the nearness of our approaches to it is what I have steadfastly believed.

"The most fortunate of us in our journey through life frequently meet with calamities and misfortunes which may greatly afflict us: and, to fortify our minds against the attacks of these calamities and misfortunes should be one of the principal studies and endeavor of our life. The only method of doing this is to assume a perfect resignation to the divine will, to consider that whatever does happen, must happen: and that by our uneasiness we cannot prevent the blow before it does fall but we may add to its force after it has fallen. These considerations and such others as these may enable us in some measure to surmount the difficulties thrown our way: to bear up with a tolerable degree of patience under this burden of life: and to proceed with the pious and unshaken resignation till we arrive at our journey's end when we may deliver up our trust into the hands of Him who gave it, and receive such reward as to Him shall seem proportioned to our merit. Such, dear Page, will be the language of the man who considers his situation in life, and such should be the language of every man who would wish to render that situation as the nature of it will admit. Few things will disturb him at all: Nothing will disturb him much." ²

1. To Dr. Rush, Ford, Vol. VII, p. 459.

2. To John Page, Memorial Vol. V, p. 10.

Jefferson never embraced the trinitarian view of God, in fact, lashed out critically at this dogma in Christianity. To Adams, he wrote in 1813:

"It is too late in the day for men in sincerity to pretend they believe in the Platonic mysticisms that three are one, and one is three; and yet that the one is not three, and the three are not one...." ¹

Two months later, in October of 1813, Jefferson again wrote

Adams:

"We must leave, therefore, to others, younger and more learned than we are, to prepare the outhanasia for Platonic Christianity and its restoration to the primitive simplicity of its founder. I think you give a just outline of the theism of the three religions, when you say that the principle of the Hebrew was the fear of the Gentile, the honor of the Christian, the love of God."

As tolerant as Jefferson was of another man's beliefs, he took time to castigate Calvin. What irritated Jefferson in Calvinistic dogma was the doctrine of Predestination:

"I can never join Calvin in addressing his God. He was indeed an athiest, which I can never be: or rather his religion was daemonism. If ever a man worshipped a false God, he did. The God described in his fine points is not the God whom you acknowledge and adore, the Creator and Benevolent Governor of the world; but a daemin of malignant spirit." ²

Was Jefferson a Unitarian? That he found the Unitarian view of the doctrine on God to his taste is quite evident. To say that he embraced the Unitarian religion is incorrect as Jefferson never officially embraced any particualr sect. He disagreed with much of the doctrinal principles of the Unitarian church, especially the speculative aspects

1. To John Adams, Ford, Vol. IX, p. 412.

2. To John Adams, Memorial, XV, p. 427.

of their teachers and adherents as well as the principle that God can be found through finite reason. The remarks of Jefferson's personal physician, therefore, are misleading:

It is due, also, to that illustrious individual to say that, in all my intercourse with him, I never heard an observatium that savored, in the slightest degree, or impiety. His religious beliefs harmonized more closely with that of the Unitarians than any thoeer denomination, but it was liberal and untrammled by sectarian feelings and prejudices. ¹

To James Smith, Jefferson writes in December of 1822:

About Unitarianism, the doctrine of the early age of X^{IV}.....the pure and simple unity of the creator of the universe is now all but ascended in the Eastern States: it is dawning in the West, and advancing towards the South: and I confidently expect that the present generation will see Unitarianism become the general religion of the United States.....I write with freedom because, while I claim a right to believe in one God, if so my reason tells me, I yield₂ as freely to others that of believing in three.

In evidence of how strongly Jefferson felt that Unitarianism should come to his home state, Virginia, we read in a letter to Benjamin Waterhouse:

Monticello, July 19, 1822.

Dear Sir,—An anciently dislocated, and now stiffening wrist, makes writing an operation so slow and painful to me, that I should not so soon have troubled you with an acknowledgment of your favor of the 8th, but for the request it contained of my consent to the publication of my letter of June the 26th. No, my dear Sir, not for the world. Into what a nest of hornets would it thrust my head! The genus irritabile vatum, on whom artuments is lost, and reason is, by themselves, disclaimed in matters of religion. Don Quixote undertook to redress the bodily wrongs of the world, but the redressment of mental vagaries would be an enterprise more than Quixotic. I should as soon undertake to bring the crazy skulls of

1. Randall, Domestic Life of Thomas Jefferson, p. 423.

2. To James Smith, Memorial, Vol. XV, p. 410.

Bedlam to sound understanding, as inculcate reason into that of an Athanasian. I am old, and tranquility is now my summum bonum. Keep me, therefore, from the fire and faggots of Calvin and his victim Servetus. Happy is the prospect of a restoration of primitive Christianity, I must leave to younger athletes to encounter and lop off the false branches which have been engrafted into it by the mythologists of the middle and modern ages. I am not aware of the peculiar resistance to Unitarianism, which you ascribe to Pennsylvania. When I lived in Philadelphia, there was respectable congregation of that sect, with a meeting-house and regular service which I attended, and in which Dr. Priestly officiated to numerous audiences. Baltimore has one or two churches, and their pastor, author of an inestimable book on this subject, was elected chaplain to the late Congress. That doctrine has not yet been preached to us; but the breeze begins to be felt which precedes the storm, and fanaticism is all in a bustle, shutting its doors and windows to keep it out. But it will come, and drive before it the foggy mists of Platonisms which have so long obscured our atmosphere. I am in hopes that some of the disciples of your institution will become missionaries to us, of these doctrines truly evangelical, and open our eyes to what has been so long hidden from them. A bold and eloquent preacher would be nowhere listened to with more freedom than in this State, nor with more firmness of mind. They might need a preparatory discourse on the text of "prove all things, hold fast that which is good," in order to unlearn the lesson that reason is an unlawful guide in religion. They might startle on being first awaked from the dreams of the night, but they would rub their eyes at once, and look the spectres boldly in the face. The preacher might be excluded by our hierophants from their churches and meeting-houses, but would be attended in the fields by whole acres of hearers and thinkers. Missionaries from Cambridge would soon be greeted with more welcome, than from the tritheistical school of Andover. Such are my wishes, such would be my welcomes, warm and cordial as the assurances of my esteem and respect for you. ¹

1. To Benjamin Waterhouse, Memorial, Vol. X, pp. 220-221.

When a certain Reverend Isaac Story attempted to interest Jefferson in the theory of the transmigration of the soul, he replies thus in a letter:

It is not for me to pronounce on the hypothesis you present of a transmigration of souls from one body to another in certain cases. The laws of nature had withheld from us the means of physical knowledge of the country of spirits, and revelation had, for reasons unknown to us, chosen to leave us in the dark as we were.....I have thought it better, by nourishing the good passions and controlling the bad, to merit an inheritance in a state of being of which I knew so little, and to trust for the future to him who has been so good for the past. ¹

For a short while during his youth, Jefferson enjoyed speculating on things of the eternal but learned early that such a procedure would get him nowhere. He openly refused to accept the Unitarian principle that a perfect knowledge of God could be achieved through finite reason, and followed the road of resignation by reposing his head:

On that pillow of ignorance which a benevolent Creator has made so soft for us, knowing how much we should be forced to use it. ²

Aside from the fact that Jefferson disagreed with the Unitarian sect on certain principles, the underlying reason that the Unitarians cannot claim him rests on his belief:

I never submitted the whole system of my opinions to the creed of any party of men whatever in religion, philosophy, in politics, or in anything else where I was capable of thinking for myself.

1. To Rev. Isaac Story, Ford, Vol. VIII, p. 107.
2. To Rev. Isaac Story, Ford, Vol. VIII, p. 107.

Chapter VI

C. Opinions on Morality

The philosophers of the 18th century were forever attempting to prove that there was no connection between religion and morality. Jefferson went a step farther on the question and maintained that religion was morality:

It is more than an inner connection of the existence of the Creator; true religion is morality. If by religion we are to understand sectarian dogmas, in which no two of them agree, then your explanation on that hypothesis is just that this would be the best possible of all possible worlds, if there were no religion in it:- But if the moral precepts, innate in man, and made a part of his physical constitution, as necessary for a social being, if the sublime doctrines of philanthropism and deism taught us by Jesus of Nazareth, in which we all agree, constitute true religion then, without it, this would be, as you again say, 'something not fit to be named even, indeed, a hell!'¹

This morality, which Jefferson maintained was religion, was innate and a part of his physical constitution:

Man was destined for society. His morality therefore was to be formed to this object. He was endowed with a sense of right and wrong merely relative to this. This sense is as much a part of his nature as the sense of hearing, seeing, feeling: it is the true foundation of morality, and not the ~~to the~~ truth, etc., as fanciful writers have imagined. The moral sense, or conscience, is as much a part of man as his leg or arm. It is given to all human beings in a stronger or weaker degree, as force of members is given them in a greater or lesser degree. It may be strengthened by exercise, as may any particular limb of the body. This sense is submitted indeed in some degree to the guidance of reason; but it is a small stock which is required for this; even a less one than that we call common sense. State a moral case to a ploughman and a professor. The farmer will decide it as well, and often better than the latter, because he has not been led astray by artificial rules.²

1. To John Adams, Memorial, Vol. XV, p. 427.
2. To Peter Carr, Memorial, Vol. VI, p. 256.

In a letter to Thomas Law in 1814, Jefferson further explained morality. He held that it was not truth because of the elusiveness and unattainability of truth. He did not think morality consisted of the "love of God" because there are atheists who have a moral sense of values. Jefferson did not believe that the to KudoV was morality either because of the number of people who have no aesthetic sense.

The truth of the matter is, that nature has implanted in our breasts a love of others, a sense of duty to them, a moral instinct, in short, which prompts us irresistably to feel and succor their distress. It is true that these social dispositions are not implanted in every man, because there is no rule without exceptions into the general rule. Some men are born without the organs of sight, or of hearing, or without hands. Yet it would be wrong to say that man is born without these faculties. When the moral sense is wanting, we endeavor to supply the defect by education; by appeals to reason and calculation, by presenting to the being so unhappily conformed other motives to do good. But nature has constituted utility to man the social test of virtue. The same act may be useful and consequently virtuous in a country which is injurious and vicious in other differently circumstances. I sincerely then believe, with you, in the general existence of a moral instinct. I think it is the brightest gem with which the human character is studded and the want of it is more degrading than the most hideous of the bodily deformities.¹

In sharp contrast to Rousseau who also believed in a creator and the presence of a moral instinct "but who would have denied that this moral instinct was nothing but social instinct," Jefferson was led to accept the existence of morality "chiefly because man being a social being, society cannot be organized and subsist if it is not composed of moral beings."² The manifestation of morality, according to Jefferson, lies in man's utility to man.

1. To John Law, Memorial, Vol. XIV, p. 141.
2. Chinard, The Apostle of America, p. 527-528

The relationship between particular and peculiar dogmas of a religion and moral precepts are viewed by Jefferson thus:

Reading, reflection and time have convinced me that the interests of society require the observation of those moral precepts in which all religions agree, (for all forbid us to murder, steal, plunder, or bear false witness) and that we should not intermeddle with the particular dogmas in which all religions differ, and which are totally unconnected with morality. In all of them we see good men, and as many in one as another. The varieties of structure of action of the human mind as in those in the body, are the work of our Creator, against which it cannot be a religious duty to erect the standard of uniformity. The practice of morality being necessary for the well being of society, he has taken care to impress its precepts indelibly on our hearts that they shall not be effaced by the subtleties of our brain.¹

1. To James Fishback, Memorial, Vol.XII, p. 315.

Chapter VII

D. Opinions on Jesus Christ

Morality, according to Jefferson, was innate in man. The manifestation of morality lies in social utility. This being so, it remained to be seen whether man could find a code of morality that would express these God-impressed precepts. While a student at Williamsburg, Jefferson accepted Bolingbroke's opinion concerning Jesus Christ:

It is not true that Christ revealed an entire body of ethics, proved to be the law of nature from principles of reason and reaching all duties of life.... a system thus collected from the writings of the ancient heathen moralists, of Tully, of Seneca, of Epictetus, and others, would be more full, more entire, more coherent, and more clearly deduced from unquestionable principles of knowledge.¹

In his later years, Jefferson came to the conclusion that the morality and ethics espoused by Jesus was the best that the world had. In 1803, after reading Dr. Priestly's treatise, "Of Socrates and Jesus," Jefferson wrote:

His moral doctrines relating to kindred and friends were more perfect than those of the most correct of the philosophers and....they went far in inculcating universal philanthropy not only to kindred and friends, to neighbors and countrymen, but to all mankind, gathering all into one family, under the bonds of love, charity, peace, common wants and common aids. A development of this head will evince the peculiar superiority of the system of Jesus over all others.²

In another letter along the same lines, Jefferson said:

An eloquent preacher....is said to have exclaimed aloud to his congregation that he did not believe there was a Quaker, Presbyterian, Methodist, or Baptist in heaven.... He added, that in heaven, God knew no distinctions, but considered all good men as his children, and as brethren of the same family. I believe with the Quaker preacher,

1. Chinard, *The Literary Bible of Thomas A. Jefferson*, p. 58.
2. *Syllabus, Memorial, Vol. X*, p. 379.

That he who steadily observes those moral precepts in which all religions concur will never be questioned at the gates of heaven, as to the dogmas in which they all differ....of all the systems of morality, ancient or modern....none appear to me so pure as that of Jesus.¹

In regard to the person of Jesus, Jefferson clearly stated his opinion thus:

In this state of things among the Jews, Jesus appeared. His parentage was obscure; his condition poor; his education null; his natural endowments great; his life correct and innocent; he was meek, benevolent, patient, firm, disinterested, and of the sublimest eloquence.

The disadvantages under which his (Jesus) doctrines appear are remarkable.

1. Like Socrates and Epictetus, he wrote nothing himself.
2. But he had not, like them, a Xenophon or an Arrian to write for him. I name not Plato, who only used the name of Socrates to cover the whimsies of his own brain. On the contrary, all the learned of his country, entrenched in its power and riches, were opposed to him, lest his labors should undermine their advantages; and the committing to writing his life and doctrines fell on unlettered and ignorant men; who wrote, too, from memory, and not till long after the transactions had passed.
3. According to the ordinary fate of those who attempt to enlighten and reform mankind, he fell an early victim to the jealousy and combination of the altar and the throne, at about thirty-three years of age, his reason having not yet attained the maximum of its energy, nor the course of his preaching, which was but of three years at most, presented occasions for developing a complete system of morals.
4. Hence the doctrines which he really delivered were defective as a whole, and fragments only of what he did deliver have come to us mutilated, misstated, and often unintelligible.
5. They have been still more disfigured by the cor-

¹. To William Conley, Memorial, XIII, p.377.

ruptions of schismatizing followers, who have found and interest in sophisticating and perverting the simple doctrines he taught, by engrafting on them the mysticisms of a Grecian sophist, frittering them into subtleties, and obscuring them with jargon, until they have caused good men to reject the whole in disgust and to view Jesus himself as impostor.

Notwithstanding these disadvantages, a system of morals is presented to us, which, if filled up in the style and spirit of the rich fragments he left us, would be the most perfect and sublime that has ever been taught by man.¹

In this state of things among the Jews, Jesus appeared.

On the matter of Christ's divinity and as a member of the Godhead

Jefferson leaves no doubt as to his opinion:

The question of his being a member of the Godhead, or in direct communication with it, claimed for him by some of his followers, and denied by others, is foreign to the present view, which is merely an estimate of the intrinsic merits of his doctrines.²

What Jesus of Nazareth actually accomplished in contrast to the Jewish religion, Jefferson gave this opinion:

1. He corrected the Deism of the Jews, confirming them in their belief of one only God, and giving them juster notions of his attributes and government.

2. His moral doctrines, relating to kindred and friends, were more pure and perfect than those of the most correct of the philosophers, and greatly more so than those of the Jews; and they went far beyond both in inculcating universal philanthropy, not only to kindred and friends, to neighbors and countrymen, but to all mankind, gathering all into one family, under the bonds of love, charity, peace, common wants and common aids. A development of this head will evince the peculiar superiority of the system of Jesus over all others.

3. The precepts of philosophy, and of the Hebrew code, laid hold of actions only. He pushed his scrutinies into the heart of man; erected his tribunal in the region of his thoughts, and purified the waters at the fountain head.

1. Syllabus, Memorial, Vol. I, p. 383.

2. Syllabus, Memorial, Vol. X, p. 383.

4. He taught, emphatically, the doctrines of a future state, which was either doubted, or disbelieved by the Jews; and wielded it with efficacy, as an important incentive, supplementary to the other motives to moral conduct.¹

In an interesting letter to Dr. Benjamin Waterhouse, dated June 26, 1822, Jefferson attempted to contrast what he believed to be the teaching of Jesus with that of Calvin:

Dear Sir,—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 every thing, 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.

1. Syllabus, Memorial, Vol. X., p. 365.

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. I rejoice that in this blessed country of free inquiry and belief, which has surrendered its creed and conscience to neither kings nor priests, the genuine doctrine of one only God is reviving, and I trust that there is not a young man now living in the United States who not die an Unitarian.

But much I fear, that when this great truth shall be re-established, its votaries will fall into the fatal error of fabricating formulas of creed and confessions of faith, the engines which so soon destroyed the religion of Jesus, and made of Christendom a mere Aeldama; that they will give up morals for mysteries, and Jesus for Plato. How much wiser are the Quakers, who, agreeing in the fundamental doctrines of the gospel, schismatize about no mysteries, and, keeping within the pale of common sense, suffer no speculative differences of opinion, any more than of feature to impair the love of their brethren. Be this the wisdom of Unitarians, this the holy mantle which shall cover within its charitable circumference all who believe in one God, and who love their neighbor! I conclude my sermon with sincere assurances of my friendly esteem and respect.¹

Even at an earlier date Jefferson blatantly criticized the orthodox clergy for disfiguring, as he called it, the teachings of Jesus:

The Priests have so disfigured the simple religion of Jesus that no one who reads the

1. To Benjamin Waterhouse, Ford, Vol.X, p. 219-220.

sophistications they have engrafted on it, from the jargon of Plato, of Aristotle, and other mystics, would conceive there could have been fathered as the sublime preacher of the sermon on the mount. Yet, knowing the importance of names they have assumed that of Christians, while they are mere Platonists, or anything rather than disciples of Jesus.¹

Jefferson revealed his opinion on "faith" in a letter to John Adams in 1813 while blasting away at the "platonizing" priests:

Sweep away their (priests) gossamer fabrics of factitious religion, and they would catch no more flies. We should all then, like the Quakers, live without an order of priests, moralize for ourselves, follow the oracles of conscience, and say nothing about that no man can understand, nor therefore believe; for I suppose belief to be the ascent of the mind to an intelligible proposition.²

Jefferson held Plato responsible for the disfigurement of Christianity and viciously spoke against him thus:

Bring Plato to the test of reason, take him from his sophisms, futilities and incomprehensibilities, and what remains? In truth, he is one of the race of genuine sophists, who has escaped the oblivion of his brethren, first by the elegance of his diction, but chiefly, by the adoption of artificial Christianity. His foggy mind is forever presenting the semblances of objects, which half-seen through a mist, can be defined neither in form nor dimension. Yet this, which should have been consigned him to early oblivion, really procured him immortality of fame and reverence.³

To the last, Jefferson looked upon himself as a Christian and explained what he meant thereby:

I am a Christian, in the only sense in which He wished anyone to be, sincerely attached to His doctrines, in preference to all others; ascribing to himself every human excellence; and believing he never claimed any other.⁴

1. To Benjamin Waterhouse, Ford, Vol.X., p. 532.
2. To John Adams, Ford, Vol.X., P. 412-413.
3. To John Adams, Ford, Vol.X., P. 463
4. Syllabus, Memorial, Vol.X., P. 380.

Chapter VIII

F. Opinions on Church Government

Jefferson's opinion on church government, like his principles of religion, changed with the years. In his Notes on Religion of 1776, he goes to great detail to break down the historical argument of the episcopal system. By an exegetical process, Jefferson points out the synonymous meanings of "bishop" and "elder" as found in the New Testament (1 Tim. 3, 2; 4, 14; 5, 17; 5, 22. Titus 1, 3-10; James 5, 14, etc.) 2 Cor. 1, 24, Jefferson quotes to show that the apostles had no claim of religious authority. Another argument advanced for episcopal government by a king. "No bishop, no king." This contention, Jefferson refuted by pleading for a government by a presbytery because it "resembles republican government." In the same breath, Jefferson sounded the warning:

The clergy have ever seen this. The bishops were always mere tools of the crown. The Presbyterian spirit is known to be so congenial with friendly liberty, that the partits after the restoration finding that the humor of people was running too strongly to exact the prerogative of the crown prompted and dissenting interest as a check and balance, and thus was produces the Toleration Act. (1689) ¹

The Roman Catholic's position on church government is refuted tersely:

St. Peter gave the title of clergy to all God's people till Pope Higinus and ye succeeding prelates took it from them and appropriated it to priests only. ²

1. Notes on Religion, Ford, Vol. II, p. 99.
2. Notes on Religion, Ford, Vol. II, p. 99.

To further repudiate the claim of the Catholic hierarchy, Jefferson points to historical events and precedent involving prominent church fathers.

Origen, being yet a layman, expounded the criptures publicly & was therein defended by Alexander of Jerusalem & Theodotn of Caesarea producing in his behalf divers examples that the privilege of teaching was antiently permitted to laymen. The first Nicene council called in the assistance of many learned lay brethren. ib. 230.

Bishops were elected by the hands of the whole church. Ignatius (the most ant^c of the extant fathers) writing to the Philadelphians sais 'that it belongs to them as to the church of god to chuse a bishop.' Camden in his description of Scotl^d sais 'that all over the world bps had no certain dioces till pope Dionysius about the year 268 did cut them out, & that the bps of Scotl^d extd their function in what place soever they came, indifferently till temp Malcolm 3. 1070.'

Cyprian, epist. 68 sais 'the people chiefly hath power either of chusing worthy or refusing unworthy bps the council of Nice contrary to the African churches exorts them to chuse orthodox bps in the place of the dead.' I Milt. 254.

Nicephorus Phocas the Greek emperor Ann. 1000 first enacted that no bps sh^d be chozen without his will. Ignatuis in his epistle to those of Tra(mutilated) confesseth that the presybters are his fellow-sellers & fellow henchers & Cyprian in the 6. 4. 52. epst. calls the presbyters, 'his con-presbyters' yet he was a bps. A modern bps to be moulded into a primitive one must be elected by the people, undiocest, unrevenued, unlorded. I Milt. 255. From the dissensions among sects themselves arises necessarily a right of chusing & necessity of deliberating to which we will conform, but if we chuse for ourselves, we must allow others to chuse also, & to reciprocity. This establishes religious liberty. 1

By 1801, Jefferson had again changed his position on church government. He concluded that a perfect religious society would be one freed of a paid ministry, and where individuals would be free to moralize for themselves. The Quaker system appealed to him.

1. Notes on Religion, Ford, Vol. II, p. 99.

They (printers) like the clergy, live by the zeal they can kindle, and the schisms they can create. It is contest of opinion in politics as well as religion which makes us take great interest in them, and bestow our money liberally on those who furnish aliment (?) to our appetite. The mind and simple principles of the christian philosophy would produce too much calm, too much regularity of good, to extract from its disciples a support for a numerous priesthood, were they not to sophisticate it, ramify it, split it into hairs, and twist its 'texts till they cover the divine morality of its' author with mysteries and require a priesthood to explain them. The Quakers seem to have discovered this. They have no priests, therefore no schisms. They judge of the text by the dictates of a common sense and common morality.

The congregational form of church government is never referred to by Jefferson but in all probability would have met with his approval.

1. To Elbridge Gerry, Ford, Vol. VIII, p. 42.

Chapter IX

Opinions on Life After Death

Jefferson never categorically denied the existence of a future life after death. Temporal life had purpose and meaning; eternal life was spent in a state of reward or punishment. When asked by Adams whether he would agree to live his seventy-three years over again, Jefferson enthusiastically replied:

Yea—I think with you that it is a good world on the whole: that it has been framed on a principle of benevolence, and more pleasure than pain dealt to us....my temperament is sanguine. I steer my bark with Hope in the head, leaving Fear astern. My hopes, indeed, sometimes fail, but not oftener than the foreboding of the gloomy.¹

At the age of seventy-four, Jefferson wrote Abigail Adams his philosophical ideas on death thus:

....the Being who presides over the world is essentially benevolent. Stealing from us, one by one, the faculties of enjoyment, searing our sensibilities, leading us like the horse in his mill, round and round the same beaten circle....until satiated and fatigued with this leaden iteration we ask our courage.²

Plato's views regarding immortality were repugnant to Jefferson. If no better arguments could be produced on a future life than those offered by Plato, there was no real justification for a belief in the existence of it. It was on certain ethical and religious grounds that Jefferson saw an eternity beyond the grave. Jefferson believed that God would judge men according to the use they made of their reason, and that a state of reward and punishment awaited them as a result of those

1. To John Adams, Memorial, Vol. XIV, p. 467.
2. To Abigail Adams, Ford, Vol X, p. 70.

decisions of reason. According to Jefferson, God was desirous of having all men saved. To Thomas Jefferson Smith in 1825, at the request of the lad's father to give counsel to the young man, Jefferson wrote:

Adore God, reverence and cherish your parents. Love your neighbor as yourself, and your country more than yourself. Be just. Be true. Murmur not at the ways of Providence. So shall the life into which you have entered be the portal to one of eternal and ineffable bliss. ¹

To John Adams, upon the death of Mrs. Adams, Jefferson further expounded his views on immortality:

....it is some comfort to us both, that the term is not very distant, at which we are to deposit in the same cœment our sorrows and suffering bodies, and to ascend in essence to an ecstatic meeting with the friends we have loved and lost, and whom we shall still love and never lose again. ²

John Adams' reply to the above letter is interesting and in all probability agreed with Jefferson's thinking:

I know not how to prove, physically, that we shall meet and know each other in a future state; nor does revelation; as I can find, give us any positive assurance of such a felicity. My reasons for believing it, as I do most undoubtedly, are that I cannot conceive such a being could make such a species as the human merely to live and die on this earth. If I did not believe a future state, I could believe in no God. ³

To Thomas Jefferson Smith, Jefferson adds a pertinent remark:

And if to the dead it is permitted to care for the things of this world, every action of your life will be under my regard. ⁴

1. To Thomas Jefferson Smith, Ford, Vol. X, p. 340.
2. To John Adams, Memorial, Vol. XI, p. 174.
3. Correspondence of John Adams and Thomas Jefferson 1812-1826, Selected with Comment by Paul Wiltach, page 162.
4. To Thomas Jefferson Smith, Vol. X, p. 340.

Chapter X

H. Opinions on Liturgics

Jefferson, accustomed to Anglican liturgy in public worship, disapproved of the revival meetings found in many of the Protestant churches of that day. In a letter addressed to Thomas Cooper, Nov. 2, 1822, Jefferson tells about a revival meeting of women in Richmond who

...have their night meetings and praying parties, where, attended by their priests, and sometimes by a henpecked husband, they pour forth the effusions of their love to Jesus, in terms as amatory and carnal as their modesty would permit them to use to a mere earthly lover. ¹

When attending his own church, Jefferson always took his own prayer book along. He always took part in the responses and prayers. It is known that Jefferson preferred psalm tunes to hymns, considering the latter not sufficiently dignified for worship.

1. To Thomas Cooper, Memorial, Vol. XV, p. 405.

CONCLUSIONS

Thomas A. Jefferson, born into the Anglican Faith, never officially identified himself with any particular sect or denomination. After the critical years around 1764, Jefferson set out to build his own philosophy of life. He studied the old philosophies in order to find the moral props which Anglican dogma could no longer give him, and, in his old age, came back to the morals of Jesus. Although Jefferson did not look upon the Bible as the verbally inspired word of God, he always held the Book in high esteem and found it as a valuable source for the development of the inner life of man. Thomas Jefferson was not a Deist. He believed in a personal God. The Trinitarian view was entirely foreign to his thinking. Thomas Jefferson looked upon Christ, not as the divine Son of God, but the greatest moralist the world produced. Morality, to Jefferson, was an item born in man and ever in need of development. The morals espoused by Jesus came closer to the morals innate in man than in any other philosophy. Thomas Jefferson believed in a life after death. On January 11, 1817 Jefferson summed up his religious opinions for John Adams with these words:

The result of your fifty or sixty years of religious reading, in the fourwords 'Be just and good' is that in which all our inquiries must end; as the riddles of all priesthoods end in four more: 'ubi panis, ibi deus'. What all agree in, is probably right. What no two agree in, most probably wrong. One of our fan-coloring biographers, who paints small men as very great, inquired of me lately, with real affection too, whether he might consider as authentic, the change in my religion much spoken of in many circles.

Now this supposed that they knew what had been my religion before, taking for it the words of their priests, when I certainly never made the confidants of my creed. My answer was 'say nothing of my religion. It is known to my God and myself alone.'

It's evidence before the world is to be sought in my life; if that has been honest and dutiful to society, the religion which has regulated it cannot be a bad one.'¹

1. To John Adams, Ford, Vol.X., p. 73.

Chapter XI

Jefferson's Opinions on Church and State and Religious Liberty

A. Religious Conditions in the Colony of Virginia

The first settlers in Virginia brought no religious grievance with them. Primarily engaged in the search for wealth, the early Virginians merely transplanted the English social system, government and religion, into American soil. A complete eradication of dissenting religious sects had just taken place in England. This same prejudice was put to practice in America. To deny the doctrine of the Trinity was a major crime punishable with imprisonment. A blasphemer could be punished by the boring of a hot poker through the tongue, children of Unitarian parents could be legally removed from their home and entrusted to a family of the Trinitarians. Those who lived in open and unrestricted "heresy" could be burned alive.

The church in Virginia was included in the diocese of London and hence, under the direction of that bishop. History tells us that consideration was once given to send Jonathan Swift to Virginia as bishop of the colony. However, the move never occurred. The ministers of the colony were generally unfit, intellectually and spiritually, for their professional duties. Pay was poor; slovenliness was common. Many of the parish priests live loose and profligate lives.

People rebelled at these conditions. Bacon's uprising abolished for a short time the perpetual vestry system and provided for the election of a new vestry every two years. After the rebellion had been crushed, the old system was re-established.

Sect after sect challenged this autocratic state-church ar-

rangement only to fall under its withering attacks. In 1642 the Puritans came only to be driven by force from the colony. Laws were enacted which laid a heavy fine on the captain of any vessel which transported this sect to the colony. The death penalty was exercised if a dissenter returned to the colony after expulsion. It was even declared a crime for the Puritans to hold religious services in their own homes.

In 1683 the Scotch-Irish Presbyterians appeared. They came from the Old Country for religious motives. Promising to settle in western Virginia and to hold these borders against hostile Indians, they asked only "that they be allowed the liberty of their conscience and in worshipping God in any way agreeable to the principles of their education." By nature and temperament, these people were natural enemies of arbitrary government in both state and church. By forceful progression, the Scotch-Irish Presbyterians did secure the Toleration Act which made the aristocratic landowners and vestrymen squirm. Says Dr. Eckenrode:

Church and State had been closely ruled by the upper class of planters. The setting up of a rival sect in the colony, with a form of government responsible to popular wishes, broke in upon the autocracy of the old regime. The crust of privilege was broken and democratic ideas in religion and politics spread and strengthened.¹

On the heels of the quiet and reserved Presbyterians came the Methodists and Baptists with a crusading spirit of fervor and fire. These two sects really aroused the ire and wrath of the Established Church. In town and country the Baptists preached to the people, and avoiding all discretion, vehemently denounced the established order and the intolerant acts. Something had to be done. More interested

probably in the social and political systems than the protection of Anglicanism, the persecution of the Baptists began. Pounced upon and beaten, jailed and imprisoned, the persecuted Baptists stormed on. A young student by the name of James Madison wrote his impression of these conditions thus:

I want again to breathe your free air. I expect it will mend my constitution and confirm my principles. I have, indeed, as good an atmosphere at home as the climate will allow, but have nothing to brag of as to the state and liberty of my country. Poverty and luxury prevail among all sorts; pride, ignorance, and knavery among the priesthood; and vice and wickedness among the laity. That is bad enough; but it is not the worst I have to tell you. That diabolical, hell-conceived principle of persecution rages among some; and, to their eternal infamy, the clergy can furnish their quota of imps for such purposes....There are, at this time, in the adjacent county, not less than five or six well-meaning men in close jail for publishing their religious sentiments, which, in the main, are very orthodox. I have neither patience to hear, talk, or think of anything relative to this matter; for I have squabbled and scolded, abused and ridiculed so long about it to little purpose that I am without common patience. So I must beg you to pity me, and pray for liberty of conscience to all.

For a number of years, Jefferson witnessed these turbulent scenes. He retired to his books and studied the problem. Patrick Henry and the parson's case aroused his interest. Jefferson had thought deeply on the subject and read extensively. When the gavel of Pendelton called the Assembly to order on October 7, 1776, Jefferson was ready for battle. He was intent on persuading others to the separation of Church and State, and eagerly set out to codify the immortal Ordinance of Religious Freedom.

Chapter XII

B. Jefferson's Struggle for Religious Liberty

As a member of the committee of religion which was assigned the task "to meet....and to take into consideration all matters and things relating to religion and religious morality," Jefferson at once began his fight for an Ordinance on Religious Freedom. The road was long and better. It took six years.

On the committee besides Jefferson were seventeen members representing every sect, but of which the defenders of the Established Church were in a comfortable majority. With Jefferson, stood George Mason and James Madison, two of the greater minds of Virginia. In opposition there were Edmund Pendelton and Robert Nicholas of equal quality and character.

The first struggle continued for three months. While petitions from the public poured into the committee, propaganda pamphlets from both sides appeared on the streets. Men argued heatedly on the issue in the dusty streets of Williamsburg. In homes and behind closed doors of the Raleigh Tavern, leaders conferred and planned strategy.

On November 6, 1776, the Committee of Religion referred the petitions to the committee of the whole House. The opposition was unable to pigeonhole the issue. On the floor a debate ensued resulting in the adoption of a resolution which opened the way toward the goal for religious freedom. The resolution gained these three points: (1) That criminal statutes were not valid and applicable in matter of religious opinion and church attendance. (2) That taxation for support of a church to which conscience did not conform was unreasonable. (3) All

acts providing for the support of the clergy should be revised. The resolution also provided "That all glebe lands, churches, chapels, and plate should be confirmed in the church for all times, and that all arrears of money or tobacco should be paid."

A committee was then chosen to draw up a bill in conformity with these resolutions. The final bill passed conformed to the House resolutions. This occurred on January 1, 1777. A large concession to religious liberty was made but there still remained a connection between church and state. The Established Church hoped that suspension from paying would not be continued after the session of 1777.

After this initial engagement, Jefferson comments in his autobiography, thus:

We prevailed so far only, as to repeal the laws which rendered criminal the maintenance of any religious opinions, the forbearance of repairing to church, or the exercise of any mode of worship; and further, to exempt dissenters from contributing to the support of the established church; and to suspend, only until next session, levies on the members of that church for the salaries of their own incumbents.¹

Pleased with the progress, Jefferson was far from his desired goal of complete separation. All that had been accomplished in this first Session was that of releasing the dissenters from the support of the State Church. He frowned too upon the State's privilege to regulate religious assemblies. Jefferson, too, was aware of the Established Church's plan to gain a general assessment. Jefferson maintained that each sect should support itself through voluntary contributions.

At the May sessions of 1777, the Established Church again sought payment of salaries from the State. It was blocked. After this the

1. Autobiography, Ford, Vol.I, p.58.

Church tried the general assessment plan. Jefferson successfully held the line. The suspension of salaries was continued and never again introduced.

In the Session of 1779, another decisive blow was struck. Petitioners demanded the abolition of the glebe and vestry system. Jefferson was made chairman of the committee that discussed these petitions. Immediately the committee responded with a bill providing for the election by the people of a new order of choosing officers. This revolutionary move was deferred by the Assembly. The dying opposition rallied and stiffened but of no avail. Soon the glebes were gone.

The opposition never gave up. Again they rallied for a general assessment. Jefferson, by this time, had been transferred to the Palace of The Governor and was no longer in a position to direct and manage his campaign. In addition, things became a little more complicated because Patrick Henry had now joined forces with Pendelton. Through James Madison, however, Jefferson fought the issue. Madison was no match against the eloquent Henry. His vision and logic were superior to that of Henry, but to the mass of people it was the fiery eloquence of Henry that stood out. It took until 1785 to defeat for all time the general assessment principle.

In the spring of 1779 already the legislature ordered the framing of a bill for religious freedom. Jefferson's hour had come. Although still working at the Palace of the Governor, he threw his whole weight behind the issue through James Madison. The Ordinance was introduced. Immediately crisis of heresy arose from the opposition. So noisy was the protest that the legislature postponed action. In the autumn of 1779, The Bill was again introduced. This time the legislature not only closed

ranks against the Ordinance but decided to take the offensive and introduced a bill stating "The Christian Religion shall in all times be deemed and help to be the established religion of the Commonwealth." The issue at stake was that since the State Church could not be revived, a State Religion would serve the same purpose. Jefferson saw quickly the ruse and succeeded in having the Bill defeated. On the other hand, the Ordinance made no progress.

The fight for the adoption of the Ordinance was to continue on through the years, of Jefferson's governorship, his period of retirement, his congressional service, and during his ambassadorship to France. It was not until 1785, six years after the original introduction, that the Bill became law, and then only after encountering last minute parliamentary subtleties on the part of Edmund Pendelton. It appears that during 1785 the Established Church once again attempted to get a general assessment and to incorporate the Episcopal Church into the State System. The Ordinance was introduced too. Pendelton planned to weaken the Bill by amending it with a few but very important words. In one amendment, he recommended "Christian" forbearance, love, and charity in place of law. Madison quickly sensed the subtlety behind the move and had the amendment voted down. A second amendment centered around the subject of "Jesus Christ, the holy author of our religion." Since the spirit of the Ordinance was to protect all sects, Jews and infidels alike, this amendment too was defeated. After all amendments failed the Established Church fought to postpone a final vote. A few changes in the Preamble occurred which did not alter the meaning and spirit of the Bill. On 1785, the Ordinance was passed and thus was closed one of the most important and bitter struggle for religious freedom in America.

Jefferson, in Paris at the time, was quite elated. He had copies printed and distributed to other officials of other countries. The fame of the Bill as well as it's contents shook the world.

views on religious liberty and the strict separation of church and state. It was not religious tolerance that Jefferson sought, but complete liberty for all sects, Catholic, Jew, Protestant, and the atheist. It was not partial separation of church and state that he contemplated, but a clear-cut cleavage of both in national life.

Whether Jefferson ever intended to separate religious morality from government is questionable. As we shall point out later, he acted impulsively. It would be difficult to say what Jefferson would do if he were confronted with the peculiar problems of church-state relationships, e.g., religion in public schools, religious instruction, discipline in government service, church teaching in public schools, transportation of parochial school students on public conveyance, etc. Jefferson believed that the various methods of motivating civil morality, constitutionalism, and conventionalism should have an alliance with the State.

The writings of Jefferson, after hearing the French's side, show evidence of the thoroughness with which he went into the subject and the historical proof he dug up to discredit the establishment of the day. In the Notes on Religion, which were prepared for his speech in the House of Delegates on the petition for the disestablishment of the Anglican Church, there is a host of references. From this canal of information, no trace went through his thought that was not view by the rivet at his finely-crystallized opinions. Jefferson found that the

Chapter XIII

C. Motivating Principles for Religious Liberty and the Separation of Church and State.

Only after deep research and study did Jefferson arrive at his views on religious liberty and the strict separation of church and state. It was not religious tolerance that Jefferson sought, but complete liberty for all sects, Catholic, Jew, Protestant, and the atheist. It was not partial separation of church and state that he contemplated, but a clear-cut cleavage of both in national life.

Whether Jefferson ever intended to separate religious morality from government is questionable. As we shall point out later, he acted inconsistently. It would be difficult to say what Jefferson would do if he were confronted with the peculiar problems of church-state relationship today, e.g., religion in public schools, release-time instruction, chaplains in government service, Bible reading in public schools, transportation of parochial-school students on public conveyances, etc. Jefferson believed that the various methods of motivating civil morality, sectarianism, and denominationalism should have no alliance with the State.

The writings of Jefferson, after hearing the Parson's case, gives evidence of the thoroughness with which he went into the subject and the historical proof he dug up to discredit the Establishment of the day. In the Notes on Religion, which were prepared for his speeches in the House of Delegates on the petitions for the disestablishment of the Anglican Church, there is a host of material. From this funnel of information, we trace back through his Common Place Book and view how he arrived at his finely-crystallized opinions. Jefferson found that the

present Establishment of Church-State and its arbitrary acts of persecution had no foundation in law, nature, or the Common Law espoused by England for centuries, as far back as the Normans. The only instance in history where a copyist had prefixed four chapters of Jewish law to laws of Alfred the Great, Jefferson declared and proved them to be a falsification and a fabrication.

The Notes on Religion begin by viewing tersely the teachings of the Sabellians, Socinians, Arminians, Arians, Apollinarians, and Locke's System of Christianity. Then Jefferson alludes to that part of mankind which never had the gospel preached to them:

....they are (1) Jews, (2) Pagans, or Gentiles. The Jews had the law of works revealed to them. By this therefore they were to be saved: & a lively faith in god's promises to send the Messiah would supply small defects. (2) The Gentiles. St. Pa. said—Rom. 2.13. "the Gentiles have the law written in their hearts, i.e. the law of nature: to which adding a faith in God & his attributes that on their repentance he would pardon them, they also would be justified. This then explains the text "there is no other name under heaven by which a man may be saved," i.e. the defects in good works shall not be supplied by a faith in Mahomet Fos, (?) or any other except Christ.¹

Jefferson's understanding of Paul's "Justification by faith" gives good material for a theological discussion. In concluding this section of the notes, Jefferson then proceeds to tell what he thinks to be the fundamentals of Christianity as found in the Gospels and Epistles:

The fundamentals of X^ty as found in the gospels are 1. Faith, 2. Repentance. That faith is every (where?) explained to be a belief that Jesus was the Messiah who had been promised. Repentance was to be proved sincerely by good works.— The advantages accruing to mankind from our Saviour's mission are these.

1. Notes On Religion, Ford, Vol.II, p. 94.

1. The knowledge of one god only.
2. A clear knowledge of their duty, or system of morality, delivered on such authority as to give it sanction.
3. The outward forms of religious worship wanted to be purged of that farcical pomp & nonsense with which they were loaded.
4. An inducement to a pious life, by revealing clearly a future existence in bliss, & that it was to be the reward of the virtuous.

The Epistles were written to persons already Christians. A person might be a Xⁿ then before they were written. Consequently the fundamentals of X^{ty} were to be found in the preaching of our Saviour, which is related in the gospels. These fundamentals are to be found in the epistles dropped here & there, & promiscuously mixed with other truths. But these other truths are not to be made fundamentals. They serve for edification indeed & explaining to us matters in worship & morality, but being written occasionally it will readily be seen that their explanations are adapted to the notions & customs of the people they were written to. But yet every sentence in them (tho the writers were inspired) must not be taken up & made a fundamental, without assent to which a man is not be admitted a member of the Xⁿ church here, or to his kingdom hereafter. The Apostles creed was by them taken to contain all things necessary to salvation, & consequently to a communion.¹

Jefferson, in his first argument for religious liberty, is pointing out from history that there never was uniformity in the field of Philosophy, and that at one time during the era of Pythagoras, Plato, the Epicureans, and Academicks, etc., differences of opinion existed without bloodshed and persecution. Then he takes issue with the new Establishment:

But now a new sort of policy, which considers the future lives & happiness of men rather than the present, has taught to distress one another, & raised an antipathy which if temporal interests could ever do now uniformity of pa, a hopeful project! is looked on as the only remedy agt. this evil & is made the very object of gov'n't itself. If magistracy

1. Notes on Religion, Ford, Vol.II, p. 94.

had vouchsafed to interpose thus in other sciences, we should have as bad logic, mathematics & philosophy as we shall have divinity in countries where the law settles orthodoxy.

Suppose the state should take into head that there should be an uniformity of countenance. Men would be obliged to put an artificial bump or swelling here, a patch there &c. but this would be merely hypocritical, or if the alternative was given of wearing a mask, 99/100ths must immediately mask. Would this add to the beauty of nature? Why otherwise in opinions? In the middle ages of X^{ty} opposition to the State opins was hushed. The consequence was, X^{ty} became loaded with all the Romish follies. Nothing but free argument, raillery & even ridicule will preserve the purity of religion. 2 Cor. 1.24, the apostles declare they had no dominion over the faith.¹

To draw his argument out still farther, Jefferson delves into the subject of the "heretic"—that individual whom the church always found cause to burn at the stake:

A heretic is an impugner of fundamentals. What are fundamentals? The protestants will say those doctrines which are clearly & precisely delivered in the holy Scriptures. Dr. Vaterland would say the Trinity. But how far this character of being clearly delivered will suit the doctrine of the trinity I leave others to determine. It is nowhere expressly declared by any of the earliest fathers, & was never affirmed or taught by the Church before the Council of Nice (Chillingas Pref. 18.33.) Iranawus said 'who are the clean? those who go on firmly, believing in the Father & in the Son.' The fundamental doctrine or the firmness of the X^{ty} faith in this early age then was to believe in the Father & Son. Constantine wrote to Arius & Alexr treating the question "As vain foolish & impertinent as a dispute of words without sense which none could explain nor any comprehend &c.'" This line is commended by Eusebius (Vit. Constant 1. r.c. 64 &c.) and Socrates (Hist. Eccles. 1. i.c. 7) as excellent admirable & full of wisdom. 2. Middleton. 115. remarks on the story of St. John & (illegible) "Le saint council (de Nicee anno 630) ayant defini que le fils de dieu est de meme substance que son pere & qu'il est eternal comme lui, composa une Simbole (the Nicene creed) ou il explique la divinite du pere et

1. Notes On Religion, Ford, Vol.II, p. 95.

du filis et qu'il finit par ces paroles 'dont le regne n'aura point de fin.' car la doctrine que regarde le Saint Esprit ne fut adjoutee que dans la seconde concile tenu contre les erreurs de Macedoniens, ou ces questions furent agitees." Zonaras par Coussin. Ann. 330. The second council meant by Zonaras was that of Constantinople ann. 381. D'hist. Prim X^{ty}. pref. XXXVIII. 2d app. to pref. 49. The Council of Antioch ann () expressly affirms of our Saviour οὐκ ἑστίν ὁμο-
ουσιος that he was not consubstantial to the father. The Council of Nice affirmed the direct contrary. D'hist. Prim. X^{ty}. Pref. CXIV. (The Writings of Thomas Jefferson.)¹

By pointing out from history that even the great church fathers disagreed on so vital a subject as the Trinity, Jefferson rhetorically asked the question, "Who is a heretic, anyhow?"

After removing the barrier of alleged uniformity in the church, Jefferson takes up the question of the Episcopate proving exagetically from the Bible that there is no ground for the apostolic institution of bishops:

Episcopcy. Gr. ἐπίσκοπος Lat. Episcopus. Ital. Vescovo. Fr. Evesque. Saxon, Byscop. Bishop (overseer). The epistles of Paul to Timothy & Titus are relied on (together with Tradition) for the Apostolic institution of bishops.

As to tradition, if we are Protestants we reject all tradition, & rely on the scripture alone, for that is the essence & common principle of all the protestant churches. As to Scripture 1. Tim. 3.2. 'a bishop must be blameless &c. ἐπίσκοπος v.8.; 'likewise must the deacons be grave &c. διακονος (ministers). C.5. v.6, he calls Timothy a 'minister, διακονος;' C.4, v.14. 'neglect not the gift that is in thee, which was given thee by prophecy with the laying on the hands of the presbytery ὑποκατεβιν C.5. 'rebuke not an elder: ὑποκατεβιν 5:17;---'let the elders that rule well, &c 5:19; 'against an elder receive nt an accusn.' 5.22. 'lay hands suddenly on no man, ὑποκατεβιν. He calls Timothy man of God ἄνθρωπος 2. Tim. 1.6. 'stir up the gift of god, which is in thee, by the putting on of my hands' ἐπιθεσιν but ante c. 4. v. 14, he said it was by the hands of the presbytery. This imposition of hands then was some ceremony or custom frequently repeated, & cer-

1. Notes On Religion, Ford, Vol.II., p. 95.

tainly is a good proof that Timothy was ordained by the elders (& consequently that they might ordain) as that it was by Paul. 1.11. Paul calls himself 'a preacher' 'an apostle,' 'a teacher, (See Next Page)'. Here he designates himself by several synonyms as he had before done Timothy. Does this prove that every synonym authorizes a different order of ecclesiastics. 4.5. 'do the work of an Evangelist, make full proof of thy ministry' (See Next Page). Timothy then is called '(See Next Page)' 4.11. He tells Tim to bring Mark with him, for 'he is profitable to me for the ministry.' 1 Peter Epist. to Titus. 1.1, he calls himself 'a servant of god' 1 Peter 1.5. 'for this cause left I thee in Crete that thou shouldst set in order the things that are wanting, and ordain κληρικούς elders in every city, as I had appointed thee.' If any be blameless, the husband of one wife, having faithful children, not accused of riot or unruly, nor a bishop must be blameless as the steward of god &c. Here then it appears that as the elders appointed the bishops, so the bishops appointed the elders, i.e., they are synonyms. Again when telling Titus to appoint elders in every city he tells him what kind of men they must be, for said he a bishop must be &c., so that in the same sentence he calls elders bishops. 3.10 'a man that is an heretic after the first & second admonition, reject, διεπίσκοπος.' James 5.14. 'is any sick among you? let him call for the elders πρεσβυτέρους of the church, & let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the lord.' 1

Jefferson continued by quoting the church fathers. He points out that Origen, while still a layman, publicly expounded the Scriptures and was defended in this action by the bishop Alexander of Jerusalem, and Theodotus of Caesarea. In regard to the matter of choosing a bishop, Jefferson points out that the church fathers, Ignatius, Camden, Cyprian, etc., places the power of choosing a bishop into the hands of the lay people and concludes with this classic thought:

A modern bps to be moulded into a primitive one must be elected by the people, undiocest, unrevenued, unlorded. I Milt. 225. From the dissensions among sects themselves arises necessarily a right of choosing & necessity of deliberating to which we will conform, but if we chuse for ourselves, we must all others to chuse also, & reciprocally. This establishes religious liberty.

Paul calls himself a 'preacher', 'an apostle', 'a teacher' κηρυξ
καὶ ἀποστόλος καὶ διδάσκαλος

make full proof of thy ministry! ἐργάου πάντα τὸν εὐ-
αγγελιστὸν τῆς διακονῆς σου πληροφόρηστος

Timothy then is called! εὐαγγελιστὸς, διδασκαλὸς, εὐαγγ-
ελιστὸς, ἀναγνῶστης δι' εὐαν

The aims of a religious society or church are the
enlightenment, edification & sanctification of
the people of God.

How far does the duty of toleration extend?

1. No church is bound to the state or to the
state within her limits. She is free against
her laws.

2. We have no right to regulate matters in the
civil judgments because to be a matter of
conscience. If any man stir from the right way, let
him suffer, no injury to them, nor therefore let
them to punish him in the things of this life. For
where they suppose he will be punished in that
which is to come--on the contrary, even by the
spirit of the gospel, charity, honesty, liberality
is due to him.

Each church being free, no one can have jurisdiction over
another, nor, not even when the civil magistrate joins
it. It neither acquires the right of the sword by
the magistrate's joining to it, nor does it lose the
right of instruction or excommunication by his going
from it. It cannot be the province of any civil mag-
istrate to have jurisdiction over them nor to not allow, he
brings only himself, having no power to bring them.
Suppose for instance our churches, one of them
another of Calvinists in Switzerland, has either
any right over the other? Will it be said the ortho-
dox has? Every church is to itself orthodox to
others erroneous or heretical.

1. Notes on Religion, Ford, Vol. II, p. 77.

Why require those things in order to ecclesiastical communion which Christ does not require in order to life eternal? How can that be the church of Christ which excludes such persons from its communion as he will one day receive into the kingdom of heaven.¹

If the Established system is neither biblical or historical, what then? Jefferson proceeds in the notes to place the church into its proper place in society and into its relationship to the civil powers.

The arms of a religious society or church are exhortations, admonitions & advice, & ultimately expulsion or excommunication. This last is the utmost limit of power.

How far does the duty of toleration extend?

1. No church is bound by the duty of toleration to retain within her bosom obstinate offenders against her laws.

2. We have no right to prejudice another in his civil enjoynments because he is of another church. If any man err from the right way, it is his own misfortune, no injury to thee; nor therefore art thou to punish him in the things of this life because thou supposeth he will be miserable in that which is to come--on the contrary accord to the spirit of the gospel, charity, bounty, liberality is due to him.

Each church being free, no one can have jurisdn over another one, not even when the civil magistrate joins it. It neither acquires the right of the sword by the magistrate's coming to it, nor does it lose the right of instruction or excommunication by his going from it. It cannot be the accession of any new member acquire jurisdn over those who do not accede. He brings only himself, having no power to bring others. Suppose for instance two churches, one of Arminians another of Calvinists in Constantinople, has either any right over the other? Will it be said the orthodox one has? Every church is to itself orthodox; to others erroneous or heretical.

1. Notes on Religion, Ford, Vol. II, p. 99.

No man complains of his neighbor for ill management of his affairs, for an error in sowing his land, or marrying his daughter, for consuming his substance in taverns, pulling down building &c. in all these he has his liberty: but if he do not frequent the church, or there conform to ceremonies, there is an immediate uproar.

The care of every man's soul belongs to himself. But what if he neglect the care of it? Well what if he neglect the care of his health or estate, which more nearly relate to the state. Will the magistrate make a law that he shall not be poor or sick? Laws provide against injury from others; but not from ourselves. God himself will not save men against their wills.

If I be marching on with my utmost vigour in that way which according to the sacred geography leads to Jerusalem straight, why am I beaten & ill used by others because my hair is not of the right cut; because I have not been dressed right, bec. I eat flesh on the road, bec. I avoid certain by-ways which seem to lead into briars, bec. among several paths I take that which seems shortest & cleanest, bec. I avoid travellers less grave & keep company with others who are more sour & austere, or bec. I follow a guide crowned with a mitre & clothed in white, yet these are the frivolous things which keep us at war.

If the magistrate command me to bring my commodity to a publick store house I bring it because he can indemnify me if he erred & I thereby lose it; but what indemnification can be given one for the kdom of heaven?

I cannot give up my guidance to the magistrates, bec. he knows no more of the way to heaven than I do, & is less concerned to direct me right than I am to go right. If the Jews had followed their Kings, among so many, what number would have led them to idolatry? Consider the vicissitudes among the Emperors, Arians, Athanas &c. or among our princes. H. S. E. 6. Mary. Elizabeth. Locke's Works 2d Vol.

Why persecute for diff^{er} in relig^{ion} opinion?

1. For love to the person.
2. Because of tendency of these opns to dis(illegible)

1. When I see them persecute their nearest connections acquaintance for gross vices, I shall believe it may proceed from love. Till they do this I appeal to their own consciences if they will examine, wh. y^e do nt find some other principle.

2. Because of tendency. Why not then level persecution at the crimes you fear will be introduced? Burn or hand the adulterer, cheat &c. Or exclude them from offices. Strange should be so zealous against things which tend to produce immorality & yet so indulgent to the immorality when produced. These moral vices all men acknowledge to be diametrically against X. & obstructive of salvation of souls, but the fantastical points for which we generally persecute are often very questionable; as we may be assured by the very different conclusions of people. Our Savior chose not to propagate his religion by temporal punts or civil incapacitation, if he had, it was in his almight power. But he chose to extend it by it's influence on reason, there by shewing to others how they could proceed.¹

After placing the Church in society and finding its relationship to the State, Jefferson continues the Notes by defining concisely the relationship of the State to the Church.

The commonwealth is 'a Society of men constituted for protecting their civil interests.'

Civil interests are 'life, health, indolency of body, liberty and property.' That the magistrate's jurisdn extends only to civil rights appear from these considns.

1. The magistrate has no power but w^t y^e people gave. The people h^ve n^t givⁿ h^m the care of souls bec. y^e cd not, because no man h^s right to abandon y^e care of his salvation to another.

No man has power to let another prescribe his faith. Faith is not faith with^t believing. No man can conform his faith to the dictates of another. The life & essence of religion consists in the internal persuasion or belief of the mind. External forms of worship, when against our belief are hypocrisy & impiety. Rom. 14. 23. "he that doubteth is damned, if he eat, because he eateth not of faith: for whatsoever is not of faith, is sin?"

2. If it be said the magistrate may make use of arguments & so draw the heterodoc to truth, I answer, every many has a commission to admonish, exhort, convince another or error.

12. A church is 'a voluntary society of man, joining themselves together of their own accord, in order

1. Notes On Religion, Ford, Vol. II, p. 101.

to the public worshipping of god in such a manner as they judge acceptable to him & effectual to the salvation of their souls.' It is voluntary bec. no man is by nature bound to any church. The hope of salvation is the cause of his entering into it. If he find anything wrong in it, he should be as free to go out as he was to come in.

13. What is the power of that church. As it is a society it must have some laws for it's regulation. Time & place of meeting. Admitting & excluding members &c. Must be regulatⁿ but as it was a spontaneous joining of members, it follows that it's laws extend to it's own members only, not to those of any other voluntary society, for then by the same rule some other voluntary society might usurp power over them.

Christ has said 'wheresoever 2 or 3 are gather^d. togeth in his name he will be in the midst of them.' This is his definition of a society. He does not make it essential that a bishop or presbyter govern them. Without them it suffices for the salvation of souls.

Compulsion in religion is distinguished peculiarly from compulsion in every other thing. I may grow rich by art I am compelled to follow, I may recover health by medicines I am compelled to take ag^t my own judgment, but I cannot be saved by a worship I disbelieve & abhor.

Whatsoever is lawful in the Commonwealth, or permitted to the subject in the ordinary way, cannot be forbidden to him for religious uses: & whatsoever is prejudicial to the Commonwealth in their ordinary uses & therefore prohibited by the laws, ought not to be permitted to churches in their sacred rites. For instance it is unlawful in the ordinary course of things or in a private house to murder a child. It should not be permitted any sect than to sacrifice children: it is ordinarily lawful (or temporarily lawful) to kill calves or lambs. They may therefore be religiously sacrificed, but if the good of the state required a temporary suspension of killing lambs, as during a siege, sacrifices of them may then be rightfully suspended also. This is the true extent of toleration.¹

Jefferson then concludes the notes with a philosophical discussion of "truth" and, drawing heavily from Locke, writes:

1. Notes on Religion; Ford, Vol.II, p. 102

Truth will do well enough if left to shift for herself. She seldom has received much aid from the power of great men to show she is rarely known & seldom welcome. She has no need of force to procure entrance into the minds of men. Error indeed has often prevailed by the assistance of power or force. Truth is the proper & sufficient antagonist to error. If anything pass in a religious meeting desitiously and contrary to the public peace, let it be punished in the same manner & no otherwise than as if it had happened in a fair or market. These meetings out not to be sancturaries for faction & flagitiousness.

Locke denies toleration to those who entertain opns contrary to those moral rules necessary for the preservation of society; as for instance, that faith is not to be kept with those of another persuasion, that Kings excommunicated forfeit their crowns, that dominion is founded in grace, or that obedience is due to some foreign prince, or who will not own & teach the duty of tolerating all men in matters of religion, or who deny the existence of a god (it was a great thing to go so far—as he himself says of the parl. who framed the act of tolern but where he stopped short we may go on.)¹

1. "Will not his own excellent rule be sufficient here too; to punish these as civil offences. e. gr. to assert that a foreign prince has power within this Commonwealth is a misdemeanor. The other opns may be despised. Perhaps the single thing & which may be required to others before toleration to them would be an oath that they would allow toleration to others."

—Thomas Jefferson

He says 'neither Pagan nor Mahomedan nor Jew outh to be excluded from the civil rights of the Commonwealth because of his religion.' Shall we suffer a Pagan to deal with us and not suffer him to pray to his god? Why have X^{ns} been distinguished above all people who have ever lived, for persecutions? Is it because it is the genius of their religion? No, it's genius is the reverse. It is the refusing toleration to those of a different opn which has produced all the bustles and wars on account of religion. It was the misfortune of mankind that during the darker centuries the X^{ns}

priests following their ambition and avarice combining with the magistrate to divide the spoils of the people, could establish the notion that schismatics might be ousted of their possessions & destroyed. This notion we have not yet cleared ourselves from. In this case no wonder the oppressed should rebel, & they will continue to rebel & raise disturbance until their civil rights are fully restored to them & all partial distinctions, exclusions & incapacitations removed.¹

With these basic principles as a guide, Jefferson was then led into framing the Bill for Religious Freedom, a classic document both in form and content (1779).

1. Notes On Religion, Ford, Vol.II, p. 103.

A Bill For Establishing Religious Freedom
(Chapter LXXXII)

Section I. Well aware that the opinions and beliefs of men depend not on their own will, but following involuntarily the evidence proposed to their minds; that Almighty God hath created the mind free, and manifested his supreme will that free it shall remain by making it altogether insusceptible of restraint; that all attempts to influence it by temporal punishments, or burthens, or by civil incapacitations, tend only to beget habits of hypocrisy and meanness, and are a departure from the plan of the holy author of our religion, who being lord both of body and mind, yet choose not to propagate it by coercion on either, as was in His Almighty power to do, but to exalt it by its influence on reason alone; that the impious presumption of legislature and ruler, civil as well as ecclesiastical, who, being themselves but fallible and uninspired men, have assumed dominion over the faith of others, setting up their own opinions and modes of thinking as the only true and infallible, and as such endeavoring to impose them then on others, hath established and maintained false religions over the greatest part of the world and through all time: That to compel a man to furnish contributions of money for the propagation of opinions which he disbelieves and abhors, is sinful and tyrannical; that even the forcing him to support this or that teacher of his own religious persuasion, is depriving him of the comfortable liberty of giving his contributions to the particular pastor whose morals he would make his pattern, and whose powers he feels most persuasive to righteousness; and his withdrawing from the ministry those temporary rewards, which proceeding from and approbation of their personal conduct, are an additional incitement to earnest and unremitting labours for the instruction of mankind; that our civil rights have no dependence on our religious opinions, any more than our opinions in physics or geometry; and therefore the proscribing any citizen as unworthy the public confidence by laying upon him an incapacity of being called to offices of trust or emolument, unless he profess or renounce this or that religious opinion, is depriving him injudiciously of those privileges and advantages to which, in common with his fellow-citizens, he has a natural right; that it tends also to corrupt the principles of that very religion it is meant to encourage, by bribing with a monopoly of worldly honours and emoluments, those who will externally profess and conform to it; that though indeed these are criminals who do not withstand such temptation, yet neither are those innocent who lay the bait in their way; that the opinions of men are not the object of civil government, nor under its jurisdiction; that to suffer the civil magistrate to intrude his powers into the field of opinion and to restrain the profession or propagation of principles on supposition of their ill tendency is a dangerous falacy, which at once destroys all religious liberty, because he being of course judge of that tendency will make his opinions the rule of judgment, and approve or condemn the sentiments of others only as they shall square with or suffer from his own; that it is time enough for the rightful purpose of civil government for its officers to interfere with principles break out into overt acts against peace and

good order; and finally, that truth is great and will prevail if left to herself; that she is the proper and sufficient antagonist to error, and has nothing to fear from the conflict unless by human interposition disarmed of her natural weapons, free argument and debate; errors ceasing to be dangerous when it is permitted freely to contradict them.

Section II. We the General Assembly of Virginia do enact that no man shall be compelled to frequent or support any religious worship, place, or ministry whatsoever, nor shall be enforced, restrained, molested, or bur hened in his body or goods, or shall otherwise suffer, on account of his religious opinions or belief; but that all men shall be free to profess, and by argument to maintain, their opinions in matters of religion, and that the same shall in no wise diminish, enlarge, or affect their civil capacities.

Section III. And though we well know that this Assembly, elected by the people for their ordinary purposes of legislation only, have no power to restrain the acts of succeeding Assemblies, constituted with powers equal to our own, and that therefore to declare this act to be irrevocable would be of no effect in law; yet we are free to declare, and do declare, that the rights hereby asserted are of the natural rights of mankind, and that if any act shall be hereafter passed to repeal the present or to narrow its operations, such act will be an infringement of natural right.

This bill was Jefferson's particular pride, and ranked in his mind with the Declaration of Independence. It was originally introduced to the Assembly June 13, 1779, and was promptly the subject of memorials, both pro and con, memorials which styled it a "diabolical scheme", for it was laid over from session to session till 1786, when, by the foolish attempt to the "state-church" partly to obtain a general assessment, the Assembly re-acted, and passed this bill into law, after first partially substituting a clause of the Virginia Declaration of Rights in place of Jefferson's original wording. Jefferson, then in Paris, promptly had an edition printed with the title: An Act For Establishing Religious Freedom, passed by the assembly of Virginia in the beginning of the year 1786. (Paris: 1786.) 8vo, pp.4.

Acte de la Republique de Virginie/ qui etablit la liberte de Religion (Paris: Phd Pierres, 1786) 8vo, pp.4.

It was again printed as:

Republican Notes On Religion: An Act Establishing Religious Freedom, passed in the Assembly of Virginia in the year 1786. By Thomas Jefferson, Esquire, President of the United States. Danbury: Printed by Thomas Row. 1803. 8vo pp.II.

The Act was criticised by Felatiah Webster in: Consideration/on an /Act/of the/Legislature/of/Virginia,/entitled,/an act for the establishment of /Religious Freedom./ By a Citizen of Philadelphia. Printed and sold by Robert Aitken, at Pope's head, in /Market Street./ M.DCC.LXXXVI. 8vo, pp.26

Throughout his writings, and on various subjects, Jefferson continued to emphasize his opinion on the subject of religion and government. On the topic of politics in the pulpit, Jefferson said:

On one question only I differ from him, and it is that which constitutes the subject of his first discourse, the right of discussing public affairs in the pulpit. I add the last words, because I admit the right in general conversation and in writing; in which last form it has been exercised in the valuable book you have now favored me with.

The mass of human concerns, moral and physical, is so vast, the field of knowledge requisite for man to conduct them to the best advantage is so extensive, that no human being can acquire the whole himself, and much less in that degree necessary for the instruction of others. It has of necessity, then, been distributed into different departments, each of which, singly, may give occupation enough to the whole time and attention of a single individual. Thus we have teachers of Languages, teachers of Mathematics, of Natural Philosophy, of Chemistry, of Medicine, of Law, of History, of Government, &c. Religion, too, is a separate department, and happens to be the only one deemed requisite for all men, however high or low. Collections of men associate together, under the name of congregations, and employ a religious teacher of the particular sect of opinions of which they happen to be, and contribute to make up a stipend as a compensation for the trouble of delivering them, at such periods as they agree on, lessons in the religion they profess. If they want instruction in other sciences or arts, they apply to other instructors; and this is generally the business of early life. But I suppose there is not an instance of a single congregation which has employed their preacher for the mixed purposes of lecturing them from the pulpit in Chemistry, in Medicine, in Law, in the science and principles of Government, or in anything but Religion exclusively. Whenever, therefore, preachers, instead of a lesson in religion, put them off with a discourse on the Copernican system, on chemical affinities, on the construction of government, or the characters or conduct of those administering it, it is a breach of contract, depriving their audience of the kind of service for which they are salaried, and giving them, instead of it, what they did not want, or, if wanted, would rather seek from better sources in that particular art or science. In choosing our pastor we look to his religious qualifications, without inquiring into his physical or political dogmas, with which we mean to have nothing to do. I am aware that arguments may be found, which may twist a thread of politics into the cord of

religious duties. So may they for every other branch of human art or science. Thus, for example, it is a religious duty to obey the laws of our country; the teacher of religion, therefore, must instruct us in those laws, that we may know how to obey them. It is a religious duty to assist our sick neighbors; the preacher must, therefore, teach us medicine, that we may do it understandingly. It is a religious duty to preserve our own health; our religious teacher, then, must tell us what dishes are wholesome, and give us recipes in cookery, that we may learn how to prepare them. And so, ingenuity, by generalizing more and more, may amalgamate all the branches of science into any one of them, and the physician who is paid to visit the sick, may give a sermon instead of medicine and the merchant to whom money is sent for a hat, may send a handkerchief instead of it. But notwithstanding this possible confusion of all sciences into one, common sense draws lines between them sufficiently distinct for the general purposes of life, and no one is at a loss to understand that a recipe in medicine or cookery, or a demonstration in geometry, is not a lesson in religion. I do not deny that a congregation may, if they please, agree with their preacher that he shall instruct them in Medicine also, or Law, or Politics. Then, lectures in these, from the pulpit, become not only a matter of right, but of duty also. But this must be with the consent of every individual; because the association being voluntary, the mere majority has no right to apply the contributions of the minority to purposes unspecified in the agreement of the congregation. I agree, too, that on all other occasions, the preacher has the right, equally with every other citizen, to express his sentiments, in speaking or writing, on the subjects of Medicine, Law, Politics, &c., his leisure time being his own, and his congregation not obliged to listen to his conversation or to read his writings; and no one would have regretted more than myself, had any scruple as to this right withheld from us the valuable discourses which have led to the expression of an opinion as to the true limits of the right. I feel my portion of indebtedness to the reverend author for the distinguished learning, the logic and the eloquence with which he has proved that religion, as well as reason, confirms the soundness of those principles on which our government has been founded and its rights asserted.

These are my views on this question. They are in opposition to those of the highly respected and able preacher, and are, therefore, the more doubtfully offered. Difference of opinion leads to inquiry, and inquiry to truth; and that, I am sure, is the ultimate and sincere

object of us both. We both value too much the freedom of opinion sanctioned by our constitution, not to cherish its exercise even where in opposition to ourselves.

Unaccustomed to reserve or mystery in the expression of my opinions, I have opened myself frankly on a question suggested by your letter and present. And although I have not the honor of your acquaintance, this mark of attention, and still more the sentiments of esteem so kindly expressed in your letter, are entitled to a confidence that observations not intended for the public will not be ushered to their notice, as has happened to me sometimes. Tranquillity, at my age, is the balm of life. While I know I am safe in the honor and charity of a McLeod, I do not wish to be cast forth to the Marats, the Dantons, and the Robespierres of the priesthood; I mean the Parishes, the Ogdens, and the Gardiners of Massachusetts. ¹

When the University of Virginia was founded, Jefferson attempted to place religion in its proper state by writing:

In the same report of the commissioners of 1818 it was stated by them that "in conformity with the principles of constitution, which place all sects of religion on an equal footing, with the jealousies of the different sects in guarding that equality from encroachment or surprise, and with the sentiments of the legislature in freedom of religion, manifested on former occasions, they had not proposed that any professorship of divinity should be established in the University; that provision, however, was made for giving instruction in the Hebrew, Greek and Latin languages, the depositories of the originals, and of the earliest and most respected authorities of the faith of every sect, and for courses of ethical lectures, developing those moral obligations in which all sects agree. That, proceeding thus far, without offence to the constitution, they had left, at this point, to every sect to take into their own hands the office of further instruction in the peculiar tenet of each."

It was not, however, to be understood that instruction in religious opinion and duties was meant

¹ Padover, The Complete Jefferson, p. 953. Letter to Wendover.

to be precluded by the public authorities, as indifferent to the interests of society. On the contrary, the relations which exist between man and his Maker, and the duties resulting from those relations, are the most interesting and important to every human being, and the most incumbent on his study and investigation. The want of instruction in the various creeds of religious faith existing among our citizens presents, therefore, a chasm in a general institution of the useful sciences. But it was thought that this want, and the entrustment to each society of instruction in its own doctrine, were evils of less danger than a permission to the public authorities to dictate modes or principles of religious instruction, or than opportunities furnished them by giving countenance or ascendancy to any one sect over another. A remedy, however, has been suggested of promising aspect, which, while it excludes the public authorities from the domain of religious freedom, will give to the sectarian schools of divinity the full benefit the public provisions made for instruction in the other branches of science. These branches are equally necessary to the divine as to the other professional or civil characters, to enable them to fulfill the duties of their calling with understanding and usefulness. It has, therefore, been in contemplation, and suggested by some pious individuals, who perceive the advantages of associating other studies with those of religion, to establish their religious schools on the confines of the University, so as to give to their students ready and convenient access and attendance on the scientific lectures of the University; and to maintain, by that means, those destined for the religious professions on as high a standing of science, and of personal weight and respectability, as may be obtained by others from the benefits of the University. Such establishments would offer the further and greater advantage of enabling the students of the University to attend religious exercises with the professor of their particular sect, either in the rooms of the building still to be erected, and destined to that purpose under impartial regulations, as proposed in the same report of the commissioners, or in the lecturing room of such professor. To such propositions the Visitors are disposed to lend a willing ear, and would think it their duty to give every encouragement, by assuring to those who might choose such a location for their schools, that the regulations of the University should be so modified and accommodated as to give every facility

to be precluded by the public authorities, as indifferent to the interests of society. On the contrary, the relations which exist between man and his Maker, and the duties resulting from those relations, are the most interesting and important to every human being, and the most incumbent on his study and investigation. The want of instruction in the various creeds of religious faith existing among our citizens presents, therefore, a chasm in a general institution of the useful sciences. But it was thought that this want, and the entrustment to each society of instruction in its own doctrine, were evils of less danger than a permission to the public authorities to dictate modes or principles of religious instruction, or than opportunities furnished them by giving countenance or ascendancy to any one sect over another. A remedy, however, has been suggested of promising aspect, which, while it excludes the public authorities from the domain of religious freedom, will give to the sectarian schools of divinity the full benefit the public provisions made for instruction in the other branches of science. These branches are equally necessary to the divine as to the other professional or civil characters, to enable them to fulfill the duties of their calling with understanding and usefulness. It has, therefore, been in contemplation, and suggested by some pious individuals, who perceive the advantages of associating other studies with those of religion, to establish their religious schools on the confines of the University, so as to give to their students ready and convenient access and attendance on the scientific lectures of the University; and to maintain, by that means, those destined for the religious professions on as high a standing of science, and of personal weight and respectability, as may be obtained by others from the benefits of the University. Such establishments would offer the further and greater advantage of enabling the students of the University to attend religious exercises with the professor of their particular sect, either in the rooms of the building still to be erected, and destined to that purpose under impartial regulations, as proposed in the same report of the commissioners, or in the lecturing room of such professor. To such propositions the Visitors are disposed to lend a willing ear, and would think it their duty to give every encouragement, by assuring to those who might choose such a location for their schools, that the regulations of the University should be so modified and accommodated as to give every facility

of access and attendance to their students, with such regulated use also as may be permitted to the other students, of the library which may hereafter be acquired, either by public or private munificence. But always understanding that these schools shall be independent of the University and of each other. Such an arrangement would complete the circle of the useful sciences embraced by this institution, and would fill the chasm now existing, on principles which would leave inviolate the constitutional freedom of religion, the most inalienable and sacred of all human rights, over which the people and authorities of this state, individually and publicly, have ever manifested the most watchful jealousy: and could this jealousy be now alarmed, in the opinion of the legislature, by what is here suggested, the idea will be relinquished on any surmise of disapprobation which they might think proper to express. ¹

To ignore human rights in the name of civil war, to support of our flag and our country in the name of justice.

In order to give the responsible weight of dignity, Jefferson and his cohorts called upon a distinguished and religious gentleman, Robert Carter, to give the proposal. Carter accepted and the resolution passed as follows:

NOTICE TO READ

To the inhabitants of the colony of Virginia.
The members of the House of Burgesses having taken into consideration the several resolutions passed over British arms, and the humane intention of a sister colony, through which it should be recommended to the several parishes in this colony that they should give assistance day for day, and week for week, to the distressed and oppressed people, and that the state of his Majesty, his ministers, and his subjects, might be improved with wisdom and justice, as every man is his neighbor's neighbor, and that the rights of all the people of this colony be preserved to the advantage of all parts of the

¹ Padover, *The Complete Jefferson*, p. 957.

D. Church And State Relationship on the National And State Level. A Distinction Made By Jefferson. Inconsistencies.

While Jefferson believed in the strict separation of church and state there is evidence to indicate that he, in practice, did not always adhere to the principle. Jefferson too made a distinction between church and state on the national and state levels.

Jefferson used the church as a tool of the state when the Port Bill (1774) was an issue with England. In his own words he describes the situation thus:

We cooked up a resolution for appointing the first day of June on which the Port Bill was to commence for a day of fasting and prayer, to implore heaven to avert from us the evils of civil war, to inspire us with firmness in support of our rights, and to turn the hearts of the king and parliament to moderation and justice.¹

In order to give the resolution an air of dignity, Jefferson and his cohorts called upon a distinguished and religious gentlemen, Robert Carter, to move the proposal. Nicholas accepted and the resolution passed as follows:

NOTICE TO FAST

(June, 1774)

To the Inhabitants of the parish of Saint Anne. The members of the late house of Burgesses having taken into consideration the dangers impending over British America from the hostile invasion of a sister colony, thought proper that it should be recommended to the several parishes in this colony that they set apart some convenient day for fasting, humiliation of an injured and oppressed people; and that the minds of his majesty, his ministers, and parliament, might be inspired with wisdom from above, to avert from us the dangers which threaten our civil rights, and all the evils of civil war. We do therefore recommend to the inhabitants of the parish of St. Anne that Saturday the 23rd instant be by them set apart for the purpose aforesaid on which

1. Autobiography, Ford, Vol. I, p. 69.

day will be paryers and a sermon suited to the occasion by the reverend Mr. Clay at the new church on Hardware river, which place is thought the most central to the parishoners in General. 1

Another interesting letter has come down to us in which there is evidence of Jefferson's inconsistency on church-state relationship. In behalf of a certain clergyman Jefferson writes to Colonel William Preston. The issue; the Chapliancy in the House of Burgesses. It is recognized that the resolution for Saint Anne Parish and the afollowing letter were written before the Union was founded and before the Ordinance For Religious Freedom was framed.

To Colonel William Preston 1.

Staunton, Aug. 18, 1768

Dear Sir.—I sit down to petition your suffrage in favor of a friend whose virtues and abilities have made him much to me, and will give him equal place in your esteem whenever you have an opportunity of becoming acquainted with them. The gentlemen I speak of is the Rev. James Fontaine, who offers himself as candidate for the place of chaplain to the House of Burgesses. I do not wish to derogate from the merit of the gentlemen who possessed the office last, but I cannot help hoping that every friend of genius, when the other qualities of the competitors are equal, will give a preference to superior abilities, integrity of heart and purity of manners recommend Messrs. Price and Fontaine equally to our esteem, but in acuteness of performing the divine service, and in every work of the latter. I do not ask your favor on a bare assurance of this from me but from the knowledge of Mr. Fontain's superiority, which you will obtain on enquiring of others. I have heard that the other has been possessed of the office; an argument which with you will need no donfutation. These small preferments should be reserved to reward and encourage genius, and not be bestowed with an indiscriminating hand among the common herd.²

1. From the original in the possession of Dr. Thomas Addis Emmet of New York.
2. This application met with no success, Rev. Thomas Price being continued in office.

1. Ford, Vol. I, p. 418.

2. To Colonel William Preston, Vol. I, p. 368.

Jefferson was also aware of the precedent set by both Washington and Adams, who while in office did proclaim such days. Says Jefferson:

I am aware that the practice of my predecessors may be quoted. But I have ever believed that the example of state executives led to the assumption of that authority by the general government, without due examination, which would have discovered that what might be a right in a state government, was a violation of that right when assumed by another. Be this as it may, every one must act according to the dictates of his own reason, & mine tells me that civil powers alone have been given to the President of the U. S. and no authority to direct the religious exercises of his constituents.

I again express my satisfaction that you have been so good as to give me an opportunity of explaining myself in a private letter, in which I could give my reasons more in detail than might have been done in public answer: and I pray you to accept the assurances of my high esteem & respect. ¹.

1. To Rev. Samuel Miller, Ford, Vol. IX, p. 174.

Conclusions

On viewing with disgust the persequatory desings of the Established Church on other sects, and after viewing with alarm the pernicious arrangement between Church and State, Jefferson, on hearing Patrick Henry in the Parsons Case, retreated to his books for a study on the whole problem. On Oct. 7, 1776, Jefferson launched an attack on the Established system that six years later culminated in the passing of the Ordinance of Religious Freedom. Jefferson's arguments in the case were centered around two points: (1) The uniformity which the Established Church sought to maintain was never in existence in history and that for centuries divided sects lived peacefully together. (2) The "Episcopal" system had no foundation in Scripture or history. After bringing full proof from both Scripture and history in this matter, Jefferson in his own inimitable way sets out to place the church in its place in society, then the State, and, finally, the relationship between the two. In a letter to the Rev. Samuel Miller, while President of the United States, Jefferson tells why he does not wish to proclaim days of thanksgiving for the nation. When precedent was pointed out to him in that George Washington had done so, Jefferson counters "every one must act according to the dictate of his own reason, and mine tells me that civil powers alone have been given to the president of the U. S. and no authority to direct the religious exercises of his constitutents." Jefferson concedes that on the State level it may be different. On the other hand it is to be noted that Jefferson was not above using the Church for political purposes as well as once recommending a particular clergyman for the Chaplaincy in the House of Burgess, indicating

thereby, that he was not entirely opposed to all organized religion in Government. It is to be noted in this connection, however, that these two events occurred before the founding of the Nation and before the Ordinance was passed as well as before the adoption of the Constitution.

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