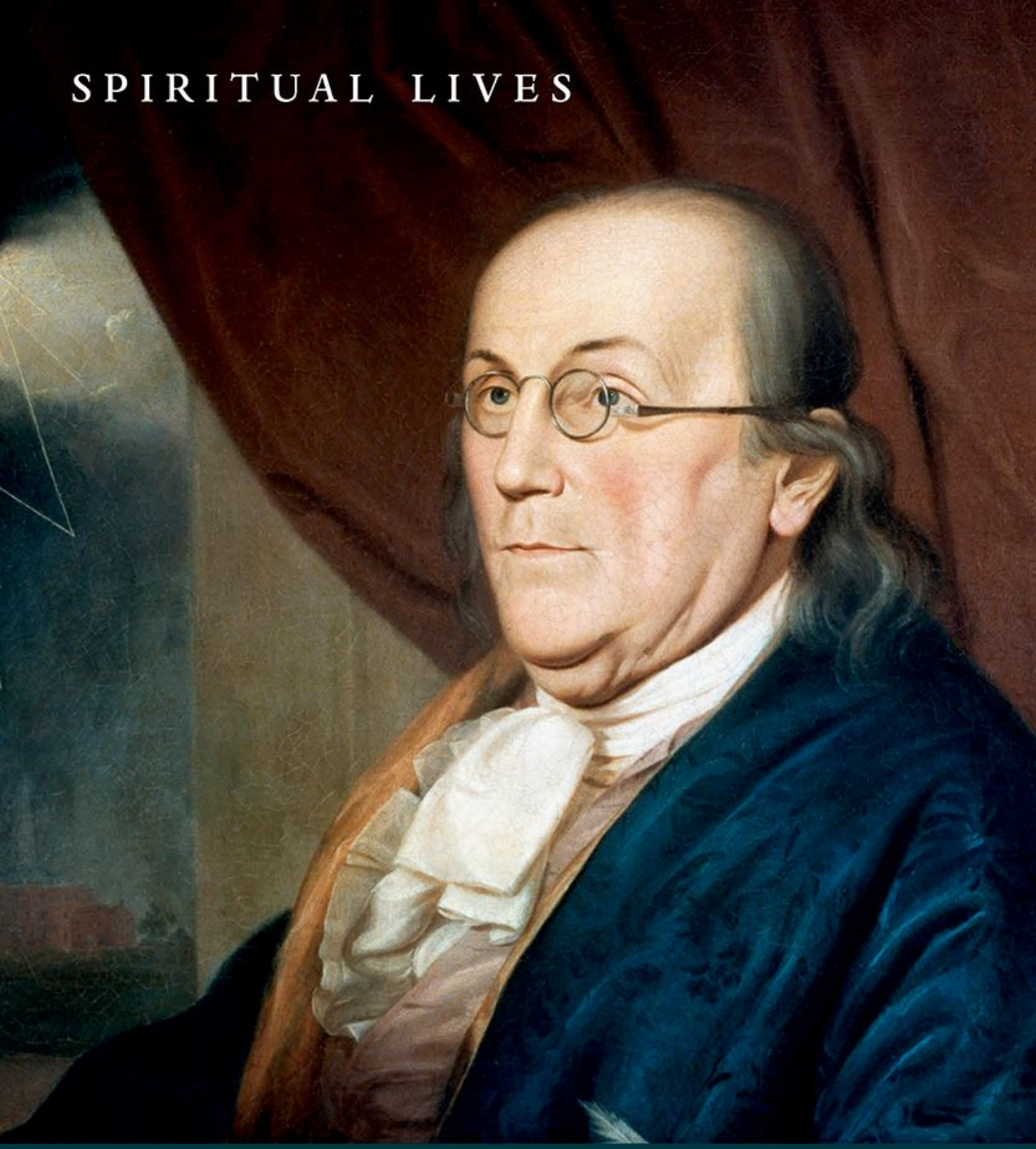
SPIRITUAL LIVES



D. G. HART

BENJAMIN FRANKLIN

CULTURAL PROTESTANT

OXFORD

SPIRITUAL LIVES

General Editor
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The *Spiritual Lives* series features biographies of prominent men and women whose eminence is not primarily based on a specifically religious contribution. Each volume provides a general account of the figure's life and thought, while giving special attention to his or her religious contexts, convictions, doubts, objections, ideas, and actions. Many leading politicians, writers, musicians, philosophers, and scientists have engaged deeply with religion in significant and resonant ways that have often been overlooked or underexplored. Some of the volumes will even focus on men and women who were lifelong unbelievers, attending to how they navigated and resisted religious questions, assumptions, and settings. The books in this series will therefore recast important figures in fresh and thought-provoking ways.

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Cultural Protestant

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Acknowledgments

Children growing up around Philadelphia take Benjamin Franklin for granted. The Franklin Institute, a natural science museum in Center City, is (or at least used to be) a regular field trip for students in primary grades and junior high. To arrive at the Institute, school buses need to use the Ben Franklin Parkway, a European-inspired boulevard that connects City Hall and the Philadelphia Art Museum (created in the 1920s as one stage of urban renewal). If students are coming to the city from New Jersey, they will likely use the Ben Franklin Bridge to cross the Delaware River. The bridge funnels vehicles into a circle, formerly known as Franklin Square, which has in the middle a statue commemorating the inventor's experiment with lightning. Many students may well come from a school named for Ben Franklin, as this author did while he attended Ben Franklin Junior High (now Middle) School in Levittown. Franklin's association with public education is not confined to the Philadelphia region. Over fifty public schools are named after him. (By way of comparison, almost 100 public schools in the United States bear Thomas Jefferson's name.)

Growing up as I did with Franklin as more or less an afterthought, the execution of this brief biography came as a great revelation. Research and writing not only provided an education in the accomplishments – especially in the American Founding – that made Franklin's name ubiquitous. But the process also revealed a remarkable figure whose life must have surprised Franklin at any number of stages. Whatever readers may think about the aphorisms that he wrote to inspire others to work hard and make something of themselves, Franklin truly practiced what he aphorized. A man with truly humble origins and more or less a boy with few associations when he arrived in Philadelphia, Franklin went on to conduct a printing business so successful he could retire at the age of forty-two, at which point he became a significant figure in colonial politics and the American Founding. Along the way he displayed an uncanny curiosity about practically every feature of human existence and the natural world even as he seemed to read everything that came into this shop. That

inquisitive side is arguably his most attractive feature and may explain much of his success. Franklin was an impressive person who lived an even more impressive life.

This book is not simply a short biography of a man who is indelibly fixed in Philadelphia institutions, memories of the American Founding, and understandings of national character. It is also a spiritual biography, a genre that may include, as indicated by the contemporary distinction, "spiritual, not religious," figures who were not known for their religious observance. If the difference between being spiritual and being religious applies to anyone, it makes the most sense of Franklin, who throughout his life had a sense of dependence on divine favor, invoked God's assistance, studied the creator's creation, but could not accept the tenets of organized Christianity.

The book is dedicated to another historian and now old friend who may well have grown up by taking Franklin for granted even on field trips to the Franklin Institute. A native of Lancaster, whose father taught at the college there named for Franklin (now Franklin and Marshall), Jeff Charles has been an agreeable and knowledgeable conversation partner since our acquaintance through the Johns Hopkins University history department intramural basketball team. This book may function as an acknowledgment of the debt that both of our Pennsylvania Dutch ancestors owed to Ben Franklin when our great great great grandparents were settling in the New World. It is definitely an expression of my great gratitude to Jeff for countless pleasant and instructive conversations about everything from intellectual history and academic politics to golf and India Pale Ale.

Introduction: A Different Kind of Protestant

Benjamin Franklin is arguably the most widely recognized and least known of the American Founders. Thomas Jefferson has the Declaration of Independence as a badge of honor, not to mention places such as the Jefferson Memorial, Monticello, and the University of Virginia where tourists learn of additional accomplishments. The same goes for George Washington whose "First Inaugural" and "Farewell Address" still appear on students' reading lists and whose home and monument both humanize the man and inspire national pride. Franklin continues to be part of the fabric of national and local displays that commemorate the Founders even if Americans are uncertain what he actually contributed to the nation's creation. For instance, like Jefferson and Washington, Franklin appears on United States currency, though in an unusual way. While the first and second presidents are fixtures on the quarter and nickel respectively, Franklin appears on the one-hundred-dollar bill, a denomination that most Americans rarely carry. In fact, they may have needed the HBO series, "The Wire," to know the faces on both the one-hundred-dollar and ten-dollar (Alexander Hamilton) bills since one of the lessons Baltimore's West Side teenage drug dealers needed to learn in distinguishing legal tender from its counterfeit alternative was that presidents are not the only ones to adorn American paper currency. Americans also encounter statues of Franklin in many American cities (European as well). Boston, Washington, D.C., and Philadelphia (with at least five) are the most visited. Participants in the post-George Floyd killing protests during the Spring of 2020 pulled down statues across the country but they only objected to the Philadelphia Masons' rendition of Franklin.

Awareness without knowledge may account for protesters mainly leaving Franklin alone. He did own slaves for most of his career. Yet,

he was also president of the first abolition society in the United States. Such details remain in the many biographies of Franklin. The best guides available to children—and parents who read to them—are the big picture books sold in the young readers sections of bookstores. There people learn of his reputation as successful businessman, politician, scientist, inventor, and writer. One of the most popular of these books is *Now and Ben: The Modern Inventions of Benjamin Franklin.* The author, Gene Barretta, catalogs the wide variety of creations to which Franklin applied his practical know-how, from starting a borrowing library and a public hospital to inventing bifocals and the odometer. For Barretta, Franklin is the original Horatio Alger with a heavy dose of Thomas Edison—the ordinary citizen whose intelligence, hard work, and common sense not only improved ordinary Americans lives but even made America where hard work paid dividends. Franklin's business acumen, skills as a writer and editor, intellectual curiosity, and practical know-how more often provide a model for "making it" in America than his skills in government reveal the nation's political assumptions.

However Americans remember Franklin, his accomplishments went well beyond his humble beginnings. He was the son of a devout Puritan Boston family whose father, Josiah, originally planned for Ben to become a minister. Second thoughts led Josiah to apprentice his youngest son (and fifteenth child by two wives) to another son, James, for indentured service in a print shop. Disputes between James and Ben prompted the younger brother to run away to Philadelphia. After a few years of mishaps, which led to a year-long adventure in London, Franklin started his own printing business and eventually his own newspaper, *The Pennsylvania Gazette.* Over the next two decades, Franklin became a prosperous business owner and reliable neighbor. In his spare time, he formed civic associations, invented gadgets, experimented with nature, and proffered advice ("time is money") that still instruct and inspire the children who read books like *Now and Ben.*

By the 1750s, his leadership within the city catapulted him into Pennsylvania politics at a time when the British Empire's holdings in North America were under threat. From the mid-1750s until his death in 1790, Franklin became the crafty statesman who negotiated first with the British and then the French to secure the agreeable outcome of American independence. His status as the eldest of the nation's

Founding Fathers made his choice in 1914 for the one-hundred dollar bill a sensible one. (Prior to Franklin, the Treasury had used Abraham Lincoln for gold and James Monroe for silver certificates.)

As impressive as his accomplishments were, Franklin's religious outlook was apparently a peripheral part of his life. Since he grew up in Boston, all biographers have had to address whether Franklin's Puritan upbringing stayed with him. For most, the determination is relatively easy since Franklin wrote a deistical tract when he was nineteen that readily showed he had abandoned his parents' faith. Yet, Franklin also repudiated his initial foray into deism, according to Brown University historian, Gordon Wood, because metaphysical reasoning was "useless." Wood adds that Franklin never "accepted the Calvinist conviction that faith alone was the source of salvation" because his motto was that the "most acceptable Service to God" was "doing Good to man."[1] Even if Franklin never seriously considered Puritanism's doctrinal or liturgical requirements, he remained on good terms with believers of all stripes, from the evangelist George Whitefield to his devout sister, Jane Mecom. Such a disposition suggests modest comfort with faith and the people who believed. According to Baylor University historian, Thomas Kidd, the most recent biographer of Franklin, his Puritan upbringing prevented a turn to skepticism. Franklin's parents' "intense faith" kept him in the fold of a "doctrineless, moralized Christianity."[2]

The problem with classifying Franklin's religious outlook is that, as Kidd observes, he wrote about Christianity more than any other eighteenth-century layman in the English-speaking world. The oldest Founding Father may not have waded into the deep waters of Christ's two natures, the Trinity, or biblical authority, but he left plenty of trails at every point in his life for historians to discern how Franklin negotiated questions of belief and unbelief. For some, he was a Deist, for others a polytheist, for still others an inveterate opponent of religious intolerance, and for the remainder a moralist. Most recently, the verdict of Kidd is that Franklin was a deist for whom the Calvinist creed of his youth prevented a complete rejection of orthodoxy.

What stands out in discussions of Franklin's faith is something that applies to treatments of the man as a thinker. Because of Franklin's profile in the Founding and his large set of writings, scholars have overestimated him as an intellectual who carved out a body of thought

with clear hierarchies and boundaries. The same applies to efforts to characterize him as a specific kind of religious person. Franklin was an amateur polymath with an endless curiosity about most areas of human existence. The attitude behind his fascination was that of a tinkerer and inventor—someone who looked for the way the universe worked and how human beings lived together. Discovering those mechanisms was to arrive at truth. Though he dabbled in philosophy, Franklin was no deep or systematic thinker. The same point applies to Franklin's understanding and intuition about God, human nature, and the spiritual world.

Indeed, the chief characteristic of Franklin was not intellect but will. He was by any measure a busy fellow. His years as a tradesman were hardly routine given the fluctuations of the colonial economy. Once he left Boston, where he had family ties to fall back on, Franklin needed to rely on his own cleverness and industry, both of which were considerable. His success as a printer, combined with various and sundry measures to make Philadelphia more liveable, positioned Franklin well once he retired at the age of forty-two to become a significant voice in local, national, and international politics. All along the way, Franklin was an avid reader of everything from philosophy to market reports, and wrote and published serious and light essays and verse (often pseudonymously). Of the Founding Fathers, Franklin stands out as the one with the most varied interests, who knew the world of commerce and street life firsthand, the one with whom you want to have a drink (except he was not a drinker). He did not avoid religion, neither did he find faith repugnant. He observed spiritual matters, spotted the usefulness of some, the folly of others, and looked for those beliefs and morals by which he could improve himself and the society in which he lived. Such betterment was not a means of hastening a peaceful and just society. It was more on the order of getting by with as little unpleasantness as possible.

The approach to Franklin's spiritual life taken in the context of what follows starts with the historical reality that in colonial North America avoiding Christianity was impossible. Protestantism was in the background—always there but not something that demanded serious attention or devotion. As an active participant in that society—on so many levels—Franklin himself functioned as a Protestant. He was certainly averse to Puritanism's "hot" faith. But he held

much in common culturally and socially with other Protestants. As such, Franklin was a cultural Protestant.

That phrase is not one typically used for Western Christians who set up churches outside Rome's authority. It is much more common to talk about "cultural Roman Catholics" or "cultural Jews" to describe figures with ties to a religious tradition who are not serious. Another word is "non-observant." It is a way to recognize a subject's religious background and affinities without claiming they are "good" Roman Catholics or "practicing" Jews. Religion in these instances stands for a sensibility rather than a set of doctrinal, liturgical, or ethical norms. Sometimes, as the essayist, Joseph Epstein, observes in the case of Jews, non-observance comes in all sizes: J. Robert Oppenheimer, "the cerebral Jew"; Yehudi Menuhin, "the artistic Jew"; Albert Einstein, "the genius Jew"; Barbara Streisand, "the infuriating Jewish woman"; and Marisa Berenson, "the Rebecca-by-the-wells beautiful Jewess." Epstein himself, though of Jewish descent, claims nothing more for his own religion than being "a pious agnostic," far from a "sedulous practitioner of the Jewish religion." Yet, he admits, being Jewish haunts his outlook as it does for many Jewish writers. It is "the feeling of never quite feeling altogether at home anywhere," always needing to answer the question "what are you doing here?"[3]

The poet, Dana Goia, makes a similar point about Roman Catholic writers. Even if they do not practice or have rejected the faith, certain themes keep showing up in Roman Catholic texts. "They combine a longing for grace and redemption with a deep sense of human imperfection and sin," Goia writes. In addition, reality for writers who grew up in the church is "charged with the invisible presence of God." At the same time, these authors regard suffering as "redemptive." When it comes to perspective, Roman Catholic authors take the long view, "looking back to the time of Christ and the Caesars while also gazing forward toward eternity." A writer does not need to be observant for these characteristics to surface in his or her writing. Goia goes on to identify three "degrees of literary Catholicism": those "who remain active in the Church," those who grew up in the church or were educated in parochial schools and "made no dramatic exit" but their outlook remains "Catholic" even if they are often "unorthodox," and finally, anti-Catholic writers who have broken with the church but remain obsessed with its failings.[4]

If Ben Franklin had grown up Roman Catholic or Jewish, he might qualify as a non-observant Catholic or cultural Jew. He might even fit Goia's second group—someone who made no dramatic exit. But Franklin grew up in a branch of Protestantism that lacks categories for non-practicing persons other than skeptic, agnostic, unbeliever, or heretic. For most descendants of the Reformation, religious adherence is an either/or proposition—either in communion or not. This became all the more the norm for Protestants after the born-again experience became popular (in many circles) thanks to Franklin's friend, George Whitefield. It was also true of Protestants during the Reformation when the lines were drawn between standing either with the pope and emperor, or with the "true" church.

Nevertheless, non-observant or cultural Protestantism makes sense of many aspects of Franklin's life and avoids the typically strained attempt to put him in the appropriate religious box. For students of the past who work on big canvasses, the affinities between Protestantism and modern cultural developments are legion. On the occasion of the Reformation's five hundredth anniversary, for instance, political theorist, Francis Fukuyama, legendary for his thesis about "the end of history," saw Protestantism as responsible for a shift in the West from social control through hierarchical structures to an ethos of personal responsibility mediated through congregations, families, and other local or communal institutions. He observes that in Protestant countries like the Netherlands, crime rates, divorces, and social disorder declined not because the modern nation-state had such effective means of imposing control but because lesser authorities in communities took up the task of socializing children and enforcing moral codes.[5] So too Niall Ferguson, hailed by some as the "greatest historian of his generation," revises Max Weber's thesis about the Protestant work ethic to argue that the Reformation cultivated literacy, frugality, and industry in ways that allowed Protestant countries to develop faster economically than Roman Catholic ones. His six "killer apps" (applications) that allowed the West (for good and ill) to dominate the world—decentralization, natural science, property rights, medicine, the proliferation of consumer goods, and the work ethic—all were bound up with innovations that Protestants either welcomed or did not actively oppose.[6] Not to be outdone, Samuel P. Huntington, one of the most highly regarded political scientists of his generation,

argued provocatively, soon on the heels of the 9/11 attacks, that the United States was culturally Anglo-Protestant. The "American creed" of individual dignity, equality of all people, and inalienable rights to justice and opportunity," all have their roots in British Protestantism. For good effect, he quoted Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., who wrote that America's language, "its laws, its institutions, its political ideals, its literature, its customs, its precepts, its prayers, primarily derived from Britain."[7]

To read claims like these and regard Franklin as not fitting in the society that grew up with Protestantism is to confine Protestant Christianity to its churchly and devotional expressions. By the time that Franklin lived, British society made more room for members to operate without belonging to the right church. But even before that, when Protestant societies permitted less deviation from orthodox faith, Franklin's enterprise, work ethic, and morality would have fit right in.

At one level, to claim that Franklin was a cultural Protestant is to border on triviality since it means little more than a person navigating a modernizing society successfully. To be clear, the point is *not* about historical causation, as if the Reformation was responsible for ending the medieval world and launching the modern one. Instead, it is to situate Western Christianity's place in the social, economic, and political developments of Europe and the ways that Protestantism provided points of entry for people in many walks of life to make their way in the modern world without maintaining a rigid religious identity. The doctrine of vocation, namely, that people served God in their secular work, was one part of this. But Protestantism included teaching about family life, book learning, investigating the natural and social worlds, and earning and saving money. All of these activities became legitimate for Protestants in ways that Roman Catholic theology (or at least one application of it) posed barriers for those in society's dominated by the Roman church. Meanwhile, Protestantism's social ethic promoted personal responsibility and order even as it threw over older political and ecclesiastical hierarchies.

The obvious hitch in describing Franklin as cultural Protestant is that he was not very religious. As much as Protestantism may have enabled Franklin to function comfortably in the modern world, his exposure to the faith in Boston's churches and in his family did not prepare him to succeed in the world of churches. Here, the contrast

sometimes drawn between the sacred canopy that somehow unified medieval Europe and the cosmic disenchantment often attributed to Protestantism is worth noticing. Although still operating with expectations for Christendom even at a local level, Protestants did restrain the ambitions and power of church officers in several ways. The doctrine of the sufficiency of Scripture meant that pastors should not in their proclamations go beyond the Bible. The recognition of institutions like marriage, not as a sacrament, but as a civil arrangement, was another change that limited the church's reach. Secular vocations were worthwhile, not in sacramental ways but as part of divine providence and the created order. In other words, the Reformation, both explicitly in its teachings about the Christian life and implicitly in the way it redrew the lines of church and society, elevated ordinary, common, or secular life.

In fact, by making a fundamental distinction between the natural world of creation and providence on the one side and the sacred world of Scripture, worship, and church membership on the other, Protestants freed the spheres of commerce, politics, language, and science to grow by standards internal to those spheres rather than having to square practices with Christian teaching about salvation. Protestantism made it possible to excel as a printer without having to check with church authorities about editorial content, setting prices for material or sales, or most importantly, thinking salvation depended on work. For all of the German sociologist, Max Weber's, fascination with the doctrine of predestination and the ways that Protestants supposedly proved their salvation by worldly success, he missed the genius of the Reformation's doctrine of salvation. Although a Roman Catholic printer might see his work as inferior to the holy life that monks and priests pursued and know that purgatory was a time to overcome the deficiencies of a life lived in the secular world, a Protestant printer who believed the doctrine of justification by faith alone experienced no worries (in theory) about whether his work was keeping him from heaven. Not only was the printing business not sinful (inherently), but it was also a way of showing gratitude to God for a salvation that depended solely on divine grace. For Protestants work became service to God and love of neighbors while waiting for Christ's return.

If Franklin qualifies as a cultural Protestant, he did so by receiving and applying much of what Protestants taught about work and study

in the secular world without accepting all that the churches taught about the world to come. He internalized the dichotomy that Protestants drew between the sacred and secular. His endeavors as a businessman, scientist, author, and politician were not outworkings of salvation but part of the way that God had providentially arranged the world. As a person who repeatedly affirmed divine providence, Franklin had a measure of confidence that the moon, the sun, and the stars followed their courses, plant and animal life adhered to prearranged patterns in the earthly exchange of life and death, and men and women presided over life on planet earth with the kind of dominion explained in the Genesis account of creation. Knowledge of the natural world, success in business, or skillful deliberations in civic and national life—all arenas where Franklin proved himself indispensable—were available to him as a cultural Protestant without having to register as a devout believer.

Cultural Protestantism, as such, captures the elements of belief and morality that Franklin retained. He was clearly skeptical about Christian teaching matters of the creed and worship, and parts of the biblical narratives. But that did not require a loss of a Protestant sensibility about agency and human relationships. According to Ferguson, for example, recent studies of Protestantism and economic development show that belief in God is important for the sort of trust that is crucial for credit institutions. He adds, "religious belief (as opposed to formal observance) of any sort appears to be associated with economic growth, particularly where concepts of heaven and hell provide incentives for good behavior in this world."[8] That is a remarkably apt description of Franklin's religion. He absorbed enough religious truth about the natural and social worlds to suppose that his efforts mattered. At the same time, Franklin did not regard himself as a sinner saved by grace.

Understanding Franklin as a cultural Protestant is one way to interpret, as the following chapters do, the major occupations of Franklin's life and situate them in the modern society that Protestantism encouraged. For all that he wrote and published, Franklin's work in business, civic life, science, technology, and diplomacy is arguably more revealing than his writings since he was not a thinker but a tinkerer. Throughout practically all of his undertakings, Franklin operated with assumptions and expectations little removed from those that Protestants possessed

about the world outside church life. He was neither devout nor agnostic but maintained a belief in God as the powerful governor of human affairs and in an afterlife when people would reap either rewards or punishments for the lives they had lived. This framework equipped him to go from obscure and humble origins to one of the eighteenth century's most accomplished persons. As much of a cliché as pulling-himself-up-by-his-bootstraps is, his advice, wit, and striving say as much about Protestantism as it does about American character.

Franklin as "cultural Protestant" actually repeats an argument that Perry Miller made almost sixty years ago. The Harvard University scholar who almost single-handedly put Franklin's contemporary, Jonathan Edwards, on the map of U.S. intellectual history, made a point about the cultural significance of Puritanism when he claimed that Edwards and Franklin belonged to a "once unitary tradition" that had split by the early eighteenth century. Each man strove for and attained, according to Miller, "a clarity, simplicity, directness" of style that was "the lasting impress of the Puritan spirit." This manner went well beyond literary expression. It was a mentality that emanated from "a revulsion against what Protestants held to be the unprofitable monasticism of the Medieval Church." In contrast to priests and the religious, Puritans countered with vocation or the idea that every legitimate secular activity "was as much a religious exercise as any other." Indeed, for Puritans "the same rationale served in either ditch-digging or manufacturing as in the physical act of putting words on paper: nobody was doing it to amuse himself. . . . He was doing the job in obedience to the commands of God, or of conscience, or of probity." Miller argued that although Franklin "blithely put aside the theology" that Edwards explained in the study and pulpit, the Philadelphian exemplified the Puritan way of life "every day of his life."[9]

Notes

1. Gordon S. Wood, *The Americanization of Benjamin Franklin* (New York: Penguin, 2004), 30.
2. Thomas S. Kidd, *Benjamin Franklin: The Religious Life of a Founding Father* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2017), 4, 6.
3. Joseph Epstein, "Funny, But I Do Look Jewish," in *Wind Sprints: Shorter Essays* (Edinburg, VA: Axios Press, 2016), 568, 570.

4. Dana Goia, "The Catholic Writer Today," *First Things*, December, 2013.
5. Francis Fukuyama, "The Political Consequences of the Protestant Reformation, Part II: Martin Luther and the Origins of Identity Politics," *American Interest*, November, 2017.
6. Niall Ferguson, *Civilization: The Six Killer Apps of Western Power* (New York: Penguin, 2012), ch. 6.
7. Schlesinger quoted in Samuel P. Huntington, *Who Are We?: The Challenges to America's National Identity* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2005), 60.
8. Ferguson, *Civilization*, 264.
9. Miller, "Franklin and the Divided Heritage of Puritanism," in Brian M. Barbour, ed., *Benjamin Franklin: A Collection of Critical Essays* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1979), 22, 23, 24.

1
Growing up Puritan

Even the date of Ben Franklin's birth had an element of religious significance, at least from one angle. Until he turned forty-eight, the Franklins celebrated their son's birthday on January 6. In 1706, the year he was born, England and its colonies still used the Julian Calendar. But that system's miscalculation of the solar year (by eleven minutes), meant the year had too many days and Easter moved each century further away from the Spring's equinox. Consequently, in 1752 British authorities followed Roman Catholic countries, France, Italy, Spain, and Portugal by adopting the Gregorian calendar, instituted by Pope Gregory XIII, with its own method of calculating leap years to keep human time in synch with the solar system. The loss of eleven days prompted rioters in England to demand back the lost days during protests in the streets. For Ben Franklin and his family, the change of calendars meant moving birthday celebrations from the sixth day of January to the seventeenth, the day that continues for official purposes to be Franklin's date of birth. It might seem odd for Protestants to accept a Roman Catholic calendar. But they did not sacralize or mark time the way Rome did. Protestants were generally utilitarian about such matters. Such pragmatism suited Ben well.

On the same day in January, 1706 that his parents, Josiah and Abiah, welcomed their new son in to the world, they followed the Puritan practice of assigning him the name of one of Israel's twelve tribes. They also took him to church where the pastor of Boston's South Church (Third), Ebenezer Pemberton, baptized the infant. The level of religious observance surrounding Franklin's birth suggests that Massachusetts Bay was still, as John Winthrop had called it, a "city on a hill," or a model of Protestant piety. It also seems to indicate that Franklin was born into a strict and devout environment. According to

Kerry Walters, the author of *Ben Franklin and His Gods*, as a boy Franklin "uncritically accepted the highly charged tradition of New England Calvinism into which he was born." Since Franklin did not grow up to inherit his parents' religious practice, his soul proved to be as rocky as the land near Boston. Kerry even contends that as an adolescent Franklin rebelled against Puritan convictions and "slid into a starkly lifeless deism."[1]

This stark contrast—between "the god of [Franklin's] Calvinist fathers and the god of his Enlightenment mentors"—fails to do justice to the breadth that characterized New England Protestantism by the time of Franklin's birth as it neared the centennial of the Pilgrims' landing at Plymouth Rock. The boys' parents themselves were hardly doctrinaire or steeped in the devotional zeal that had initially marked the "hot" Protestantism of Puritans. To be sure, Josiah and Abiah found a spiritual home among the Puritans, but their existence in Boston depended as much on the ordinary duties of bread-winning, home-making, and political participation as on devotional practices that even for the godly were exacting. Meanwhile, the congregation in which Franklin grew up was one of the colony's most lax. In other words, the Puritanism that Franklin experienced was not the intense variety that had created problems for English monarchs, from Elizabeth I to James I and Charles I. New England Protestantism was already well on its way "from piety to moralism," to use Joseph Haroutinian's famous phrase.[2] If Ben Franklin grew up a juvenile free thinker who never forgot the value of hard work and personal responsibility, the reason had less to do with a rejection of his parents' or pastors' faith than with the possibilities that colonial Boston offered its citizens and settlers.

The English Protestant Inheritance

In his autobiography, Franklin's most popular and widely read book, he claimed his parents had reared him as a Presbyterian. The latter term had less to do with the intricacies of church government—Presbyterianism qualifying as rule by the few in contrast to Episcopalianism's rule by one (the bishop) or Congregationalism's rule by the many—than it did with dissenting Protestants in England. Franklin did not write about his life until the 1770s while on a diplomatic

mission to England and finished it in Philadelphia over decade later. By then he had lived outside New England for almost fifty years and denominational designations for different Protestants had become common.

When Franklin was growing up, "Presbyterian" was a word that was almost as contested as "Puritan." Since bishops ruled the Church of England (with the Crown at the head), a Protestant communion that arose in 1534 at least in part to accommodate Henry VIII's desire for a wife who could bear a male heir, Presbyterianism posed a threat to the stability of both the church and the realm. Even in New England where Puritans of a particular stripe had free rein (until the revocation of their charter in 1692), the preferred form of church government was not Presbyterian but Congregational. The theological characteristics of British Protestantism—Puritan, Anglican, and Presbyterian—were decidedly Reformed (synonymous for many with Calvinism). The articles of the Church of England, for instance, affirmed predestination as readily and as clearly as John Calvin did in his theological textbook, *The Institutes*. English Protestants differed over church government and liturgy. To understand what Franklin understood (or misunderstood) by the word Presbyterian requires a closer look at the affinities that informed his father and mother's religious practice.

The Franklins were the fruit, in part, of English Protestantism during the reigns of the Stuarts. If the original frustrations with Elizabeth I's religious policies drove some priests and bishops to purify—with "Puritan" functioning as an epithet to label these purists, those objections became even greater under Charles I (1625–1649). In Northampton, the English town from which the Franklins came, the king's archbishop, William Laud, in 1637 had excommunicated local church wardens for not restoring the communion at rail and altar; Puritans insisted on a table and no rail. Some Puritans, like those who in 1629 accompanied John Winthrop to Massachusetts Bay, worried that Archbishop Laud was precisely capable of implementing such high-handed and unfaithful policies. Franklin's father, Josiah, uncle, Benjamin the elder, and grandparents did not leave England so they could find a pure church. As Franklin observed, his father's family remained in the Church of England until the "End of Charles the 2ds Reign," roughly the 1670s.[3] Only after the ejection of Noncomformist

ministers from the established church in 1662 with the Act of Uniformity did pastors with Puritan outlooks begin to hold meetings outside the official church buildings in "conventicles," the term for unofficial and potentially illegal gatherings for worship.

What strengthened the elder Franklins' identification with Puritanism was Josiah and the elder Benjamin's move to Banbury, a town Arthur Bernon Tourtellot, who wrote, *Ben Franklin: The Shaping of Genius*, described as a "hotbed of Puritanism."[4] Northampton offered limited prospects for boys in search of a trade but Banbury, a market town at the crossroads of Oxfordshire and Northamptonshire, was five times the size of the Franklins' original village. Puritanism had also taken hold of Banbury. In 1601, according to the account of a local priest, Protestants had "in furious zeal" destroyed the cross that overshadowed the local market.[5] That sort of piety was distant from the economic motives that drove the Franklins. But relocating to Banbury situated Ben Franklin's father and uncle further within the orbit of a strain of Protestantism that had reservations about the Church of England and inspired settlements in the New World.

The "contagion of clerical dissent" at Banbury took many forms. One of the local rectors was John Dod, a friend and literary executor of Thomas Cartwright's writings. The latter was among the chief critics of rule by bishops and argued strenuously for Presbyterianism as the biblical form of church government. Another minister in Banbury who provided the greatest pastoral care for Josiah Franklin was Samuel Wells, an Oxford University graduate who served as a chaplain to Parliament's military during the 1640s civil war that pitted Puritans against the Crown. But Wells opposed Parliament's resolve to try Charles I for treason and generated a petition with the names of nineteen clergy. By the time that Josiah arrived in Banbury in the early 1670s, Wells had lost his position in the parish as a nonconformist minister. But he was the "most direct and determining influence" on Franklin's father.[6] The Five-Mile Act required pastors like Wells either to swear loyalty to the Church of England or move at least five miles away from their former parishes. Wells complied by relocating to Deddington. At the same time, he sent letter after letter to his former parishioners with counsel and exhortation that he would have given if present. Wells' Puritanism was not "given to fanaticism,"[7] but reflected the characteristic marks of these Protestants' piety, namely, a

heavy reliance on the Bible and willingness to learn from long and erudite sermons based on close readings of Scripture. Ben Franklin himself understood the importance of the Bible to his ancestors. In his *Autobiography* he recounted a story he learned from his uncle about his great-great-grandparents' family worship:

> They had got an English Bible, and to conceal and secure it, it was fastened open with tapes under and within the cover of a joint-stool. When my great-great-grandfather read it to his family, he turned up the joint-stool upon his knees, turning over the leaves then under the tapes. One of the children stood at the door to give notice if he saw the apparitor coming, who was an officer of the spiritual court. In that case the stool was turned down again upon its feet, where the Bible remained concealed under it as before.[8]

Puritan devotion aside, the demands of supporting a family were as important in Josiah's 1683 decision, when only twenty-six, to emigrate to Boston, Massachusetts. He had completed his apprenticeship in the dyeing trade and in 1676 had married Anne Child, a woman from his original village of Ecton. In Banbury, Josiah had worked as a paid employee for his older brother, John, in the same business in which he had apprenticed. The couple soon had two children, Elizabeth and Samuel. While Josiah's family was growing, his brother and boss, John, in 1682 married Ann Jeffs. The Banbury business now needed to sustain two families, which by 1683 was one too many. As the younger member, Josiah chose Boston. His son, Benjamin, later interpreted the decision, as so many narratives of American immigrants have, as one of the religiously devoted seeking political freedom. Instead of moving to the country, according to Ben, Josiah migrated to Massachusetts where the family expected to practice their religion freely. Benjamin Franklin the elder, Josiah's brother, attributed the move to "things not succeeding [in Banbury] according to [Josiah's] mind."[9] Religious devotion aside, he knew his prospects for supporting a family in England were bleak. Tourtellot calculated that the annual cost of living in Stuart England was twenty-six pounds and almost sixty percent of English families made less than twenty pounds annually. Skilled artisans like Josiah "did somewhat better . . . but only to the degree that they could afford an occasionally more varied diet, pay a slightly higher rent, and use soap and candles with less punishing frugality."[10]

For those who survived the voyage to the New World—a two-month ordeal in the summer of 1683 for Josiah and Anne—Boston offered better prospects than England. In addition to bad food, little water, and sickness that spread among passengers on overcrowded ships, the lumbering frigates regularly lost passengers and livestock during rough seas. But the prospects for a better standard of living generally made up for the risks of trans-Atlantic travel. In New England, an unskilled worker earned over two times what he might receive in the old country. Skilled laborers could do even better, except that in Josiah's case the demand for dyeing was small since laws forbade anyone below the rank of gentleman from wearing silk. This explains his choice of work as a tallow chandler. This business involved procuring fat from slaughterhouses and then distributing it to soap and candle makers.

Boston was congenial to Josiah's Puritan inclinations. The closest congregation to the Franklins was Third Church, also known as Old South. At the time of the Franklins arrival, it was the youngest of Boston's churches and for many observers the least rigorous. Josiah owned the covenant on September 27, 1685 and his reasons for joining remain obscure. What is clear is that Franklin's father became an active member in Third Church and soon assumed positions of responsibility. The congregation appointed him tithingman, which according to the language of Massachusetts' General Court, included inspecting "the disorders in and by publick and private houses of entertainment, and prophanation of ye Lord's day."[11] Josiah enjoyed the respect of his fellow Bostonians sufficiently to enforce attendance at Sunday services and to prevent people from napping or daydreaming at church. If Josiah found someone insufficiently dutiful, he was supposed to report them to the local magistrates. One could well imagine that locals—the ones Cotton Mather accused of increasing Boston "exceedingly" in "idleness"—regarded Josiah Franklin as little more than a snitch. But his son remembered that Boston's elites "consulted him for his Opinion in Affairs of the Town or of the Church he belong'd to and sho'd a good deal of Respect for his Judgment and Advice."[12]

The activities of a tithingman might also give a wrong impression about Old South Church. As strict as Boston still was (and would remain into the 1920s through moral activist agencies like venerable

Watch and Ward Society), in the 1680s, despite the constant complaints that its people were "the most profligate and debauched wretches in the world," Old South was on the relaxed side of the Puritan spectrum.[13] The congregation began during a dispute among members of Boston's First Church over the Halfway Covenant. This was an official policy of Massachusetts' churches to accommodate members who could not give an adequate account of faith; it technically allowed the children of unconverted baptized adults to be church members. In effect, it removed the requirement of a personal story of conversion for church membership. For conservative Puritans, this was a breach of the devout practices that had brought the original settlers to the New World. For others, it was an adjustment to the realities of a fallen world. The Franklins' congregation had taken the side of adapting Puritanism. This hardly made Josiah a liberal Puritan. Neither was he affiliated with the ultra-orthodox.

This was equally true for the pastors who shepherded the Franklins at Old South. Samuel Willard (1640–1707), pastor when Josiah arrived, regularly went head-to-head with the Mather family, arguably the center of conservative outlooks in Boston. Willard stood out, though only anonymously in print, as a critic of the methods that judges used in the Salem witch trials and eventually published a work that dissented especially from Cotton Mather's conclusions. At issue, in particular, was the willingness of officials to admit spectral evidence (dreams and visions) in court, a decision that Willard opposed. He was also the pastor in 1693 who read from the pulpit in Old South, likely in Josiah's presence, Judge Samuel Sewall's confession of guilt in the Salem proceedings. The judge apologized that he had, along with eight other judges, condemned twenty persons to death. Willard was no liberal but combined "theological conservatism and religious liberalism" with "flexibility in public affairs" and a "totally independent attitude" to create his own version of Puritanism.[14] Indeed, some trace Ben Franklin's own independence of mind to Willard's high estimate of reason as "the manner" by which God acted "upon our Understanding."[15] Willard was sufficiently respectable to serve as president of Harvard College for the last six years of his life, which proved to be an appointment to block the conservative, Cotton Mather, from assuming the post.

Willard's successor at Old South, Ebenezer Pemberton, the pastor who baptized baby Ben, was another check upon the Mathers'

conservatism and a further indication that Franklin's experience of Puritanism was hardly repressive. Pemberton had been an associate pastor at Old South thanks to Willard's high-handed manipulation of congregational consent; he refused to acknowledge a vote against Pemberton and did not reconstitute the assembly of church members until it unanimously approved of his choice of a colleague. Pemberton supported the further liberalization of Harvard by backing John Leverett as Willard's successor, an appointment that the Mathers also opposed. He was Franklin's pastor for the first eleven years of his life and he established a model for the importance of learning and reading good literature. Pemberton wrote, for instance, that a good education "is no less necessary, as an ordinary medium to secure the glory of Christ's visible kingdom."[16]

Josiah Franklin's wife, Anne Child Franklin, died only six years after the family had settled in Boston. The widower was thirty-one years old, fairly well established in the colonial setting, and the father of four young children ranging between eleven (Elizabeth) and four-year-old (Josiah). To maintain his responsibilities, remarriage was crucial and was a common practice at a time when marriage provided basic social services. The expense of hiring a servant was less onerous than finding space in the small Boston home. Five months after Anne's death, on November 29, 1689, Josiah married Abiah Folger, a twenty-two-year-old. Their union produced ten children (no still-borns), including Ben, and lasted for close to fifty years. Abiah was the descendant of Flemish Protestants who left the Low Countries for England during combat between the Spanish Crown and Calvinist rebels. The Folgers settled in Norwich and practiced their Protestant devotion among the non-conformists whom historians classify as Puritans. In 1635, however, with fears over Archbishop Laud's religious policies, John Folger, Ben Franklin's great-grandfather, left Norwich for Boston on the same ship with John Winthrop, Jr. According to Tourtellot, the Folgers were a "more spirited people" than the Franklins, "more on the move, more impatient perhaps."[17] The Folgers were particularly sensitive to religious oppression and prone to side with Presbyterian forms of church government over episcopacy.

Peter Folger, Ben's grandfather, cut an impressive figure in the New World, all the more so considering he never rose to an official

prominence in either colonial government or church life. In *Magnalia Christi Americana: Or, The Ecclesiastical History of New-England*, Cotton Mather referred to Folger as an "able, godly Englishman."[18] Folger did not stay put. Soon after migrating to Boston, he set out for Dedham and collaborated with Thomas Mayhew, Sr., and his son, Thomas, Jr. This work led Folger eventually to Nantucket where Mayhew, Jr., functioned as governor over an operation that included real estate development and converting the native population. Folger's assigned work was as schoolmaster and surveyor, but it grew to include learning the native languages and conducting negotiations between the European settlers and island residents. Mather credited Folger with converting and catechizing the natives even while overlooking some of their less orthodox ways.

Despite his peripatetic ways, Folger still managed to support a family of nine children. His last child, Abiah, was the only one to be born in Nantucket. All but two of the children remained on the island. Two of the daughters, Patience and Abiah, settled in Boston. Despite their father's Baptist inclinations, both daughters attended and became members at Third Church (Old South) where Josiah Franklin's family worshiped. How much Abiah channeled her father's spunk to Ben is open to question since records of male accomplishments are easier to follow than those of mothers and sisters. At the same time, Tourtellot's description of Folger indicated that Abiah taught Ben to emulate his maternal grandfather: "remarkable liveliness," "enormous versatility," "energy," "boisterous resistance to authority which he thought errant or abrasive," "love of the written word," "essential skepticism," "joyous learning of new trades when the need arose," "defiance of the wrong and the wrongheaded," "delight and uninhibitedness in trying his hand at both poetry and prose," "qualities of character and intelligence that led the settlers to depend on his skill and fairness."[19] That sounds a lot like the adult Ben. Even if Tourtellot read Franklin into Folger, the grandfather was indicative of a large aspect of colonial Puritan life, namely, that orthodoxy and religious zeal did not dominate Massachusetts Bay's inhabitants as many imagine. Ideas and religious convictions existed on a spectrum in the colony. That was likely just as true of the home that Josiah and Abiah built after their marriage in 1689.

Domestic Life

Whatever the effects of Puritanism on Ben Franklin's childhood formation, those religious convictions came to him through the medium of family life. In his own account, the influence of his father was clearly more important compared to that of his mother, Abiah, who deserved mention for an excellent constitution and the capacity to suckle all of her ten children—Ben was the youngest son, with two younger sisters. His maternal grandfather, Peter Folger, actually received more attention in Franklin's memories of family life, likely owing to Cotton Mather's positive mention. But Josiah made arguably the greatest impression in the way he conducted himself in the family's small home (six hundred square feet). Franklin recalled vividly Josiah's frame—"of middle Stature, but well set and very strong." His father was gifted at drawing, played psalm tunes on the violin, and "had a clear pleasing Voice." Josiah was handy at fixing things and using tools, even outside his trade. The most significant attribute was his "solid Judgment in prudential Matters," both public and private. This undoubtedly accounts for Josiah's appeal to church and civil authorities. It also made the kitchen table a place that likely gave Franklin his own inclination for conversation and socializing: "At [Josiah's] Table, he lik'd to have as often as he could some sensible Friend or Neighbor, to converse with, and always took care to start some ingenious or useful Topic for Discourse." Josiah's intention was "to improve the Minds of his Children." The lesson that Ben learned was to begin reflection on "what was good, just and prudent in the Conduct of Life."[20]

Among the guests in the Franklin home were likely the parents of Charles Chauncy (1705–1787), who may have been one of Ben's childhood playmates and who grew up to be a prominent Congregationalist pastor. Chauncy would eventually hold down responsibilities as minister as a twenty-two-year-old at Boston's oldest congregation, First Church, and later entered the annals of American church history as the Great Awakening's and Jonathan Edwards' most forceful critic. His biographer, Edward M. Griffin, conjectures that Chauncy's parents reared him "pretty much the way" Josiah and Abiah Franklin oversaw Ben.[21] But Charles turned out differently from Ben. Although a critic of Edwards' revivalism, Chauncy also refused to go

along with Franklin's eventual embrace of a faith free from divine revelation (some might call it deism, others providentialism). Unlike Franklin who would admit that "Revelation has indeed no weight with me," Chauncy continued to take his cues from Scripture and reason.[22] One factor may have been that, to the regular attendance at church and prayer, Bible reading, and psalm singing in the home, Chauncy's parents added the Westminster Shorter Catechism, a teaching device constructed by Puritan clergy during the unsettling decade (1640s) of England's war between Parliament and the Crown. The primer that Chauncy's parents used at home included the catechism. Franklin himself made no reference to catechesis in his youth.

Another difference between Chauncy and Franklin was extended family. When Ben turned six in 1712, his father purchased a much larger home in the same neighborhood of Boston—the Franklins, with three children and Jane, the last, on the way, moved from six hundred square feet into a spacious dwelling almost six times as large (3,500 square feet). The new house also gave the family room to accommodate a visitor, Ben Franklin the elder, Josiah's older brother by seven years. In 1715 he joined the family and stayed for four years during which time Ben, the nephew, grew into adolescence. At the time, Ben the elder was a drifter, "a failure," a sixty-five-year-old man whose work as a dyer in London had included business dealings that left him bankrupt. The commonplace books that Ben the elder left behind "constitute a pathetic chronicle, in rhymes and meter often no less pathetic, of an endless series of misadventures, misunderstandings, and misfortunes."[23] He had struggled to find lasting work in London as a bachelor during the Restoration, and then married Hannah, one of the daughters of the Puritan pastor Wells, who had led other Franklins into the network of nonconformist Protestantism. With her, Ben the elder had ten children. By 1705 when Hannah died, so had eight of their offspring. Five years later, alone and destitute, he cobbled together funds for a passage to Boston.

In Massachusetts, his trade, dyeing, was as inactive as his own temperament—Ben the elder lacked his brother Josiah's entrepreneurial spirit. To occupy his time, Uncle Ben continued to write, and by example made a dent on his impressionable nephew who became an author at a young age. The uncle had already written with his nephew in mind before settling in Boston. He had sent Ben,

then five years old, a poem about the dangers of war and the military—"Bye it doe many fall, Not Many Rise/ Makes Many poor, few Rich, fewer Wise." Another verse composed by the uncle instructed the young Ben to be "an Obedient son/ Each Day let Duty constantly be Done/ Never give Way to sloth or lust or pride." As a seven-year-old, Ben wrote back to his uncle, which inspired the elder Ben to write what for Tourtellot "was the best of his poems to survive." It concluded in a manner that may well have given the younger Ben a confidence with words that few of his peers had so early in life:

> Goe on, My Name, and be progressive still
> Til though Excell Great [Edward] Cocker with thy Quill.
> Soe Imitate and [hi]s Excellence Reherse
> Till though Excell His cyphers, Writing, Verse;
> And show us here that your young Western Chime
> Out Does all Down unto our present Time.
> With choycer Measure put his poesie Down;
> And I will Vote for thee the Lawrell Crown.[24]

In Boston, the uncle spent less time on verse and paid more attention matters closer to home. For instance, he composed a history of the Franklin family, a narrative of his own health and ailments, and a transcription from the Town Book of Boston with the names of its alleys, streets, and lanes. "Turn Again Alley," "Beer Lane," or "Princes Street" intrigued the new arrival to Massachusetts Bay.[25]

Uncle Ben's presence in the Franklin home also reinforced Josiah's determination to send the young Ben to school to prepare for the ministry. It was, as Ben (who was the tenth of Josiah's sons) later recalled, "a tithe of his [boys] to the Service of the Church." Ben added, "My early Readiness in learning to read (which must have been very early, as I do not remember when I could not read), and the opinion of all his friends, that I should certainly make a good scholar," encouraged Josiah in his deliberate effort to sacrifice for the glory of his creator and sustainer. Ben's father also received support from Uncle Ben who "approv'd."[26] To assist the budding scholar, the elder Ben gave the boy a collection of sermons that he had transcribed with his own form of shorthand. The elder Ben also taught the younger how to decipher and use the system of transcription in hopes the nephew might learn how to compose sermons of his own.

Since he never cultivated an interest in sermons, Ben soon forgot the technique. The uncle's departure from the Franklin home to live with one of his daughters in Boston also contributed to the loss. Although Uncle Ben was present to see the progress his nephew made at Boston Latin School, the surest way to prepare for admission to Harvard, the interactions between the elder Ben and Josiah became testy. The nephew remembered how "affectionate [the brothers'] correspondence was while they were separated" and how vigorous "the Disgusts and Misunderstandings" were "when they came to live sometime together in the same House."[27] Even so, Uncle Ben left his mark on the aspiring student as "an ingenious man" and a habitual reader. Walter Isaacson's interpretation of Ben the elder's presence in the Franklin home as proof of the adage—"Fish and guests stink after three days"—fails to do justice to the uncle's impression on his nephew.[28]

The "Free Grammar School of Boston," founded in 1635, was older even than Harvard by one year. Its greatest headmaster, Ezekiel Cheever, lived to the ripe age of ninety-four. His influence was still noticeable when Franklin attended even though the teacher died a few years before. Cheever's successor, Nathaniel Williams was a pastor and physician who continued to practice medicine and preach at Old South even while teaching at Boston's Latin school. Unlike his predecessor, Williams was not intimidating in the classroom. He was "of a middling Size, enclining to Fatness; His Countenance Fresh and Comely, with a mixture of Majesty and smiling Sweetness." Williams also mixed his conversations with "Chearfulness [sic] and Gravity."[29] The curriculum was explicitly designed to prepare boys for matriculation at Harvard. This meant students needed to be able to use Latin for all instruction and know enough Greek to read ancient authors in the original. In 1711 Boston's selectmen spearheaded a study of the school to see if the curriculum could accommodate those students not intent on becoming scholars. Williams heard the concerns but did not change the curriculum. It was still rigorous and involved mastery of Latin, Greek, and even Hebrew.

Franklin enrolled, like most boys, at the age of eight and quickly distinguished himself even if the life of a scholar was not in the designs of providence. He later recounted that he had entered in "the Middle" of his class, rose to the head of it, and then teachers advanced him to

the class above by the end of his first year of study. As Tourtellot observes, this was a "remarkable accomplishment since Franklin's origins were much humbler than his classmates whose backgrounds were either wealthier or more privileged. The three classmates Tourtellot used for this comparison—Mather Byles, Samuel Freeman, and Jeremiah Gridley—were all members of the Harvard class of 1725. Byles went on to be a "somewhat unorthodox" pastor of "Anglican taste and Tory convictions." Freeman went into business and into the Church of England, and with his impressive estate he left a beneficence for poorer students heading into the Anglican ministry. Gridley went into law, founded a weekly newspaper, and was so impressive that he earned John Adams' praise as "the model of the skilled advocate."[30] In addition to learning Latin vocabulary, grammar, and translation, students read Corderius' colloquies and Aesop's fables. Franklin's father may not have been as well connected as the parents of other children, though in a small town like Boston, holding down responsibilities at South Church social networks could go a long way, but the boy's native curiosity and intelligence, in addition to the exposure to books and the joys of reading supplied him with skills to excel among his peers.

As well as Ben did under Williams' tutelage, Josiah decided to withdraw his son from Boston Latin after his first year in the classroom. This coincided with a recognition that Ben should not pursue the Christian ministry. The son's version of this episode stressed the financial calculation in Josiah's choice—"my father. . . from a view of the expense of a college education . . . [and] having so large a family . . . altered his first intention." This was at least what advice Josiah gave "to his friends in [Ben's] hearing."[31] Tourtellot doubts that money was the chief consideration, though he does not question what Josiah said in front of his son. At its most demanding moments, Josiah had no more than four sons living at home under the age of apprenticeship. What was much more decisive, and what Josiah would not say in front of his son, was that Ben's religious disposition was not up to the demands of training for the Puritan ministry. Tourtellot argues that Josiah knew Ben did not possess the right kind of devotion that could withstand "the searching inquiry" exacted by the local clergy and the Puritan establishment.[32] The historian of Franklin's youth may overestimate just how exacting that scrutiny was since Boston's churches

by the early eighteenth century had ordained pastors that were hardly steeped in the pious zeal that had characterized the colony's first generation-and-a-half. After all, Charles Chauncy, though he grew up to be a defender of Puritan traditions, did not exude the kind of piety that was typical of Puritanism's experiential Calvinism. Tourtellot does point to an important story that suggests Josiah realized Ben's training for the ministry could result in as much pain as gain. Ben's grandson, William Temple Franklin, recalled his grandfather's story from about the time that he started attending Boston Latin:

> Dr. Franklin, when a child, found the long graces used by his father before and after meals very tedious. One day after the winter's provisions had been salted, – "I think Father," said Benjamin, "if you were to say *Grace* over the whole cask – once for all – it would be a vast *saving of time*."[33]

Ben was already calculating that "time is money." That contrasted with the piety that had sustained Josiah since Northampton. The father likely sensed his son's true disposition.

With the door to the ministry closed, the elder Franklin needed to find a trade suitable for his son. That did not mean school was behind, however. The Puritan commonwealth threatened parents with fines if their children could not read or write. This commitment to literacy—in 1680 ninety-eight percent of men and sixty-two percent of women could sign legal documents—meant that Boston had eight writing schools for its residents. Two received public funds and the rest were private. Parents had the option of not enrolling their children in schools that were more or less comprehensive elementary schools. Even so, they needed to teach their children at home. Josiah and Abiah most likely educated their daughters themselves. Ben, however, received instruction from George Brownell who lived two streets away on Wings Lane and advertised his school as a place to learn "Writing, Cyphering, Dancing, Treble Violin, Flute, Spinnet, &c. Also English and French Quilting, Imbroidery, Florishing, Plain Work, Marking in several sorts of Stitches. . . ."[34] Despite the breadth of Brownell's curriculum, Bostonians referred to these institutions as "writing schools." Putting words on paper with quill and ink was the bread and butter of instruction in colonial society. It was "the sole form of communication" for legal and business records and essential as much

for scholars as tradesmen. Vocabulary, grammar, spelling, and penmanship were as important to writing as was the skill of making and maintaining quills from the feathers of geese. Ben later paid Brownell, "a then famous man," the compliment of using "mild" and "encouraging" methods.[35]

Math was a different matter, a potential irony for a man who achieved fame as a scientist. Ben admitted that he failed at the methods Brownell used. This "cyphering" likely included copying figures and adding or subtracting them without any real frame of reference. The boy's failure in arithmetic was largely responsible for Josiah withdrawing Ben from the school after a year. On his own initiative as an adolescent, Ben picked up Edward Cocker's 1677 text on math and "went thro' the whole by my self with great Ease," a comment that could well have impugned the alleged success of Brownell's school.[36] Ben's initiative and native intelligence also extended to the sorts of play in which Boston's youth engaged. A harbor town meant that boating and swimming were simply part of the habitat. Most biographers of Franklin observe that he excelled as a swimmer. He also invented devices to increase his speed in the water. One creation was a set of crude flippers to attach to his feet. Another was taking a kite into the water where he discovered that, "lying on my back and holding the stick in my hands, I was drawn along the surface of the water in a very agreeable manner."[37]

Ben's mix of intellectual curiosity and physical strength left Josiah undecided about a trade for his ten-year-old son. An apprenticeship in the family candle- and soap-making business was the best that Josiah could do initially. The end of Ben's formal education coincided with the marriage of Ben's brother, John, who was ten years older and had completed his apprenticeship with Josiah. In 1716, when John moved to Rhodes Island to open his own shop, Ben filled in. As it happened, however, crafting soap and candles hardly required physical strength or intellectual skill. According to Tourtellot, Josiah's trade was "the least inspiring, least imaginative, and least innovative" on both sides of the Atlantic before 1750." Indeed, "no craft could have been less responsive to the analytical, inventive, and inquiring mind" that Ben obviously possessed.[38] The process of making candles was still basically what it had been since fifteenth-century Paris. Only in 1750 would candle makers begin to use the crystalline spermaceti of the sperm

whale and the berry of bayberry bushes to simplify the ordeal of rendering tallow from beef and mutton fat (though bayberry candles were a luxury). Chopping the fatty tissue of oxen and sheep was just the beginning of a literally noxious process that involved heating the fat over fire until the usable substance floated to the surface and the candle-maker collected it. Then came twisting cotton or flax fibers into wicks of sufficient thickness and tightness to produce an even burn. Soap was less arduous but still relied on rendering fat from tallow and mixing it with what was known as "alkali," a material derived from ashes. The process was "dull" and "predictable."[39] It also made Franklin somewhat fussy about soap. At the age of eighty, he wrote to his sister, Jane, about cakes of soap that had crumbled and asked for advice about whether to salvage it by re-melting the pieces.

Ben worked for his father for two years, but his dislike of the trade was obvious. Consequently, in 1718, when Ben was twelve, Josiah looked for another line of work for his enterprising son. The father ruled out all duties that might involve seafaring even though the work on Boston's docks fascinated Ben. Three years earlier, Josiah, Jr. had not returned from sea. So the father turned to the streets and alleys of Boston. Josiah accompanied Ben on walks to observe the many lines of work available. In addition to all the trades that made Boston virtually a self-sufficient economy for finished goods—everything from carpenters and weavers and brewers and bakers to rope and tile makers—the city's tradesmen also often created their own tools. Woodworking was especially varied and specialized in Boston with some producers constructing chairs, coaches, frames for ships, and planks for the same vessels. The energy and inventiveness of the city's tradesmen made a lasting impression on Franklin who was always curious about how things worked. He later conceded, "it has been useful to me, having learnt so much by it, as to be able to do little Jobs my self in my House, when a Workman could not readily be got; and to construct little Machines for my Experiments . . . "[40]

One trade that stood out was that of cutler. Josiah's nephew and Ben's cousin, Samuel, was an established figure in Boston who produced knives, razors, scissors, daggers, saws, and tools for other trades. Cutlers enjoyed much more variety and possessed more skill than candle and soap makers and so the work could possibly sate Ben's curiosity. The problem was that Samuel wanted to be paid to teach his

cousin the trade. This was a poor way to return Josiah's favor of housing Samuel's father, Ben the elder, for four years. Tourtellot writes that Josiah may very well "have been bitterly resentful" and refused to pay.[41] After only a few days of apprenticing with Samuel, Ben was back home.

Josiah then turned to another family member, his twenty-one-year-old son, James. In 1717, James had just returned from England, having acquired skills to run a print shop. James accepted Ben but on terms decidedly favorable to the older brother. The agreement for indenture required Ben to be wholly subservient to James for nine years. This was a peculiar apprenticeship since it was longer than most (seamen typically required four years and the average length of trades was seven years) and Ben began later than most apprentices. Because of Ben's education, James was free from the master's normal duty to oversee his apprentice's knowledge of reading, writing, and math. A further complication was the sibling relationship. The twenty-one-year-old may have regarded his twelve-year-old brother as more of a burden than help. By the terms of the indenture, James did take responsibility for Ben's lodging, food, drink, clothes, and eventually the wages paid to journeymen. In return, Ben "truly and faithfully" served his brother, obeyed his commands, and kept his secrets. The agreement went on:

> hurt to his master [Ben] shall not doe nor consent to be done, . . . nor from his master's business absent himselfe by night or day, his masters goods he shall not wast nor imbezzell. . . . Taverns and ale Howses he shall not frequent except about his masters business. . . . as a true and faithful servant [he] ought to behave himself in word and deed during the said tenure.[42]

No wonder Ben had a "hankering for the sea."[43]

James Franklin's business, despite the demanding terms of indenture, provided the adolescent Ben with plenty of creative work even if the demand for printed materials was limited. Three other presses already existed but James' connections at Old South Church earned him some business, such as the publication in 1718 of a sermon delivered by Ebenezer Pemberton at the ordination of the congregation's new pastor, Joseph Sewall. The lack of work could have been a blessing since the process was arduous. Each signature of pages (four)

had to be set separately without the aid of a tool except a composing stick that helped the printer maintain the same length of lines. The press could print one signature at a time. This meant that if James had a job for 500 copies a forty-page pamphlet, he and Ben would have had to run 5,000 sheets of paper before even sorting, cutting, and binding the pages. The most that two persons operating a press could produce was 240 sheets per hour, which explains why Ben often worked twelve- to fourteen-hour days. The strength that made him an exceptional swimmer also enabled him to perform the physically demanding labor of lifting plates, locking stones, and pulling the spindle lever. This work also beat candle making since it was varied and unpredictable.

Working for James even provided Ben the opportunity to experiment intellectually. Soon after starting his apprenticeship, two sensational news stories swept the imaginations of Boston's residents and provided Ben with an outlet for verse. The first was the death of the Worthylake family in the fall of 1718 when they took a small, canoe-like vessel to Beacon Island (today's Little Brewster), the easternmost of the tiny land masses that dot the Boston harbor where George Worthylake kept a flock of sheep. During the trip into turbulent waters at high tide, the boat capsized and everyone in it drowned. The second event was the capture and death in March, 1719 of Edward Teach, whose legendary status as a pirate along the Atlantic Coast of the southern colonies gained him the name, "Blackbeard." Adding to his mystique was his long, thick, black beard, parted and tied each side behind an ear. Robert Maynard, a Virginia lieutenant in the royal navy, lured Teach into a deadly fight. In both cases, the tragedy of a family's death and the heroism of a colonist in defeating one of the colonies' villains, inspired sermons, ballads, and song. Cotton Mather published a sermon about the Worthylake family.

The young Franklin bested Mather with verse that his brother published and "sold wonderfully," as Ben later recalled. (The ballad went missing, though a discovery of "The Lighthouse Tragedy" in 1940 on Middle Brewster Island may be Ben's composition.) The Franklins also capitalized on the tragedy with another ballad, also composed by Ben, about the "Blackbeard" incident since the threat of piracy was a constant worry for the Boston community. He employed the form of a sailor's song to mark the legendary event and once again

the publication turned a profit for James. Josiah, who monitored his sons' affairs, was not pleased by Ben's poetry, however. Tourtellot speculates that Ben's father did not want his son to wind up like his uncle, a poet who wasted his time on doggerel. Ben's later memory was that Josiah warned that "Verse-makers were generally Beggars."[44] Josiah was also likely embarrassed by the way the Franklin brothers used sensational news for profit. He instructed Ben to stop writing poetry, which Ben later thought was good advice. But it did not resolve the question of whether James could survive as a printer or what Ben would do with his life.

Bible Commonwealth No More

The Boston of Ben Franklin's youth was a long way from the town that in 1629 John Winthrop and the original Puritan settlers had envisioned as a "city on a hill." If the largest city of the Massachusetts Bay colony at the beginning of the eighteenth century was a model for any form of religious enterprise, it was one of decorum, order, industry, and trust in providence. It may still have had elements of the older zeal that had inspired English Protestants to seek the purity of the church, but those embers had cooled.

Through his parents and the proceedings at Old South Church, Ben became familiar with some of Puritanism's older demands and expectations. These were hardly imposing since a much greater preoccupation of Josiah, Abiah, and their children was supporting themselves in lines of work that were as steady as they were profitable. To chalk up this work ethic to Puritanism may have a certain plausibility, but the demands of colonial society could turn even the most high church of Anglicans into hard-working tradesmen and promoters of thrift. The most lasting influence of Puritanism on Ben was the print culture and literacy that English Protestantism expected and cultivated. Reading sustained his native curiosity and provoked his creativity. Ben never forsook this part of the moderate Puritan culture he inherited. But to say that he rejected the orthodox faith of the Puritan establishment is to overestimate the coherence and longevity of this strain of English Protestantism. By the time of his birth, that faith had dissolved into a broad set of religious, ethical, and social conventions that were no more arduous than the demands of the British Empire.

Notes

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3. Benjamin Franklin, *The Autobiography*, in J. A. Leo Lemay, ed., *Franklin: Essays, Articles, Bagatelles, and Letters, Poor Richard's Almanack, and Autobiography* (New York: Library of America, 1987), 1312.
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5. Tourtellot, *Benjamin Franklin*, 27.
6. Tourtellot, *Benjamin Franklin*, 66.
7. Tourtellot, *Benjamin Franklin*, 42.
8. Franklin, *Autobiography*, 1312.
9. Benjamin Franklin the Elder, "A Short Account of the Family of Thomas Franklin of Ecton in Northamptonshire," quoted in Tourtellot, *Benjamin Franklin*, 43.
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12. Franklin, *Autobiography*, 1315.
13. John Dutton, *Letters from New England* (1867), quoted in Tourtellot, *Benjamin Franklin*, 68.
14. Tourtellot, *Benjamin Franklin*, 118.
15. Samuel Willard, *The Character of a Good Ruler* (1694), quoted in Tourtellot, *Benjamin Franklin*, 119.
16. Ebenezer Pemberton, *Sermons and Discourses on Several Occasions* (1727), quoted in Tourtellot, *Benjamin Franklin*, 123.
17. Tourtellot, *Benjamin Franklin*, 94.
18. Mather quoted in Franklin, *Autobiography*, 1312.
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20. Franklin, *Autobiography*, 1315.
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22. Griffin, *Old Brick*, 8.
23. Tourtellot, *Benjamin Franklin*, 134–35.
24. Poem quoted in Tourtellot, *Benjamin Franklin*, 140, 139, 141.

25. Tourtellot, *Benjamin Franklin*, 138.
26. Franklin, *Autobiography*, 1313.
27. Franklin, *Autobiography*, 1313.
28. Walter Isaacson, *Benjamin Franklin: An American Life* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2004), 18.
29. Funeral sermon on Dr. Williams quoted in Tourtellot, *Benjamin Franklin*, 150.
30. Tourtellot, *Benjamin Franklin*, 152, 153; Adams' quotation from *Works*, II, 46, quoted by Tourtellot.
31. Franklin, *Autobiography*, 1313.
32. Tourtellot, *Benjamin Franklin*, 156.
33. William Temple Franklin, *Memoirs of the Life and Writings of Benjamin Franklin* (1818), quoted in Tourtellot, *Benjamin Franklin*, 156.
34. *Boston News-Letter* March 2, 99, 1712, quoted in Tourtellot, *Benjamin Franklin*, 157.
35. Franklin, *Autobiography*, 1313.
36. Franklin, *Autobiography*, 1313.
37. Franklin, *Autobiography*, 1314.
38. Tourtellot, *Benjamin Franklin*, 198.
39. Tourtellot, *Benjamin Franklin*, 200.
40. Franklin, *Autobiography*, 1316.
41. Tourtellot, *Benjamin Franklin*, 203.
42. Language of the agreement from William B. Weeden, *Economic and Social History of New England* (1890), quoted in Tourtellot, *Benjamin Franklin*, 204–205.
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2
Young, Restless and Deist (Briefly)

Ben Franklin had a front row seat at the opening of deism in British North America. Of the chief figures in American deism that religion professor, Kerry Walters, includes in *Revolutionary Deists* (2011), Franklin is clearly the oldest, so much so, that he belongs to a different generation even if it included only one deist. The New England farmer, amateur philosopher, and patriot, Ethan Allen, was born in 1738 when Franklin was an established businessman in his adopted city of Philadelphia. Thomas Paine, born a year before Allen, became one of the loudest and most outlandish of deists but like Allen, because of his support for American independence, Paine's religious views were tolerable. Thomas Jefferson, born in 1743, was arguably the most respectable and mainstream of American deists given his ascendancy to the highest elected office in the United States. The poet and nationalist, Philip Freneau, was born in 1752, almost fifty years after Franklin. Finally, Elihu Palmer, the deist who tried to give fellow believers an institutional outlet by founding in 1796 the Deistical Society of New York, was born in 1764 while Franklin was in London with the task of petitioning George III to turn Pennsylvania from a proprietary to a royal colony. This made Franklin the old man of American deists. It also meant that in ways similar to his curiosity about the business and natural worlds, Franklin was willing to speculate about the metaphysical conditions of the cosmos, even if it meant doing so largely on his own.

The originality of Franklin's deism looks even more unusual from an overview of his life. While an adolescent as an apprentice for his brother James, Franklin came to his ideas about the ways of God in the affairs of the universe. He was a voracious reader, who followed intellectual life as much as he could despite his own lack of formal

training and distance from London. Franklin's youthful arrival at deistical convictions proved embarrassing even to himself when he discovered that his ideas were riddled with inconsistencies. This explains why Walters describes Franklin as an "ambivalent" deist. As a teenager Franklin became a proponent of the religion of nature. He was so devoted that Walters refers to this advocacy as "a conversion." Yet, this was not a complete break with the religious outlook that Franklin had assimilated in Josiah and Abiah's home or had observed at Old South Church. According to Walters, Franklin "never shed all of the early influence of the Calvinist ethos."[1] As much as students of Franklin may overestimate the Reformed Protestant character of that ethos, the young Bostonian was unwilling to become a champion of deism the way that others—like Paine, Freneau, and Palmer, for instance—were. Indeed, at the age of nineteen when feeling sufficiently confident of his speculations about the universe to commit his ideas to print, he quickly backed away from his crude and hasty formulations. As the author of the recent religious biography of Franklin, Thomas Kidd, put it, deism "does not quite capture the texture or trajectory" of the man's beliefs.[2]

For the rest of his life, Franklin inhabited an unsettled intellectual world in which the God of the Bible was more than he could handle but the powers of such a God were necessary to understand nature's workings and historical purpose. Even as an older man, when he summed up his religious convictions, Franklin's modest deism was hardly a threat in the sphere of politics to the good order of American society. As innocuous as his religious views may have become, what remained remarkable was Franklin's intellectual curiosity. Even without the advantages of leisure or formal study, Franklin read contemporary philosophy and heterodox theology in ways that rivaled his Massachusetts' contemporary, Jonathan Edwards. For the Northampton, Massachusetts pastor, following the intricacies of British authors made some sense since theology was a part of his professional work. For Franklin, reading and writing were merely avocations. But, just as he embodied a rags-to-riches story of hard work and thrift, so in intellectual life Franklin pulled himself up by his bootstraps to qualify as a thinker.

The Contemplative Apprentice

Ben Franklin's most sustained reflections on matters divine occurred when he was young and striving to make a living. That he took the time to read about life's big questions while working long hours as an apprentice is testimony to Franklin's intellectual vitality. It also raises questions about how significant his notions about God and religion actually were. If Franklin had not become the senior member of the United States' Founding Fathers, would anyone have paid more attention to them than to John Fitch (1744–1798), the steam boat inventor and operator who peppered his autobiography with ideas about religion and philosophy? Or, because Franklin became a prominent American, have people tended to take his ideas more seriously than sustained scrutiny will bear? Either way, Franklin's early writings about God showed an impressive awareness of writers in the English-speaking world, especially for a young man who needed to learn a trade and settle. They also showed all the weaknesses of youth: autodidacticism and rush to judgment. In the larger scheme of things, they had almost nothing to do with the man who became the father of American self-help literature.

On a practical level, working for his brother and learning the intricacies of printing was arduous. Whenever he could, Franklin sought to improve himself by reading philosophical subjects. His approach, as he later recalled, was to read "at Night, after Work, or before Work began in the Morning; or on Sundays." Here his freedom from his father was particularly revealing. Had he still been living at home, Josiah would have "exacted" the "common Attendance on publick Worship."[3] Franklin believed that Sunday observance was still a "duty" that he should perform. Still, he had limited time and plenty to learn. When James was not working, Ben spent many of his hours alone in the printing house and turned the space into a reading room. His interests were wide and included math and English composition, partly to compensate for the inadequacies of his grammar school education. Franklin also for a time practiced a version of vegetarianism thanks to his acquisition of Thomas Tryon's *The Way to Health, Long Life and Happiness*, that included warnings about alcohol and tobacco. Abstemious consumption may have improved health but was also a way to save money. Ben persuaded James to pay him half

what the senior Franklin, also a bachelor, would have paid a cook. Ben used the money, plus what he saved from not eating meat, to create a budget for books. By himself in the printing house, Ben ate small meals, usually fruits and breads, while reading. This diet, he persuaded himself, contributed to a "greater Clearness of Head and quicker Apprehension."[4]

The first important source for Franklin's intellectual development was John Locke, the English philosopher and political theorist who had died two years before Ben's birth. Franklin biographer, Arthur Bernon Tourtellot, observes a number of parallels between Franklin and Locke, such as both growing up in a religious culture steeped in Calvinism and having fathers who chose the Protestant ministry as the vocation for their sons. Even more significant, Franklin and Locke, as Tourtellot puts it, were both "by instinct and by belief, empiricists, who were given to practical experimentation." With this instinct came an impatience "to the point of embarrassment and distress with pedantic theological disputes that led nowhere." At the same time, Locke's ability as a philosopher far exceeded Franklin's capacity or tolerance for abstract, systematic thought. Locke was by nature an academic even though he wrote in a conversational manner about epistemology, metaphysics, and ethics. Franklin "loved to be in the midst of worldly and practical affairs" and so found outlets in business, politics, diplomacy, administration, experimentation, and education. This difference meant that Franklin "lacked the subtlety of Locke's distinctions and the depths of his perceptions."[5] Even so, he had to be one of the few fifteen-year-olds reading Locke while following a diet not far removed from prison rations—stale tarts, a handful of raisins, and water.

Although Franklin never explained what Locke taught him (or whether he continued to read Locke as an adult), the English philosopher's ideas about knowledge were prominent in North American learned circles even if a fairly recent discovery. For instance, at roughly the same time that Franklin was reading Locke, Jonathan Edwards, only three years older than the printing apprentice, was encountering the philosopher's ideas about human powers of knowledge at Yale College. Of course, Franklin's religious convictions turned out to be very different from Edwards. The Northampton pastor did his best, unlike Franklin, to defend the older Calvinist

beliefs of Puritans. Even so, Edwards' doctrine did not prevent an appreciation for Locke's epistemology. One of Edwards' theological descendants wrote that as a thirteen-year-old, Edwards had encountered Locke "with great delight and profit" and "had more satisfaction and pleasure studying [him], than the most greed miser in gathering up handsful of silver and gold from some new discovered treasure."[6] Locke cast a similarly enthralling shadow over Franklin. The reason had less to do with the need for intellectual leverage to reject Calvinism than with Locke's practicality. "Our business here is not to know all things," Locke wrote, "but those which concern our conduct." This meant that reason was arguably a surer guide to life in the real world than divine revelation (the Bible). Locke asserted, for instance, that reason "is natural revelation, whereby the Eternal Father of light and Fountain of all knowledge, communicates to mankind that portion of truth which he has laid within the reach of their natural faculties."[7] Even if Locke deflated Scripture, his philosophy maintained conventional ideas about right conduct and made morality accessible to a reasonable person whether religious or not.

In addition to Locke, Franklin acknowledged the influence of Ashley Cooper, the Third Earl of Shaftesbury, for making him "a real doubter in many points of our religious doctrine."[8] Shaftesbury, one of the most widely read moral philosophers of the eighteenth century, occupied similar intellectual space as Locke in British letters and for good reason. Locke himself played a part in the Earl's education as a young boy. His occasional writings took shape in two editions from 1711 and 1714, *Characteristicks of Men, Manners, Opinions, and Times*, a work that the English poet, Alexander Pope, described as doing "more harm to revealed religion in England than all the works of infidelity put together."[9] That damage came in Shaftesbury's indifference to Christian dogma and high regard for Christianity's practical and moral qualities. He sought a general social harmony, built on ideals of beauty and love, that esteemed laws, religion, institutions, science, the arts—"whatever civilizes or polishes rude mankind." Christianity had a role to play in enhancing human affairs and perfecting human nature, but only so long as it avoided dogmatic formulas. This was the play book that Franklin followed for the rest of his life. Shaftesbury functioned, like Locke, as intellectual justification for appropriating parts of his Protestant heritage. It was moderate,

conservative, and even modest. In fact, Franklin later attributed his own caution about ideas to his exposure to the new philosophy. He refused to use words like "certainly, undoubtedly, or any others that give the air of positiveness to an opinion." Dogmatism, either for or against dogma, was forbidden.[10]

Locke and Shaftesbury opened an intellectual world firmly in the deist camp, even though deism itself was more an outlook and reading list than a card-carrying affiliation. Franklin later described his religious sensibility as the sort of minimalist belief he found in Locke and Shaftesbury. These were, as he put it, "the essentials of every known religion" and contained nothing that "might shock the professors of any religion":

> That there is one God, who made all things.
> That he governs the world by his providence.
> That he ought to be worshiped by adoration, prayer, and thanksgiving.
> But that the most acceptable service of God is doing good to man.
> That the soul is immortal.
> And that God will certainly reward virtue and punish vice, either here or hereafter.[11]

These convictions did not keep deists from church membership or Sunday services. Indeed, Locke and Shaftesbury remained in the Church of England if only for the sake of respectability and the prayer book's elegance. In other words, deism at least at this stage in its development was not anti-Christian. Franklin's own deistic convictions never required him to sever ties with the people and institutions of organized Christianity.

Nevertheless, orthodox churchmen saw deism as a threat to Christianity. In England opposition emerged in a series of lectures that Robert Boyle, the president and founder of the Royal Society, and an eminent chemist and physicist in his own right, sponsored to expose the alleged error. He employed guilt-by-association tactics by linking deism with such other "notorious infidels" as atheists, pagans, Jews, and Muslims. The lectures were also supposed to be ecumenical in the sense that speakers should not discuss differences among Christian communions. The danger that Boyle did not consider was whether even polemical presentations of other positions might publicize the wrong ideas to vulnerable minds. The unintended consequences of

Boyle's lectures were particularly relevant to Franklin's development. When several copies of the lectures became part of Franklin's lunchtime reading, he admitted that "the Arguments of the Deists that were quoted to be refuted" were actually "stronger than the Refutations."[12] In fact, the lectures made him a "thorough Deist." So convinced was the adolescent that he even became an evangelist for deism. One of his friends from Boston became the object of Franklin's missionary zeal.

Advocating deism, in turn, added another set of readings to Franklin's routine and another piece to the puzzle of his intellectual formation. In addition to the works of deism's most important forerunners, Franklin became acquainted with the study of logic through the Port Royal philosophers, Antoine Arnauld and Pierre Nicole. These French writers' *Logic: or the Art of Thinking* and *Rhetoric: Or the Art of Speaking* gained traction in the English-speaking world soon after its publication and translation during the 1660s. Some of the appeal may have owed to the Port Royal thinkers' criticism of both Roman Catholicism's dogmatism and Calvinism's fatalism. Another attraction was Arnauld and Nicole's insistence on precision and brevity. Careless use of terms or ornamental language undermined logic. What Franklin found, however, was that disciplined arguments might be useful for painting an opponent into a intellectual corner, but did little to encourage "an agreeable and persuasive conversationalist."[13] This was precisely Franklin's experience with his friend, John Collins, whom he tried to convince of deism. His arguments may have been airtight but left Collins cold.

The remedy was an alternative method of debating, one that Franklin found almost by accident while reading James Greenwood's *Essay Toward a Practical English Grammar* (1711). This basic textbook on English usage also included a piece of a Socratic dialogue that intrigued Franklin. He sought out and acquired a copy of Edward Bysshe's translation of Xenophon's *Memorabilia Socratis* (1715), which contained over fifty dialogues. Instead of airtight arguments that left an interlocutor room only for assent, Socrates represented a model of steering a conversation in the intended direction without a heavy hand. Socrates was also an exemplar of the sort of virtue that resonated with Franklin. When the Greek philosopher asked:

> Do you think there is anything worse for a man than that which makes him choose what is bad for him instead of what is good, and persuades him to cultivate the former and disregard the latter, and compels him to behave in the opposite way to that which is adopted by sensible people?[14]

Franklin could hardly have beat Euthydemus to the recorded answer: "No, nothing." In fact, Socrates' impression was still evident when Franklin sat down to write the *Autobiography*:

> I was charm'd with it, adopted it, dropt my abrupt Contradiction, and positive Argumentation, and put on the humbler Enquirer and Doubter. And being then, from reading Shaftsbury [sic] and Collins, become a real Doubter in many Points of our Religious Doctrine, I found this Method safest for my self and very embarrassing to those against who I used it, therefore I took a Delight in it, practis'd it continually and grew very artful and expert in drawing People even of superior Knowledge into Concessions the Consequences of which they did not foresee, entangling them in Difficulties out of which they could not extricate themselves, and so obtaining Victories that neither my self nor my Cause always deserved.[15]

Whether the triumphs enjoyed were on the order of the Greek philosopher's, the discovery of Socrates was responsible for the sort of charm and playfulness that characterized Franklin's thought through much of his life.

Independence of Mind and Body

These heady and bookish developments grew not from the instruction of a private tutor hired by the Lord of the manor, but from the curiosity, discipline, and striving of a teenager who was an indentured servant. However comfortable or hostile Ben's relationship with his master and brother, James, he worked long hours in the print shop at a physically demanding job. Many in Franklin's circumstances would have been content to acquire the skills that could sustain a lifetime of employment and a modest standard of living. Others might have been sufficiently curious to learn not just the mechanics but the business of printing and so rise from tradesman to owner. All of this was true for

Franklin. And yet, on top of mastering all facets of the print shop, he determined to become conversant in philosophy.

Franklin's experience with running the business and newspaper editing had come unexpectedly in 1722 when he was sixteen. In 1719 James became the publisher of a new weekly newspaper, *The Boston Gazette*, and saw the advantage of starting his own publication. In 1721 James launched *The New-England Courant*, a move that some have interpreted as the "beginning of the long battle for a free press in America" since Boston's other papers had the backing of the city's cultural establishment.[16] James was so eager to challenge the authorities that he opposed Cotton Mather's advocacy of small pox vaccinations. The *Courant* may have signaled the advance of freedom of the press, but James' opposition to a pastor who was on the side of medical progress shows that history is never a tidy record of progressive victories. James' failure to understand the science of vaccinations may explain why Franklin left the incident out of his *Autobiography*. Even so, the Harvard historian responsible for resurrecting Puritanism, Perry Miller, judged the *Courant* to be "the first open effort to defy the norm" of New England's civilization.[17] Ben used the new publication to test his own writing talents. His Silence Dogood letters, a witty series on the inconsistencies of colonial society, told pseudonymously by an elderly widow, attracted readers, and became the topic for banter in the printing house among Franklin's workers. When Ben eventually revealed that he was the author, James resented his brother's rising status in the shop as an affront to their different stations. James abruptly ended the series and refused any mention of Silence Dogood in the *Courant* for over six months.

Even as James asserted his authority over his brother, he also needed Ben to keep the paper going. When the older Franklin wrote an editorial during the summer of 1722 that criticized the government for a slow response to pirates raiding ships in Boston's harbor, the local authorities sent James to jail for approximately a month. During that time, Ben ran the paper and had to do so in a way that did not add to James' time in prison. Within six months of his release, James was in trouble with the court for mocking religion and disturbing the "peace & Good Order" of Boston.[18] Instead of giving up the *Courant*, James followed the trail blazed by previous dissenters, Roger Williams and Anne Hutchinson, and relocated to Rhodes Island. This left Ben

in charge and circumspect. He promptly published rules for the paper that included showing deference to Boston's religious and civil authorities.

Respect for Boston's establishment was one thing, submission to his brother was another. Already resentful of his brother's sometimes onerous rule, Ben used the terms of his second stint as editor to secure his own independence. To prove that he was no longer in control of the paper, James had granted Ben "a full discharge" from the terms of his indenture. A gentlemen's agreement between the brothers also stipulated that Ben would return to the old terms of his service once James returned to Boston. Ben saw the opening "full discharge" gave him and before reverting to the original terms of his apprenticeship, left Boston to find work as a printer in New York. Ben later admitted that "it was not fair" to take advantage of this loophole but James was "an ill-natur'd man" who did not react well to Franklin's own "saucy and provoking" manner.[19] Ben's only way to pay for his passage was to sell books. The other piece of subterfuge he needed to escape was the story that he had "got a naughty Girl with child" and her friends were intent on marriage. During mid-September 1723, against Josiah Franklin's wishes, Ben left Boston.

Instead of moving to New York, Franklin's search for employment landed him in Philadelphia in September of 1723. Although a colony dominated by Quakers, it was also a place that attracted a diverse set of settlers thanks to the Quakers' tolerant policies. Franklin's intellectual experimentation would not necessarily be a barrier in the new city. Finding a job was tricky, though. He eventually took a position in Samuel Keimer's printing house. Then Franklin met (through remote family connections) Pennsylvania's governor, William Keith who wanted to start another printing business and agreed to underwrite a trip to London where Franklin was supposed to purchase the necessary equipment. Instead of working in Philadelphia, soon Franklin found himself in London, a seventeen-year-old on the rise. And still he was drawn to speculation about the cosmos.

In London, Franklin discovered that Keith had reneged on his deal. The governor was, in Franklin's words, the sort of person who wanted to please "everybody," but since he had little "to give, he gave expectations."[20] The young journeyman rebounded, found cheap lodgings, and work in a print shop. He even indulged, at the

encouragement of his best friend and aspiring poet, James Ralph, amusements that he later rejected for their tendency to undermine industry and virtue. Franklin still avoided beer and tobacco, but could not resist "Intrigues with low Women."[21] Nor could he refuse philosophical reflection about human existence. The specific prod in London was a gathering at the print shop a run for William Wollaston's *The Religion of Nature Delineated*. First published in 1722 when Wollaston, an Anglican priest and school teacher, was producing his mature thought (he died in 1724), the book was an attempt to preserve Christianity without the supernatural elements on which it had depended. The result was a natural religion, much like Christianity's generic convictions about morality, without the need for divine revelation or miracles. It was also the sort of safe haven for someone on his way out of Puritanism.

Instead of using Wollaston as a bridge to God and morality without the supernatural, Franklin used his free time to write *A Dissertation on Liberty and Necessity* (1725). The enterprising young man gained permission from his boss to print 100 copies of a roughly 5,000-word essay on some of theology and philosophy's biggest questions—the problem of evil, suffering, free will, the immortality of the soul, and determinism. This was a long way from the letters of Silence Dogood. Historians have dissected Franklin's metaphysical reasoning the way that many have poured over the works of Plato and Aristotle. Whether his thought merits that kind of scrutiny, Franklin's argument was as simple as the *Dissertation* was short. The first section addressed free will and determinism. In it Franklin attacked the sunny view of the universe of many theologians, whether orthodox or liberal, that God was good, controlled all things, and all such design produced a harmonious universe that induced humans to lead virtuous lives. The notion that God was good and all powerful flew in the face of evil in the universe, not to mention that if God controlled all things humans lacked free will and by implication virtue and vice became meaningless. In the second section, Franklin turned to pleasure and pain and asserted that basic motivation for human action was avoidance of discomfort or pain. If this were true, the idea of disinterested benevolence or good deeds was a fiction. "How can any Action be meritorious of Praise or Dispraise, Reward or Punishment, when the natural Principle of *Self-Love* is the only and irresistible Motive to it?"[22]

In a somewhat forced series of implications, Franklin used this point and its corollary—that life invariably included equitable parts of pleasure and pain—to argue against eternal happiness as the reward for a good life. The subject of the afterlife gave Franklin the excuse to examine the immortality of the soul, a notion where he drew on Locke's psychology to argue that without a body or a brain the soul, a mere faculty of human nature, had nothing to do once separated from the rest of human life. In his conclusion, Franklin admitted that his arguments were devastating: "Mankind naturally and generally love to be flatter'd: Whatever soothes our Pride, and tends to exalt our Species above the rest of Creation, we are pleas'd with and easily believe." "What!" Franklin quipped, "bring ourselves down to an Equality with the Beasts of the Field!" But truth, he believed, was on his side: "Truth will be Truth tho' it sometimes prove mortifying and distasteful."[23]

This dark turn intellectually was out of step with the pragmatism and uplift that characterized most of Franklin's life. Perhaps it was a function merely of youth; Franklin was only nineteen. If the *Dissertation* had been a true predictor of Franklin's spiritual and philosophical development, he would have turned out more the Friedrich Nietzsche of colonial America than what he became, the forerunner of Horatio Alger. Walters may overestimate the anti-Calvinism of the *Dissertation* but still captures the fevered (and uncharacteristic) nature of Franklin's dip into metaphysics: *"When you think about it, all notions of God except that of a distant metaphysical principle are foolish. . . . But when it comes right down to it, what's so special about being a human anyway? Humans are just sophisticated, windup toys, not wingless angels or lowly worms.*"[24] As such, Franklin's *Dissertation* was a strange way to leave Calvinism. According to Walters, Franklin dabbled in a version of determinism even more mechanical and confining than any Puritan teaching on predestination when he argued that "humans are incapable of rising above the laws of sensation that define and control behavior." This was more one-sided than the doctrine of "utter depravity, which prevents [persons] from overcoming the limitations imposed by original sin."[25]

Always aware of his reputation, Franklin soon burned as many of the 100 copies of the *Dissertation* that he could find except one. Not only was the essay another instance of the heavy reliance on logic that he had disdained when he warmed to the Socratic method, but it also

showed his lack of aptitude for metaphysical reasoning. Franklin decided more generally that speculative philosophy was useless. So why did he write the *Dissertation* in the first place? One explanation is that it improved Franklin's standing in London; it was another example of self-fashioning by a young man with great ambition trying to find his way in a world where social standing still mattered. If so, intellectual nihilism was appealing in intellectual circles even three centuries ago. Indeed, the *Dissertation* gave Franklin immediate access to a circle of London intellectuals who now saw the young printer as an ally. James Lyon, a surgeon, championed Franklin's book. That acquaintance provided an opportunity to meet Bernard Mandeville, the author of the controversial *Fable of the Bees*. Franklin was finding the places, such as the coffeehouses and taverns where radical ideas circulated, that facilitated the kinds of conversations he used to experience in his brother's printing house.

At the same time, Franklin could not become an intellectual in the eighteenth-century London sense of men with independent wealth or professional standing who made ideas a hobby. He was young, away from home, and still needed to make a living. Roughly a year into his London sojourn, Franklin took a job with a larger publisher, John Watts. Even the personable young journeyman could not avoid friction with peers when he refused to drink beer during the day (for fortification) and to pay the common fee used to buy beer. Franklin eventually chipped in for drinks but saw limited possibilities for himself in London. When the Quaker merchant from Philadelphia, Thomas Denham, offered Franklin a position as clerk for fifty pounds per year, he took it. Even though he was making more in Watts' printing house, Franklin jumped at the opportunity to return to America.

In the summer of 1726 on the voyage back to Philadelphia, Franklin constructed "A Plan for Future Conduct," a program that foreshadowed the kind of self-help for which he became famous. It also appeared that the metaphysical corners into which he had painted himself in the *Dissertation* were in the past. Bromides such as "speak the truth in every instance," "[be] extremely frugal," "apply myself industriously," and "speak ill of no man," littered the work.[26] The "Plan" also drew on Franklin's strengths, not as a seer of cosmic order but as an observer of human relations. He was particularly aware of the

social nature of men and women. "I acknowledge solitude an agreeable refreshment to a busy mind," he wrote, "but were these thinking people obliged to be always alone, I am apt to think they would quickly find their very being insupportable to them."[27] In effect, Franklin's frame of mind on the ship was a much better reflection of his temperament than his attempt at philosophy in London. Orthodox Calvinism had clearly not taken root and deism became a youthful stopgap.

Devout Deism

Back in Philadelphia, Franklin followed his "Plan" and settled into a productive life. He worked for Denham for roughly a year before the shopkeeper died. Franklin then did what he knew best and found a job with a printer. By 1728 he had set up a print shop (with the help of his business partner's father's funding). In short order, Franklin secured additional investment to own the business outright. Accompanying his industry were other interests that made Philadelphia agreeable. The Junto, a group of tradesmen and artisans that met to discuss news, work, and even philosophical matters, started in 1727 at Franklin's initiative, perhaps an homage to Josiah Franklin's conversations in his kitchen. During these early years he became the postmaster in Philadelphia, a job that assisted the dissemination of the newspapers he printed and would eventually edit. Those publications also provided an outlet for Franklin's prose, some of it again written pseudonymously, and prompted him to start his own newspaper, the *Pennsylvania Gazette*. On the domestic front, in 1730 Franklin married Deborah Read. It was a common-law union and had no ceremony. One reason for avoiding the theatrics of marriage was Franklin's own practicality and thrift. Another was that he brought an illegitimate son, William, into the marriage. (See Chapter 4 below on Franklin's relations with women and children.)

These busy years—starting a business, home, clubs—were also the time when Franklin gave the most sustained attention to religion. He would continue to make observations about faith, offer moral advice, pen observations about the characteristics of believers, and wrangle over the politics of the colonies' different denominations. Yet, Franklin settled on his beliefs at the relatively young age of twenty-two. That

religious resolution meant a friendly distance from the Protestant congregations in Philadelphia. Soon after he returned from London, Franklin subscribed to the Presbyterian church but would not worship there regularly. The pastor, Jedediah Andrews, another transplant from Massachusetts, was part of the appeal but after five weeks of the Presbyterian's preaching the printer gave up. Andrews was simply a sectarian (in contemporary vernacular, a fundamentalist):

> At length he took for his text that verse of the fourth chapter of Philippians, "Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, honest, just, pure, lovely, or of good report, if there be any virtue, or any praise, think on these things." And I imagin'd, in a sermon on such a text, we could not miss of having some morality. But he confin'd himself to five points only, as meant by the apostle, viz.: 1. Keeping holy the Sabbath day. 2. Being diligent in reading the holy Scriptures. 3. Attending duly the publick worship. 4. Partaking of the Sacrament. 5. Paying a due respect to God's ministers. These might be all good things; but, as they were not the kind of good things that I expected from that text, I despaired of ever meeting with them from any other, was disgusted, and attended his preaching no more.[28]

Franklin wanted a religion that increased civic righteousness, not churchly piety. That utilitarian calculation persisted throughout Franklin's life (and set the tone for American Protestantism after him).

Since the local churches could not satisfy his religious needs, Franklin produced his own "little Liturgy, or form of prayer, for my own private use."[29] His "Articles of Belief and Acts of Religion," composed in 1728, included a brief confession of faith and liturgy. As surprising as this development might seem, Franklin did continue to identify with Christianity even after the sweeping claims he made about God in his *Dissertation*. In 1727 soon after he had returned to Philadelphia, Franklin suffered a severe bout of pleurisy that made him think he might die. Around this time he may have composed the following epitaph for his tombstone:

> The Body
> of B. Franklin Printer;
> (Like the Cover of an old Book
> Its Contents torn out
> And stript of its Lettering and Gilding)

Lies here, Food for Worms.
But the Work shall not be lost:
For it will, (as he believed) appear once more,
In a new and more elegant Edition,
Revised and corrected,
By the Author.[30]

If that draft for his tombstone is an indication that Franklin still had some belief in the resurrection, it was not a big step for him to produce a creed and plan of devotion. In some ways, his beliefs about God echoed his earlier *Dissertation* in its description of a relationship between God and humans that rendered people as small spokes in an insignificant wheel in a distant part of the universe. Indeed, Franklin understood the cosmos to be a "System of Planets" beyond the observable stars, "filled with Suns . . . each with a Chorus of Worlds for ever moving round" the supreme being who created them. Earth was merely a "little Ball," almost "Nothing." This framework tempted Franklin to think that worshiping God was meaningless. God seemed to be a being who "expects or requires no Worship or Praise from us" because he was so "INFINITELY ABOVE" men and women. Nevertheless, Franklin had learned the duty of honoring God and hoped to "be preserved from Atheism and Infidelity, Impiety and Profaneness." Because human beings were inherently disposed to "Devotion or the Worship of some unseen Power" and possessed "Reason superior to all other Animals," he felt bound "to pay Divine Regards to Something."[31] This something was synonymous with "the Infinite," part of the cosmos populated by "many Beings or Gods, vastly superior to Man." Alfred Owen Aldridge, author of *Benjamin Franklin: Philosopher and Man* (1965), explained that Franklin's polytheism was an outgrowth of a the older conception of the Great Chain of Being and an indication of a new sense that heavenly beings, in between God and man, superintended the sun, moon, and stars under the direction of the ultimate deity. Franklin was not sure if these beings were immortal or changeless, but they were "exceeding wise and good and very powerful," and that each of these gods had created its own solar system.[32]

The God of the sun and planets in which Franklin found himself, accordingly, was the one to praise and adore. The question was how

to become acceptable to this God. One way was praise, another was a virtuous life; virtue produced happiness in human beings and in God who delighted in seeing his creatures happy. The upshot of Franklin's cosmological deduction was a commitment "to praise my God continually, for it is his Due, and it is all I can return for his many Favours and great Goodness to me."[33]

This was the rationale for the liturgy that Franklin produced for private worship. He divided the service up into elements of adoration, petition, and thanks, the historic parts of prayer in Christianity. Indeed, Franklin's prayer book resembled the Church of England's Book of Common Prayer in its formal patterns and stylized language, a break from the Puritan rejection of written prayers and formal liturgy. The section on adoration included six forms of praise, all of which concerned the blessings of the created order and human virtues. The fourth was the longest:

> Thy Wisdom, thy Power, and thy GOODNESS are every where clearly seen; in the Air and in the Water, in the Heavens and on the Earth; Thou providest for the various winged Fowl, and the innumerable Inhabitants of the Water; Thou givest Cold and Heat, Rain and Sunshine in their Season, and to the Fruits of the Earth Increase.
>
> Praised be thy Name for ever.[34]

In the section of petitions, Franklin expressed "my earnest Desires that [God] would graciously assist my Continual Endeavors and Resolutions of eschewing Vice and embracing Virtue." The concluding part of the service on gratitude was the shortest, even though Franklin specified that "Ingratitude is one of the most odious of Vices." For this section, he wrote four prayers to acknowledge "Favours . . . receive[d] from Heaven" and the "innumerable Benefits" of "Life and Reason," "the Use of Speech," "Health and Joy," and "every pleasant Hour."[35] The service included no mention of sin and its consequences nor of grace and the need for a redeemer. Yet, as an understanding of human dependence on a higher power and a justification for ethical conduct, Franklin's faith was moderately heterodox.

These "Articles" were part of Franklin's private writings and only later did editors include them in his works. He was not creating a self-image to ward off fears of a skeptic living in Philadelphia. Another

biographer, Walter Isaacson, records Denis Diderot's quip that a "deist is someone who has not lived long enough to become an atheist."[36] John Adams, Franklin's later colleague in the Continental Congress suspected that the Philadelphian was in fact an atheist despite affirmations of belief in God. As near as anyone can tell, Franklin never departed from some recognition of divine activity in human affairs and the latter's duty to the former. According to Aldridge, Franklin "never entirely abandoned the combination of ethics and polytheism" in his "Articles." Kidd raises the question of whether the "Articles" were a form of satire about religion. But if Franklin did use them, as he asserted, for "private" devotion, Kidd asks, why write in a "satirical mode?"[37] Walters concludes that the "Articles" reflect Franklin's final stage of faith, an outlook he "never forsook."[38] If someone wants to treat Franklin as a profound thinker, an intellectual ahead of his time, the "Articles" may also function to reveal more than the author's own dispositions and provide glimpses philosophical and religious truths.

Just as plausible is the image of a twenty-four-year-old printer who was curious and intellectually adventurous, read most of what he could find, reflected on human existence in categories that echoed distantly what he had heard at home and church in Boston, and was prone to write down and preserve most of his thoughts. As such, the "Articles" were simply an entry in Franklin's record of thought and reflect his resolve to accept his place in the universe, particularly in the affairs of the increasingly busy port town of Philadelphia. In that setting, a God-fearer would also be a trustworthy business partner, citizen, and neighbor.

Notes

1. Kerry S. Walters, *Revolutionary Deists: Early America's Rational Infidels* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 2011), 52, 53.
2. Thomas S. Kidd, *Benjamin Franklin: The Religious Life of a Founding Father* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2017), 4.
3. Benjamin Franklin, *The Autobiography*, in J. A. Leo Lemay, ed., *Franklin: Essays, Articles, Bagatelles, and Letters, Poor Richard's Almanack, and Autobiography* (New York: Library of America, 1987), 1320.
4. Franklin, *Autobiography*.

5. Arthur Bernon Tourtellot, *Benjamin Franklin: The Shaping of Genius, The Boston Years* (New York: Doubleday & Co., 1977), 215, 216.
6. Obituary of Edwards from *New York Mercury*, April 10, 1758, quoted in George M. Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards: A Life* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 62.
7. John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, quoted in Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards*, 218.
8. Franklin, *Autobiography*, 1321.
9. Pope quoted in Tourtellot, *Benjamin Franklin*, 219.
10. Franklin, *Autobiography*, 1322.
11. Benjamin Franklin, *Articles of Belief and Acts of Religion*, reprinted in J. A. Leo Lemay, ed., *Benjamin Franklin: Silence Dogood, The Busy-Body, and Early Writings* (New York: Library of America, 1987), 83.
12. Franklin, *Articles of Belief*, 113–14.
13. Franklin, *Articles of Belief*, 114.
14. Xenophon, *Memoirs of Socrates*, quoted in Tourtellot, *Benjamin Franklin*, 227.
15. Franklin, *Autobiography*, 1321.
16. Tourtellot, *Benjamin Franklin*, 233.
17. Perry Miller quoted in Walter Isaacson, *Benjamin Franklin: An American Life* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2004), 22.
18. Clyd e A. Duniway, *The Development of Freedom of the Press in Massachusetts* (1969), quoted in J. A. Leo Lemay, *The Life of Benjamin Franklin, Volume 1: Journalist, 1706–1730* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006), 185.
19. Frank lin, *Autobiography*, 1325.
20. Franklin, *Autobiography*, 1345.
21. Franklin, *Autobiography*, 1371.
22. Benjamin Franklin, *A Dissertation on Liberty and Necessity, Pleasure and Pain* (1725), reprinted in Lemay, ed., *Benjamin Franklin: Silence Dogood* . . . , 65.
23. Franklin, *Dissertation on Liberty and Necessity*, 71.
24. Kerry Walters, *Benjamin Franklin and His Gods* (Champagne, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1998), 62.
25. Walters, *Benjamin Franklin*, 64.
26. Benjamin Franklin, "Plan of Conduct," reprinted in Lemay, ed., *Benjamin Franklin: Silence Dogood* . . . , 72.
27. Franklin, *Autobiography*, 1353.
28. Franklin, *Autobiography*, 1383.

29. Franklin, *Autobiography*, 1383.
30. Benjamin Franklin, *Epitaph*, reprinted in Lemay, ed., *Benjamin Franklin: Silence Dogood . . .* , 91.
31. Franklin, *Articles of Belief*, 83–84.
32. Alfred Owen Aldridge, *Benjamin Franklin: Philosopher and Man* (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1965), 29–30.
33. Franklin, *Articles of Belief*, 85.
34. Franklin, *Articles of Belief*, 86.
35. Franklin, *Articles of Belief*, 88, 90.
36. Denis Diderot quoted in Isaacson, *Benjamin Franklin*, 85.
37. Kidd, *Benjamin Franklin*, 31, 69.
38. Walters, *Benjamin Franklin*, 135, 145.

3
Striving

Franklin was "a man of many voices and masks": so writes Gordon S. Wood in the introduction to his biography, *The Americanization of Ben Franklin* (2004). Franklin possessed a "constant self-awareness," assumed "different personas and roles," and made knowing the real person a challenge. This capacity to fashion a self for different audiences, or hide behind a mask explains Silence Dogood and Poor Richard, the other pseudonym by which Franklin introduced himself to the reading public. Wood notes that Franklin later in his life during another lengthy stay in London, wrote ninety pieces under forty-two different names.[1] J. A. Leo Lemay captures this multi-dimensional quality of Franklin when he writes, "no other eighteenth-century writer has so many different personae or so many different voices."[2]

When Franklin started his own print shop, however, work was what mattered and his identity as a middle-class tradesman became the way most Americans understood him. A series of early nineteenth-century entrepreneurs wrote memoirs that not only resembled Franklin's *Autobiography* but recounted working their way up from impoverished circumstances in a manner the followed the by then famous Philadelphian. "The men who wrote these memoirs," Wood concludes, "were successful businessmen who were proud of pulling themselves up by their own bootstraps." Wood even goes as far as to suggest that the American character that Alexis de Tocqueville observed during the 1830s, which praised labor as "the necessary, natural, and honest condition of all men," owed mainly to the Franklin that Americans had come to remember and know.[3] "Because Americans came to celebrate work so emphatically – with Franklin as their most representative figure," Wood contends, "the leisured slaveholding aristocracy of Virginia and the rest of the South" became out of touch with

the "enterprise and egalitarianism" that dominated the country. "The North had changed dramatically" since the founding and Franklin was a major factor in the triumph of the Protestant work ethic.[4]

Whether Franklin's productivity and success were truer to who he was than his writing, scientific investigation, or diplomacy, his entrepreneurial accomplishments were necessary to Franklin's stability in Philadelphia and his later social mobility. Franklin the printer was completely unlike the pseudonymous persons he created to challenge social conventions or deride elites. In that sense, the *real* Franklin is at least as much the practical, productive, printer as any other part of his identity, the very mechanism by which he became part of the establishment. At the same time, that work ethic relied on conventions of a society that drew from Protestant, classical, and modern sources. In fact, the promoters of Protestant industriousness rarely connected the dots between business virtues and a grace-infused pursuit of holiness. In that regard, Franklin's quest for virtue through a regimented routine of daily disciplines fit squarely in Protestant understandings of the marketplace.

In Pursuit of Perfection

A cynic might well interpret Franklin's writings about virtue as part of his life-long scheme to prove himself a reliable partner in business and politics. In fact, the chief evidence for what Franklin called ambitiously his "Plan for Attaining Moral Perfection" comes from the second part of his 1784 *Autobiography*. The original notebook in which he listed thirteen virtues and a spreadsheet to document his performance of them does not survive. (Of the many editions of Franklin's extensive and varied writings, publishers had not included this "Plan.") J. A. Leo Lemay estimates that the original notebook dated from 1731. Franklin's grandson, William Temple Franklin, claimed to have the first copy which was dated July 1, 1733. But Lemay also observes that a group of fellow Philadelphians, organized by Franklin and committed to a life of virtue, the "Society of the *Free and Easy*," had copies of the "Plan." Since this group's initial meetings transpired in May of 1731, Lemay concludes that in that same year Franklin first produced his original plan for perfection.[5] Aside from suggesting a zeal for the autographs of Franklin's corpus akin to the

methods students of the Bible use to date the earliest manuscripts of the New Testament, discoveries of the creation of the "Plan" indicate that the *Autobiography* is the main guide to the author's pursuit of the good life. Indeed, as is the case with much of Franklin's life, biographers rely on the subject's later retelling of his life rather than following the trail he left in the actual course of his life. In other words, Franklin's reflections as an old man about virtue, after his own business success, his involvement in local and national politics and international diplomacy, are not exactly what they must have been to a twenty-five-year-old single man whose life, work, thoughts, and earning power were evolving.

Be that as it may, Franklin's own account of his effort at virtue, corroborated by his grandson, does indicate a moral seriousness that pervaded his life and thought and that shows the lingering effects of his Puritan upbringing. Some might say that the list of virtues aimed more at self-improvement than moral perfection. Franklin listed thirteen: temperance, silence, order, resolution, frugality, industry, sincerity, justice, moderation, cleanliness, tranquility, chastity, and humility. A simple comparison of Franklin's list to either the cardinal virtues of prudence, courage, temperance, and justice or the Christian ones of faith, hope, and charity suggests that his reading in classical literature and modern philosophers had more influence than the New Testament. Even his explanation of the cardinal virtues, however, suggested the how-to-win-friends-and-influence-people manner. Temperance was a reminder not to eat to "Dulness," or drink to "Elevation." Justice was a warning against "doing Injuries or omitting the Benefits that are your Duty."[6]

At the same time, the virtues that some associated with the Protestant work ethic had less to do with conduct in business than personal integrity. Frugality was, for Franklin, another version of the Golden Rule: "Make no Expense but to do good to others or yourself." Likewise, industry was motivation to be busy always: "Cut off all unnecessary actions." The oddest virtues, such as order and silence, were the most applicable to Franklin's daily work. Silence was a warning against "trifling Conversation," a fault that sometimes got the better of him as an apprentice in Boston and low-level tradesman in London. Order was a prescription to let "each Part of your Business have its Time." For the Christian virtues, Franklin's thoughts echoed

classical authors as much as Christian. Chastity was a warning in the mold of the Epicureans' instruction against sexual indulgence, as in "Rarely use Venery but for Health or Offspring." Likewise, humility functioned as a reminder to "Imitate Jesus and Socrates," though likely not to the point of execution.[7]

As worldly as Franklin's plan for moral seriousness may have appeared, its resemblance to one of his contemporaries, Jonathan Edwards, again deserves mention. About a decade before Franklin devised his plan for moral perfection, the man who became according to some "America's greatest theologian" had just arrived in New York City to pastor a Presbyterian church. Edwards was, like Franklin, a young man (twenty-two), in a new urban setting, and uncertain about the direction of his life. Like Franklin, Edwards also penned a set of resolutions for a life of virtue. One important difference was that Edwards' plan ran to seventy imperatives. Another was that Edwards made the glory of God the explicit motivation for his quest:

> 1. Resolved, that I will do whatsoever I think to be most to God's glory, and my own good, profit and pleasure, in the whole of my duration, without any consideration of the time, whether now, or never so many myriads of ages hence. Resolved to do whatever I think to be my duty, and most for the good and advantage of mankind in general. Resolved to do this, whatever difficulties I meet with, how many and how great soever.[8]

Although Edwards' first resolution could well have qualified as three separate affirmations, the rest of the list was not so exhausting. In fact, the last six or seven sounded like the sort of practical virtue that Franklin sought and recommended. Number 66 expressed resolve to maintain a "benign aspect" whenever he spoke to others. Number 70 may have been redundant in hoping for "something of benevolence, in all that I speak." In number 62 Edwards pledged "never to do anything but duty." But number 69 expanded those duties to involve "that, which I shall wish I had done when I see others do it."[9]

For all of the differences between Edwards and Franklin, not to mention their contrasting receptions by later generations of Americans, a desire for moral perfection was an important consideration for each man. Neither set out merely to try to live a virtuous life. Both set a standard of "never to do" something or "always to be" a certain way.

Theirs was a relentless pursuit of doing good, which was something of an odd feature for men who had grown up in the sin-haunted environment of Puritanism with its Augustinian outlook on the inherent sinfulness of human nature. Typically, a recognition of sin's residing presence prevented even devout believers from thinking perfection possible. Perfectionism, in fact, would become a trait that distinguished Wesleyianism from Calvinism.[10] But in the early eighteenth century, young men growing up in New England, if Edwards and Franklin are any indication, turned up the dial of morality to perfectionist settings.

Comparing Franklin to Edwards invites entering a body of literature about Puritanism, revivalism, and the New England theology. Franklin is generally absent from this literature if only because historians recognize that his plan for perfection made no reference to grace, faith, or even religion. Franklin's pursuit is in effect a secularized version of Edwards'. For instance, intellectual historian, Norman Fiering, detected in Franklin an approach to virtue that relied on habits, a position that Edwards explicitly rejected. "Edwards' primary intent in moral philosophy was to establish the independent validity of certain ideas inherited from the Calvinist tradition," Fiering wrote, and to reject "least the principle that no man can pull himself into heaven entirely by his own bootstraps." True morality only arose from "a decisive change of heart resulting in a reorientation of the appetites or affections."[11] This was a reflection of the Protestant notion that good works proceeded from faith, or actions from disposition.

In contrast, Franklin's idea of virtue was utilitarian. He was less concerned about the source of good works than with their usefulness and desirability. Fiering admits that Franklin was the wave of the future, that the possibility of social morality owed more to Franklin than to Edwards. As such, Franklin was an indication of Puritanism's secularization. In this sense, he was also a forerunner of what transpired among Edwards' followers, a transformation that Joseph Haroutunian famously termed, *From Piety to Moralism* (1932) in a book that became a favorite among mid-twentieth-century Protestants and readers of Perry Miller's interpretation of Puritanism.[12] Although the fault of later New Divinity pastors (Edwardseans) was to try to fit Puritan morality into the metaphysics of predestination, they too strayed from the ideal of Edwards' ethics by turning what was

supposed to be a lively piety into a morality that had no flexibility or forgiveness. Except, as Allen Guelzo argued, New Divinity pastors learned the sort of moralism that Haroutunian faulted from Edwards himself.[13] If that is the case, then Franklin's plan for perfection was not so distant from Edwards' own pursuit of moral perfection.

Instead of presenting rival moral systems, perhaps Franklin and Edwards were working out of a common New England Protestant experience that Cotton Mather had tried to address in *Bonifacius: An Essay on the Good* (1710). In his insightful essay on Mather, the literary scholar, David Levin argues that Franklin very well followed the Puritan pastor's ethical instruction, even to the point of adapting the older moral standards for times in which new business endeavors appeared to be making traditional piety obsolete. A case in point, for Levin, was London, a place that spawned Societies for the Reformation of Manners. The reason was the rise of unprecedented urban challenges, such as drunkenness, health epidemics, crime, and the lack of a police force to uphold the rule of law. Franklin, of course, observed London and his determination to abstain from beer may have indicated his own internalization of restraint to preserve public and personal order. Even if Franklin's plan for moral improvement derived from his financial insecurity, a utilitarian case for virtue was not simply a secular position but also something that Mather advocated. As Levin states, both Mather and Franklin argued that "what is right, works." Both also appealed to their audience's "self-interest" while stopping short of the view that "what works is right."[14] Whether faith was the only way to such a life of virtue was the real challenge for British colonists at the beginning of the eighteenth century even in Puritan Boston. Even with an established church, the need for virtuous conduct and supports for moral improvement were crucial for alleviating the sort of misery—either by avoiding it through upright living or by providing charity for the unfortunate—that was becoming more common in both Boston and Philadelphia. That may not have been Edwards' experience on the frontier in western Massachusetts, but urban settings perhaps demanded different moral medicine.

Secular Sanctity

Separating virtue from faith or grace may have strayed from Puritan orthodoxy, but for someone like Franklin without faith it made sense. If good works were only possible in the life of a believer, then non-Christians had no hope for goodness. Of course, Protestants had ways around sending non-believers to prison, aside from the rule of law, trial by jury, and assumptions of innocence until proven guilty of breaking the law. The Westminster Confession, for instance, conceded that even unregenerate persons were capable of performing good works. It explained that unbelievers could perform works that might comply with God's commands and be "of good use both to themselves and others." Yet, if such works did not arise from a heart "purified by faith," did not follow Scripture, and the intention was not for "the glory of God," such virtuous conduct was "sinful, and cannot please God" (chapter 16.7). That was a tough standard but one that denied works any role in salvation. Protestants stressed faith as the means for redemption as opposed to grace-infused good works for Roman Catholics. Such a strict view could obviously make an average citizen living in a Protestant land think he had no chance of being good. But such a misunderstanding failed to distinguish outward or civic virtue from truly good works. The former complied with civic norms and kept people out of prison. Truly good works were only available to those with genuine faith. This distinction between civic and true virtue was a standard one for Protestant theologians and one to which Jonathan Edwards himself appealed in a posthumously published work, *The Nature of True Virtue* (1765). The Northampton pastor insisted that public benevolence proceeded from a moral sense that was distinct from true virtue. To confuse the two was a great mistake.[15]

Franklin's own reflections on morality, once he gained his footing as a newspaper editor, were less concerned with the sources of right conduct than virtue's utility. He peppered his writings on almost every aspect of colonial society with a wider series of reflections on morality that located virtue in sources accessible to the wider (and not strictly Christian) public. To shopkeepers tempted to bend the truth for advantages in business, Franklin offered sensible counsel: "if a Man will *lie* and *swear* in his Shop to get a Trifle, why should we

question his doing of it, when he may be hot to make his Fortune by his *Perjury*!"[16] It was not an appeal to a high ethical standard, more a meditation on the practical benefits—economic and psychological—of truth's "Beauties" compared to lying's "Inconveniences." Franklin was also hard on the practice of drinking two or three drams for breakfast instead of a "Draught of Beer and a Toast, or a Hunk of Bread and Cheese." The problem was drunkenness which was "utterly inconsistent" with "Modesty" and "natural Affection." To prove its harmfulness, Franklin reprinted a lengthy section from a best-selling textbook on medicine (*Allen's Synopsis of Physick*) in which the author classified "distilled intoxicating liquors" as poisonous.[17] In another short piece, Franklin recommended simplicity as a virtue, "the homespun Dress of Honesty," the opposite of "Chicanery and Craft" which were the telltale signs of "false Elegance" and "Knavery." The evidence of simplicity's superiority came whenever someone visited the country and heard common people "conversing from the Heart, and without Design."[18] Franklin conceded that many "good People" aimed for simplicity but it was actually a pretense. His recommendation relied almost entirely on intuition, a sense that the truly simple person would know simplicity when she saw it.

Such a common-sense outlook, the ability to recognize virtues without long and complex moral reasoning, likely accounts for those occasions when Franklin recommended virtues that seemed at first to be transgressive. These suggested that Franklin's moral pose was not designed simply to prove himself to Philadelphia's gatekeepers. He was fully capable of going against the grain. For instance, in "On Censure or Backbiting," an essay from 1732, Franklin took the opposing view. Although all "Divines have condemn's it, all Religions have forbid it, all Writers of Morality have endeavor'd to discountenance it," Franklin opposed "the universal Vogue of Mankind in all Ages" to reject it. One of censure's benefits was to check powerful, "ill-designing" men from grasping and abusing the reins of the state. Aside from its political value, criticism also improved private virtue by encouraging the person to wonder "*What will the World say of me?*" Censure even contributed to a "thorough" knowledge of the human race, which made it "the most useful" of all the sciences.[19] In fact, criticism was a fitting mechanism for reducing laws against certain vices and the accompanying difficulty of meting out a just penalty.

This reasonable recommendation of censure was akin to Franklin's 1734 essay that declared "Self-Denial [was] Not the Essence of Virtue." Here he used some of the logic that he had applied in his "Dissertation." His main point concerned a person's natural inclinations. If a man was "naturally temperate, just, &c." then self-denial would mean resisting those virtues and turning to vice. The naturally virtuous person must, in effect, "in spite of his natural Inclinations, wrong his Neighbors, and eat and drink, &c. to excess." The point of this reverse psychology came closer to home when Franklin considered proper compensation for workers: "If I have two Journeymen, one naturally industrious, the other idle, but both perform a Days Work equally good, ought I to give the latter the most Wages?" That sort of calculation made no sense. Challenging self-denial, accordingly, was not a reason to overturn public virtues. Temperance and justice merited "our Love and Esteem."[20] But a virtuous action's relation to the self was not essential to a proper regard for right conduct. For Franklin the actions, at least in public and business matters, counted more than motives.

The culmination of his ruminations on virtues came in 1748 when Franklin retired from work in the print shop and rose to the status of gentleman. Whatever his financial standing may have meant for public affairs—according to historian, Gordon Wood, Franklin believed that political elites needed to be free from economic worries—his "Advice for a Young Tradesman, Written by An Old One" (1748) was vintage self-help. This was the essay that began with what became Franklin's most quoted aphorism: "Remember that TIME is Money." Although that assertion testified to the value of work over leisure and consumption, the essay suggested to readers that acquiring money was the point. Franklin followed up with the line, "Remember that CREDIT is Money," "Remember that Money is of a prolific generating Nature," and "Remember this Saying, *That the good Paymaster is Lord of another Man's Purse*." In fact, Franklin's concluding instruction, that the way to wealth depended chiefly on "two Words, INDUSTRY and FRUGALITY; *i.e.* Waste neither Time nor Money but make the best Use of both."[21] Thirty years later, Franklin proposed including moral aphorisms on copper coins to "make an Impression upon the Mind, especially of young Persons, and . . . regulate the Conduct":

> such as on some, *The Fear of the Lord is the Beginning of Wisdom*; on others, *Honesty is the best Policy*; on others, *He that by the Plow would thrive; himself must either lead or drive*. On others, *keep thy Shop & thy Shop will keep thee*. On others, *a Penny sav'd is a Penny got*. On others, *He that buys what he has no need of, will soon be forced to sell his Necessaries*, on others, *Early to bed & early to rise, will make a man healthy, wealthy & wise*, and so on to a great Variety.[22]

As cagey as Franklin could be, he did not mind that his advice had less to do with character than success in a world of commerce, so closely did the two correspond in his experience and his ideal for personal and social life. A tradesman needed to mind even his most "trifling Actions" because creditors and business owners were paying keen attention. "The Sound of your Hammer at Five in the Morning or Nine at Night," Franklin warned, "heard by a Creditor, makes him easy Six Months longer." But if that same person saw a debtor at the tavern "when you should be at work," the creditor would ask for full return on his loan "the next Day." Competitors and lenders were even watching the tradesman's wife and home. "Finer Cloths" or more expensive household goods would shock a creditor and threaten a loan. "Creditors are a kind of People," Franklin observed," that have the sharpest Eyes and Ears, as well as the best Memories . . . "[23]

Such a seemingly crass calculation of self-restraint and wealth, however profitable it might have been both for aspirant and the wider society, went hand in hand with Franklin's wider efforts to inculcate industry and moderation. Only a year after his advice about wealth to young men, Franklin laid out a plan for an academy to instruct young people, a proposal that laid the foundation for what became the University of Pennsylvania. As much as this institution was not going to follow the lead of the colonies existing colleges (Harvard, William & Mary, Yale, and Princeton) either in religion or training elites, Franklin's rationale was far removed from his advice to the young tradesman. This was not a school simply to learn how to establish a business and acquire wealth. It was an institution to prepare graduates to be responsible and upstanding members of a commercial society.[24] The plan was detailed, from soup to nuts, from a rector of "good Understanding, good Morals," learned, and correct in his English, to a menu for scholars that reinforced temperance and frugality.[25] The curriculum also included everything that Franklin

deemed "useful" and "ornamental." It began with penmanship, arithmetic, English grammar, geography, history, ancient customs, morality, and especially history. The study of the past provided illustrations of "the wonderful Effects of ORATORY," the advantages of "Civil Orders and Constitutions," and benefit considerations of distinguishing right from wrong. History was also the place to teach "the Necessity of *Publick Religion*." Franklin explained that the school should show the public usefulness of religion, or "the Advantage of a Religious Character among private persons," the "Mischiefs of Superstition," and even "the Excellency of the CHRISTIAN RELIGION above all others antient or modern."[26] Historical knowledge even extended to an understanding of commerce, manufacturing, and trade, but the point of such subjects was to add to the good of the country.

The end of the entire education was to impress on young scholars' minds an ability "to serve Mankind, one's Country, Friends and Family." Here in his notes, Franklin quoted from British sources. He used John Milton to assert that the end of learning was "to repair the Ruins of our first Parents, by regaining *to know God aright*, and out of that Knowledge to *love him*, to *imitate him*." From Frances Hutcheson, Franklin appropriated the idea that education's aim was to encourage and assist those "Natural and Moral Powers" in human nature that would apply knowledge to "Purposes of public and private life." From John Locke, Franklin added the rationale that education's purpose was to "improve [students'] Hearts and Understandings," "protect their Innocence," and to "inspire them with Principles of Honour and Probity."[27] Whether education could accomplish such virtuous outcomes and as conventional as such pedagogical theory was, Franklin's proposal for the academy decidedly lacked the seemingly crude utilitarian purpose of pursuing virtue and character for the sake of pleasing creditors and acquiring wealth.

Finding coherence in Franklin's moral reflections has bedeviled those who try to make sense of him as both a successful tradesmen and moral philosopher. Since Franklin was in the printing business and edited newspapers, he left a body of writing that match the output of most thinkers included in the canon of Anglo-American intellectuals. From that angle, his reflections on morality, whether theoretical or practical, were part of a wider set of trans-Atlantic writings about morality that bridged the worlds of Protestantism and the

Enlightenment. Franklin scholar, Alfred Owen Aldridge, may engage in excess when he writes that Franklin's writings "show that he fully understood the theoretical implications of ethical thought."[28] As an editor usually in search of copy and as an autodidact, Franklin never had to submit his ideas to intellectual authorities who could determine either his mastery of the subject or his place in eighteenth-century debates about moral philosophy. What is clear is that he read widely the ethical writings that circulated in the British colonies and tried out different arguments depending on the occasion. In some cases, he seemed to side, for instance, with Lord Shaftesbury (Anthony Ashley Cooper) in his essay on self-denial but against Bernard Mandeville, whom Franklin had met while a tradesman in London. Aldridge concludes that Franklin's estimate of virtue as a natural affection that could grow and make a person even more virtuous followed Shaftesbury instead of Mandeville who had insisted that virtue depended on suppressing the base and cruel aspects of human nature.[29] In contrast, biographer J. A. Leo Lemay observes that later in life Franklin switched from Shaftesbury to Mandeville in viewing human nature as inherently selfish and nasty.[30]

Tracing influences on Franklin becomes even more trying when situating him in the world of colonial theology. Aldridge, for instance, not only connects Franklin to Mandeville but also likens the Philadelphian to Jonathan Edwards. When Edwards wrote that to assume that neighbors would excuse the actions of an ill-natured man because his disposition made him incapable of virtue, he paralleled Franklin who taught (at least at times) that "virtue does not depend on resistance to an innate contrary principle of evil."[31] Wherever Franklin came down on the debates of his day, he tried to stay abreast of the intellectual currents and swam in them when and where he could.

Perhaps the most straightforward way to make sense of Franklin's varied and shifting thoughts about virtue, not to mention his own life, is to read them as a plan to cultivate good works apart from what Puritans thought about sanctifying grace. How was a person, who did not believe in God or the nature of Christian holiness the way he had been reared, supposed to pursue the good life? One way would be to find justification for virtue in what Puritans may have regarded as all the wrong places but ones that Franklin believed would make sense for inhabitants of a society in which not everyone was an orthodox

believer. A snapshot of such a scheme for ethical living is Franklin's outline of the great chain of being in which people ranked higher than oysters, horses, and elephants but lower than angels. A man, he wrote, "cannot in this Life be so perfect as an Angel . . . for an Angel by being incorporeal is allw'd some Perfections we are at present incapable of." Men and women, accordingly, were incapable of "being so perfect here as he is capable of being in Heaven." But within the limits of human existence, people could live up to their moral potential. For Franklin, the world was "a very good" place and "if we behave our selves well, we shall doubtless do very well in it."[32]

In other words, Franklin's morality was independent of grace but provided an alternative for those unable to believe or join a church. As Lemay writes, Franklin's program for virtue "omitted spiritual rebirth, justification, and glorification" while trying to hold on to sanctification, the life-long process or self-denial and living for God's glory.[33] This meant that the path to virtue came not through going to church or listening to sermons but by habits of industry and well-regulated patterns of personal and social life. As Franklin explained to one correspondent:

> I wish [Calvinism] were more productive of Good Works than I have generally seen it: I mean real good Works. Works of Kindness, Charity, Mercy, and Publick Spirit; not Holiday-keeping, Sermon-Reading or Hearing, performing Church Ceremonies, or making long Prayers, fill'd with Flatteries and Compliments . . . The Worship of God is a duty, the hearing and reading of Sermons may be useful: but if Men rest in hearing and Praying, as too many do, it is as if a Tree should value itself on being water'd and putting forth Leaves, tho' it never produc'd any Fruit.[34]

Franklin recognized faith could contribute to the good of society. In fact, in another letter from late in his life, Franklin warned an agnostic correspondent from pressing the issue of morality apart from religion too hard because the "great Proportion of Mankind" needed "the Motives of Religion to restrain them from Vice, to support their Virtue, and retain them in the Practice of it till it becomes *habitual*."[35] For those without religious conviction, Franklin believed his advice about virtue could be "of great Service to those who have not Faith, and come in Aid of the weak Faith of others."[36]

This was not Puritan orthodoxy. Neither was it obviously a threat to the kind of godly society that the Puritans had hoped to create unless they wanted to restrict citizenship to true believers.

Bourgeois Conformity?

`Franklin's thoughts about virtue may have been fresh and even somewhat racy by eighteenth-century Anglo-American standards, but by the twentieth century, they seemed trite, predictable, and typically middle-class. The English novelist, D. H. Lawrence, for instance, in *Studies in Classic American Literature* (1923) could not conceal his contempt for Franklin's acquisitive calculation of morality and wealth. After recalling his encounter with Franklin as a boy through almanacs his father brought into the home and that included the American's aphorisms about industry, Lawrence let loose:

> . . . what's wrong with Benjamin, that we can't stand him? Or else, what's wrong with us, that we find fault with such a paragon?
>
> Man is a moral animal. All right. I am a moral animal. And I'm going to remain such. I'm not justifying to be turned into a virtuous little automaton as Benjamin would have me. "This is good, that is bad. Turn the little handle and let the good tap flow," saith Benjamin, and all America with him. "But first of all extirpate those savages who are always turning on the bad absolve."
>
> I am a moral animal. But I am not a moral machine. I don't work with a little set of handles or levers. The Temperance- silence-order-resolution-frugality-industry-sincerity - justice- moderation-cleanliness-tranquillity-chastity-humility keyboard is not going to get me going. I'm really not just an automatic piano with a moral Benjamin getting tunes out of me.[37]

According to Gordon Wood, this was "the most famous criticism of Franklin ever written."[38] But Lawrence's contemporary, the novelist, F. Scott Fitzgerald, echoed the English writer in *The Great Gatsby*. Fitzgerald invoked Franklin to expose the hollowness of Jay Gatsby's childhood efforts to inculcate virtuous habits and improve his station. Franklin's plan for perfection became Gatsby's model: "Rise from bed, 6:00A.M.," "Dumbbell exercise and wall-scaling, 6:15-6:30," "Study electricity, 7:15-8:15," etc.[39] For Fitzgerald, Franklin's

understanding of virtue was synonymous with the American Dream and its material rewards. Fitzgerald was not as contemptuous as Lawrence, but his story of Gatsby was hardly a vindication of Franklin. A fairly dodgy understanding of the good life undergirded Gatsby's success which in turn could not satisfy his deepest longings.

Many writers have criticized Lawrence but also seem to have missed an important point that in the end may resolve the contradictions embedded in Franklin's ethics. Kerry Walters, for instance, writes that the wider Franklin corpus shows fundamental agreement between the American and the English novelist, in other words, that Franklin like Lawrence distrusted "simplistic and easy solutions."[40] So too, Lemay finds harmony between the two figures: "Lawrence did what Franklin wanted his readers to do – examine themselves and create their own schemes for their own ends."[41] That assessment may be too sanguine for some, but another way to iron out the wrinkles in Franklin is to take seriously the novelist's complaint about America's relationship to Europe. The English writer's dismissal was blunt but to the point:

> . . . this dry, moral, utilitarian little democrat [Franklin], has done more to ruin the old Europe than any Russian nihilist. He has done it by slow attrition, like a son who has stayed at home and obeyed his parents, all the while silently hating their authority, and silently, in his soul, destroying not only their authority but their whole existence.[42]

The attribution of motives by Lawrence was a bridge too far since no one—even Franklin himself—knows the exact motivation for his pursuit of virtue. What is possible to say, however, is that without the spiritual authority of Europe's state churches, Franklin found a way for people to be upstanding citizens, productive laborers, and wealthy business owners. Those endeavors did invariably produce as Lawrence complained, "the galling bondage . . . of heaped-up gold" which were "only so many muck-heaps."[43] Indeed, the road to hell as Josiah Franklin may have thought was paved with Ben's industry and earnings. On the upside, the good life that Josiah's son recommended and often followed, even without grace, made the world less hellish.

Notes

1. Gordon S. Wood, *The Americanization of Benjamin Franklin* (New York: Penguin Press, 2004), 14.

2. J. A. Leo Lemay, *The Canon of Benjamin Franklin* (1986), quoted in Wood, *Americanization*.
3. Alexis de Toqueville, *Democracy in America* (1835), quoted in Wood, *Americanization*, 244.
4. Wood, *Americanization*, 244, 245.
5. J. A. Leo Lemay, *The Life of Benjamin Franklin, Volume 2: Printer and Publisher, 1730–1747* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006), 59, 60.
6. Benjamin Franklin, *Autobiography*, in J. A. Leo Lemay, ed., *Franklin: Essays, Articles, Bagatelles, and Letters, Poor Richard's Almanack, and Autobiography* (New York: Library of America, 1987), 1384, 1385.
7. Franklin, *Autobiography*, 1385.
8. Jonathan Edwards, "Personal Narrative," in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards, Volume 16: Letters and Personal Writings*, ed. George S. Claghorn (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), 753.
9. Edwards, "Personal Narrative," 758.
10. See, for instance, Timothy L. Smith, *Revivalism and Social Reform: American Protestantism on the Eve of the Civil War* (New York: Harper & Row, 1957).
11. Norman S. Fiering, "Benjamin Franklin and the Way to Virtue," *American Quarterly* 30.2 (Summer 1978), 222.
12. Joseph Haroutunian, *Piety versus Moralism: The Passing of the New England Theology* (New York: H. Holt, 1932).
13. Allen C. Guelzo, *Edwards on the Will: A Century of American Theological Debate* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1987), 93.
14. David Levin, "Essays To Do Good for the Glory of God: Cotton Mather's *Bonifacius*," in Sacvan Bercovitch, ed., *American Puritan Imagination: Essays in Revaluation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1974), 148.
15. Jonathan Edwards, "The Nature of True Virtue," in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards, Volume 8: Ethical Writings*, ed., Paul Ramsey (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989).
16. Benjamin Franklin, "Lying Shopkeepers," in J. A. Leo Lemay, ed., *Franklin: Silence Dogood, The Busy-Body, and Early Writings* (New York: Library of America, 1987), 160.
17. Benjamin Franklin, "On Drunkenness," in Lemay, ed., *Franklin: Silence Dogood . . .* , 213, 215.
18. Benjamin Franklin, "On Simplicity," in Lemay, ed., *Franklin: Silence Dogood . . .* , 182.
19. Benjamin Franklin, "On Censure or Backbiting," in Lemay, ed., *Franklin: Silence Dogood . . .* , 192, 193.

20. Benjamin Franklin, "Self-Denial Not the Essence of Virtue," in Lemay, ed., *Franklin: Silence Dogood* . . . , 242, 244.
21. Benjamin Franklin, "Advice to a Young Tradesman, Written by an Old One," in Lemay, ed., *Franklin: Silence Dogood* . . . , 320, 321.
22. "Fr om Benjamin Franklin to Edward Bridgen, 2 October 1779," Founders Online, National Archives, accessed August 6, 2019, https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Franklin/01-30-02-0354.
23. Franklin, "Advice," 321.
24. Wood, *Americanization*, observes that Franklin's plans for the academy switched from one in 1743 for an English academy that would train "the meaner sorts" of Philadelphians to a traditional Latin school designed for sons of the gentry, 48.
25. Benjamin Franklin, "The Education of Wealth," in Lema y, ed., *Franklin: Silence Dogood* . . . , 327.
26. Franklin, "The Education of Wealth," 337.
27. Franklin, "The Education of Wealth," 342–43.
28. Alfred Owen Aldridge, *Benjamin Franklin and Nature's Gods* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1967), 59.
29. Aldridge, *Benjamin Franklin*, 62–63.
30. Lemay, *Benjamin Franklin, Volume 2*, 68.
31. Aldridge, *Benjamin Franklin*, 62.
32. Franklin, *Autobiography* quoted in Aldridge, *Benjamin Franklin*, 65, 67.
33. Lemay, *Benjamin Franklin, Volume 2*, 55.
34. Franklin letter to Joseph Huey, June 6, 1753, quoted in Kerry Walters, *Benjamin Franklin and His Gods* (Champagne, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1998), 127.
35. Franklin letter to an unidentified person, December 13, 1757, quoted in Walters, *Benjamin Franklin*, 128.
36. Franklin letter of Lord Kames, May 3, 1760, quoted in Lemay, *Benjamin Franklin, Volume 2*, 41.
37. D. H. Lawrence, *Studies in Classic American Literature* (New York: Thomas Seltzer, 1923), 23–24.
38. Wo od, *Americanization*, 8.
39. F. Scott Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby* (1925), quoted in Wood, *Americanization*, 8.
40. Walters, *Benjamin Franklin*, 5.
41. Lemay, *Benjamin Franklin, Volume 2*, 58.
42. Lawrence, *Studies*, 31.
43. Lawrence, *Studies*, 31.

4
The Way of Print

If Ben Franklin had only been a printer, he still would have led a remarkable life. As his biographer, J. A. Leo Lemay put it, "[no] printer before Franklin built what might be considered a major vertical business empire."[1] After only a decade in the trade in Philadelphia, Franklin had controlling interests in producing paper and ink, and was one of the colonies leading publishers of books, pamphlets, and periodicals. Meanwhile, he published one the most important newspapers in British North America, created a system of printing franchises that cultivated younger printers and increased Franklin's profits, clerked for the Pennsylvania legislature, and held down the post as the colony's postmaster. In other words, Franklin understood the possibilities of print and took advantage of them, both for his own profit and for promoting the literate culture to which he aspired. That command of the business and recognition of its many dimensions made Franklin, according to Ralph Frasca, the author of *Ben Franklin's Printing Network* (2006), "the largest and most influential" figure in "early American printing networks."[2]

Because Franklin worked as clerk for the Philadelphia merchant, Thomas Denham, he learned to be a careful bookkeeper. Ben's financial records therefore left traces of the jobs he took on as a printer, though the accounting books tally only work performed on credit. Job printing was Franklin's forte throughout most of his active years as a printer. It had the advantage of generating frequent commissions and avoided using large amounts of type on bigger projects like Bibles and books. Eventually, Franklin would print the first novel in North America, Samuel Richardson's *Pamela* (1742). This was an exception since the return on books was uncertain. The way to pay for large-scale publications was usually through subscriptions. The bulk of

Franklin's printing was small and odd jobs. In 1730, when he started his own business, Franklin recorded the following transactions:

> cures for Dr. Brewster; powers of attorney and bond forms for Joseph Breintal, administration bonds . . . for Dr. Samuel Bushill . . . ; tobaccos papers for Nathaniel Edgecomb, Lawrence Rice, and Jon Spence; 100 bonds of good behavior and 100 certificates for Andrew Hamilton; Welsh Society tickets for Dr. Jones; certificates for John Moore; advertisements for Thomas Peters and John Wilkinson; forms for Nicholas Scull, deputy sherriff; and "hungary bills" for John Spence.[3]

The total number of jobs for the year was seventeen, for twelve different customers. The fact that many of these names recur in Franklin's account books suggest satisfaction with the quality of the twenty-four-year-old printer's work. The quantity of work he took on is also an indication of how hard Franklin worked at a trade that took great physical strength and generally called for work days that ran from dawn to dusk.

Over the next eighteen years, Franklin continued to produce the standard forms that helped businesses and government function but also added considerably to his initial jobs. He acquired the contract for official government documents from Pennsylvania as early as 1730, a transaction that gave him wide access to other business and public affairs. In 1740, he began to do the same for New Jersey, which included records of votes, procedures, governors' proclamations, treaties (with native Americans), laws, and acts. Franklin also secured the business for printing colonial currency. Between 1739 and 1748 he printed eleven paper currency issues, four for Pennsylvania, four for New Jersey, and three for the Three Lower Counties (i.e., Delaware). Legal documents added to his workload: so much so, that between 1730 and 1748 he operated three working presses. His newspaper, *The Pennsylvania Gazette*, and an annual almanac, *Poor Richard*, tapped Franklin's creativity and spontaneity. Only after these routine though official and daily print runs did Franklin come to producing books and pamphlets for local institutions, many of which he had a hand in creating, such as the Pennsylvania Hospital, the Library Company, and the American Philosophical Society.

Finally, Franklin tackled book production which was the most public and long lasting of his endeavors, and the riskiest. For instance,

in 1736 he printed three books on his own: the former mayor of Philadelphia, Jonathan Dickinson's captivity narrative, *God's Protecting Providence Man's Surest Help;* a second edition of a medical guide, *Every Man His Own Doctor*; and James Logan's, one of Philadelphia's leading citizens, *Charge to the Grand Inquest.* Sales for these books are uncertain except for Logan's, which sold poorly. The author eventually purchased all copies to distribute to friends. Most of the other books printed during this period were paid for by the authors: Conrad Beissel's *Hymns* for the Ephrata community (a German pietist group); the Anglican priest, Richard Peter's *Two Last Sermons*; and George Fox's *Instructions for Right Spelling.* At his own expense, Franklin published the first American edition of the legendary hymn author, Isaac Watt's *Divine Songs Attempted in Easy Language for the Use of Children.* In effect, Franklin followed no single strategy for his business other than finding work at rates agreeable to his own needs from customers who could pay their bills. He was a businessman first and foremost and found other outlets for his considerable intellectual curiosity.[4]

At the same time, as a printer, Franklin was part of a culture of print and book making that drew heavily from customs and outlooks that Protestantism had especially fostered since the sixteenth century. When Martin Luther waged his theological battle with secular and religious authorities, he opened a world of vernacular print and inspired a lay audience without precedent. To say that publishing was the domain of Protestants would be an oversimplification since Roman Catholics needed documents, manuals, and prayer books as much as the rulers of predominantly Roman Catholic societies needed law books, notices, pamphlets, and records. At the same time, Protestantism opened up markets for publishers and promoted literacy in ways that Roman Catholicism did not. Not only did Protestants gain a reputation as "people of the book" thanks to the importance of Bible-reading for Protestant piety, but also, Protestantism required a literate laity that could keep up with the elements of a worship service or the labors of their pastor. In addition, Protestantism nurtured social conditions that gave printers greater freedom to publish a range of materials that in Roman Catholic societies would have required the imprimatur of church officials (at least for religiously related matter).

Whether Franklin understood his place in the world of print that had grown up around Protestantism is not clear. But in his

autobiography, he produced a snapshot of the expectations for literacy that generally prevailed among Protestants when he wrote "[f]rom a child I was fond of reading, and all the little money that came into my hands was ever laid out in books." One of Franklin's first memories was of reading John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* which prompted the purchase of a collection of Bunyan's works in "separate little volumes." Once Franklin's father, Josiah, determined that the Puritan ministry was not suitable for Ben, the son began to read other authors, from Plutarch to Daniel Defoe and Cotton Mather. Arguably, the most telling line in Franklin's account of his youth was the admission that this "bookish inclination at length determined my father to make me a printer."[5] Such a print culture was not only the background for Franklin's intellectual curiosity, but also the condition for his financial success.

Pennsylvania Gazette

As one of three printers in Philadelphia, Franklin knew at the opening of his print shop that to distinguish himself he needed a publication, like a newspaper, that drew attention to his business and enlarged existing networks of content providers and readers. His initial plan to start a newspaper and challenge Andrew Bradford's *American Weekly Mercury* received a blow when Samuel Keimer, his former boss, beat Franklin to the challenge. Yet, Franklin's rivals had no way of knowing how talented their younger competitor was. To upend Keimer's paper, awkwardly entitled, *The Universal Instructor in All Arts and Sciences, and Pennsylvania Gazette*, Franklin wrote a series for Bradford's paper, known as the Busy-Body essays. As "the best writer in America," according to Carl Van Doren, who won a Pulitzer Prize for his biography of Franklin,[6] the new printer brought skills to the marketplace that Keimer and Bradford lacked. The plan succeeded. Keimer had overreached with his *Universal Instructor*, fell into debt, and fled to Barbados. Although Franklin had added zest to Bradford's dull *American Weekly*, Keimer's paper was now available. The twenty-three-year-old entrepreneur from Boston took over the paper and simplified its name to *Pennsylvania Gazette*. With his new outlet, Franklin announced that Pennsylvanians' "long" desire for "a good newspaper" had been fulfilled.

Walter Isaacson conjectures that newspaper editors fall into three categories. One is the "crusading" ideologue who has "strong opinions, partisan passions," and a rebellious streak. Isaacson thinks Franklin's brother, James, was this kind of editor. The second type was someone enamored of power, who enjoyed mixing with "the established order and feeling vested in it." Franklin's competitor, Andrew Bradford, according to Isaacson, ran the *American Weekly* this way. The last class of newspaper editor was the person "charmed and amused by the world" and who sought to do the same for readers. This was both an asset and a liability because it meant the said editor was caught between "wanting to participate in the world while also remaining a detached observer." In what is one of the most astute observations about Franklin's manner as both editor and journalist, Isaacson writes that the "depths of his beliefs were often concealed by his knack for engaging in a knowing wink."[7] That outlook was often an affront to Franklin's religious readers who saw the world mainly through the lens of piety. But for a person who struggled with belief and doubt, it was arguably the best way to negotiate the certainties of the old religion and the questions that a new world posed.

Promoting moral virtue is how Ralph Frasca describes Franklin's approach to journalism in his study of the printer's accomplishments. Indeed, with the *Pennsylvania Gazette* Franklin did try to avoid slurs on the reputations of Philadelphia's officials and residents. At the same time, business demanded that he entice readers with items that appealed to their baser instincts. This meant that he was not shy about including amusing stories about sex. For instance, Isaacson mentions one story from the newspaper about a sex-starved woman who sought a divorce because her husband was inadequate in the bedroom. She appealed to the local magistrate who encouraged a medical examination of her husband that revealed him "in every respect to be *sufficient*." Franklin's summary included the news that the woman "now declares . . . that 'George is as good as de best.'" In addition to stories and advice about sex and marriage, the *Pennsylvania Gazette* featured crime stories, another topic that titillated readers, such as an account of a couple accused of murdering the husband's daughter from a previous marriage. When authorities ruled that the girl, who suffered from poor health, would have died anyway, Franklin judged that the couple had broken both the "law of nations"

and "the universal law of nature."[8] Readers also bought the *Pennsylvania Gazette* for its gossip, though often it was more a forum for reporting on the ordinary affairs of city life in all its virtues and vices than an outright attempt to circulate slanderous information. If later generations regarded Franklin's coverage of Philadelphia's rough and tumble as a break with Christian norms of decency, they likely forgot that Puritans themselves were earthy in their own descriptions of sex, marriage, and domestic life. According to Leland Ryken, a student of Puritan culture, for these Protestants "married sex was . . . meant to be exuberant" and they "were not squeamish about it."[9]

Whatever such stories say about journalism's tabloid roots, the *Gazette* had a serious side as well. Franklin's model was the *London Gazette*, a paper begun in 1665, which set the pattern for most newspapers in the English-speaking world. It included announcements of government proceedings, foreign news, local developments, and advertising. This was the pattern that Keimer followed when he started the *Universal Instructor* and that Franklin appropriated with the *Gazette*. A close inspection of Franklin's paper indicates that news and advertisements provided the bulk of content. News comprised forty-seven percent (down from Keimer's fifty-nine percent), and advertising made up forty-three percent of copy (up from Keimer's sixteen percent). The increase of space devoted to advertisements is one obvious explanation for the *Gazette*'s profitability. At the same time, as much as Franklin's own writing for the paper attracted readers, the number of essays in the *Gazette* actually declined from four percent (*Universal Instructor*) to two-and-one-half (*Gazette*). As much as advertising helped Franklin's profits, the news he chose was generally substantial. In fact, owing to wars in Europe and the Middle East, fifty-five percent of news items featured matters of diplomacy, war, and military subjects. The next closest subject was coverage of the Crown and other elites in British society (eleven percent). The next most frequently published items pertained to accidents and crimes (ten percent) and business (eight percent). Religion finished several notches below (a little over two percent). The *Gazette* relied on news found in other newspapers. Franklin also published correspondents as well as his own observations of local life.[10]

When religion did become newsworthy, it owed either to controversy or activities that veered from the ordinary affairs of local

congregations. The arrival of the Anglican priest, George Whitefield, to the colonies was one of those times when religion, in the form of an itinerant evangelist preaching to large crowds, was sensational. But even before Whitefield became a celebrity, Franklin gave some attention to a controversy among Philadelphia's Presbyterians over the doctrines of one of their pastors. Samuel Hemphill, a minister from Ireland, received an appointment as an assistant to Jedediah Andrews at the city's only Presbyterian congregation. Despite objections from other ministers in the area, Hemphill's appointment went forward but his initial sermons did not silence critics. When Presbyterians decided to open an investigation into the Irish pastor's views, Franklin published a Socratic dialogue to raise objections to orthodox Presbyterians' intolerance. At issue was the Protestant understanding of faith and works, or whether morality itself was sufficient for salvation. One of the interlocutors in this exchange, Mr. S., repeated what Franklin had already claimed about Christianity, namely, that it was best when it increased public and personal virtue. On those grounds, Hemphill's failure to explain the priority of faith to good works was not a problem since his views had support from other parts of the Bible. Just as important was the discrepancy between doctrinal knowledge and moral conduct. Since Philadelphians were clearly deficient in morality, what harm, Mr. S. asked, could more sermons on Christian virtues do? (For additional details on the Hemphill controversy, see Chapter 7, below.)

These concerns about public morality also gave Franklin the opportunity to comment on the Protestant Reformation and the churches that had grown from it. For the *Gazette*'s editor, the history of Christianity was a story of replacing the simplicity of Jesus' teaching with the elaborations of "Apostasy." Martin Luther may have started by objecting to indulgences, but soon he, John Calvin, and Anglicans "went further" to produce lengthy statements of faith and doctrine. Presbyterians especially had been unsatisfied with the Church of England, and "fancying themselves infallible in *their* Interpretations," crafted the Westminster Confession. As much as Franklin faulted Protestants for going too far in their definitions and codes, he also argued that these Christians were inconsistent about religious liberty. On the hand, they appealed to freedom to escape the orthodoxy to which they objected but then, on the other hand, denied such liberty

to those who dissented from their creeds. "We have justly deny'd the Infallibility of the *Pope* and his *Councils* and *Synods*," Franklin asked through the voice of Mr. S., "and can we modestly "claim *Infallibility* for our selves or our *Synods*?"[11]

In his coverage of George Whitefield, Franklin revealed a certain bias. On June 12, 1740, the *Gazette* noted that during the convening of Presbyterians in Philadelphia, "there were no less than 14 Sermons preached on *Society-Hill* to large Audiences," "Religion is become the Subject of most Conversations," "No Books are in Request but those of Piety and Devotion," and "People are every where entertaining themselves with Psalms, Hymns and Spiritual Songs." The *Gazette* attributed such piety to "the successful Labours of the Reverend Mr. *Whitefield*."[12] Six years later, the paper printed an "appreciation" of the evangelist by none other than the printer himself. Whitefield's sermons proved his "great Ability," everyone recognized his "rich Fancy, sound and ripening Judgment, and extensive Acquaintance with Men and Books of useful Literature," and he relied on "Purity of Language, Perspicuity of Method, a ready Elocution, an engaging Address, and an apt Gesture." No one could doubt, Franklin insisted, that Whitefield had awakened many Philadelphians "to a Sense of the Importance of Religion," while his ministry had built up others "in their most holy Christian Faith."[13] One year later, Franklin published two letters from South Carolinians who gladly pledged support for the evangelist's fund raising efforts for an orphanage in Georgia. These donors would undoubtedly, Franklin conceded, "please [Whitefield's] Friends" and "convince every candid Reader" that the evangelist's finances were "just."[14]

Such editorial approval of Whitefield came well after Franklin had explained, early on in his coverage of the awakening, that his editorial policy was to print all points of view because "when Truth has fair Play, it will always prevail over Falshood [sic]."[15] Franklin needed to defend the *Gazette* after receiving criticism for biased coverage of Whitefield. Readers complained that the paper was closed to criticisms of the revival. The priest at Christ's Church, Archibald Cummings, who had initially invited Whitefield to preach in his parish, changed his mind about the evangelist once his sermons revealed an antagonism to church hierarchies and enlightened Christianity. Franklin denied the charge. The world could justly complain over

any publisher who presumed to decide arbitrarily "what ought and what ought not to be published."[16] Although the *Gazette*'s coverage of religion was small, it remained positive about the evangelist who became the font of born-again Protestantism.

Poor Richard, Rich Ben

In addition to the daily grind of producing the *Gazette*, Franklin assumed responsibility for an annual almanac that, according to Isaacson, combined two goals: "the making of money and the promotion of virtue." Someone could plausibly add that *Poor Richard's Almanac*, which ran from 1732 until 1758, was simply another instance of Franklin's capacity for both the world of print and the sort of reading material that interested his potential audience. He may have calculated that an almanac would increase profits and enhance his firm's reputation. The almanac came naturally to a man with limitless curiosity and the means to display it. It was also a genre that appealed to Franklin's sense of utility and industry. Here was a book, as T. J. Tomlin, the author of *Divinity for All Persuasions: Almanacs and Early American Religious Life* (2017), writes, "unlike any other."[17] On the surface, it was a calendar that allowed users to chart days and months, in other words, a diary. Owners often added pages that recorded the major events of personal and business life, births, deaths, marriages, transactions, guests. At the same time, an almanac oriented a reader to the cosmos, from God to friend and neighbor. Almanacs included descriptions of the moon's phases and planets courses which implied "the all-knowing God who controlled them." For public affairs, these books revealed schedules for courts and predicted local weather conditions. They included what functioned as a directory of local inns and taverns. Medical advice also "informed readers about their bodies and how to treat them."[18] A crude analogy might liken the almanac to the smart phone.

Because of its unique features and wide range, almanacs rivaled the Bible for room on the bookshelf in colonial American homes and provided an immediate source of income to printers. Priced at the contemporary equivalent of one dollar, the almanac's affordability gave it a broad readership. A printer in Boston who controlled the production of almanacs sold 60,000 annually, a figure that suggested

every household in America owned one. Printers' records indicated that some customers only purchased almanacs. In 1743, Franklin himself supplied a bookseller in Annapolis with 1,500 copies of *Poor Richard's Almanac* at a time when the entire population of Maryland's capital was 900. Such popularity was also responsible for what Franklin called, "considerable profit," from *Poor Richard.*[19] Receipts from Boston printers during the eighteenth century show profits of fifty pounds per year, at a time when an entire estate averaged 160 pounds in net worth. In Virginia, a printer estimated a 400 percent profit on one year's sales. Some historians speculate that almanacs were even more popular than the Bible.

To this market, producers responded with appealing copy. Franklin's ploy was to create the character, Poor Richard (Saunders), who for roughly twenty-five years introduced the almanac with news about personal affairs or even fictional stories about real persons, such as Franklin's banter with rival almanac producer, Titan Leeds. The genre invited predictions about the upcoming year and in 1733, Franklin predicted the death of Leeds. Leeds did not see the humor in Franklin's playful use of the medium and objected to Poor Richard's prophecy. For several years, Franklin kept the prank going. Even after Leeds died, Franklin printed a letter from Leeds' ghost that complimented Poor Richard for his accuracy. Readers unfamiliar with Jonathan Swift, one of Franklin's favorite authors, may have considered the jesting about death cruel. Leeds did not seem to know the sources of Franklin's inspiration and amusement. But the creator of Poor Richard was once again imitating the English writers that he enjoyed. In this case Swift's satire on an astrologer and almanac maker, John Partridge, became the inspiration for Franklin's good-natured ridicule of the entries found in most versions.

The production of an annual guide to the rhythms of the calendar year gave Franklin, through Poor Richard, the vehicle to reflect on the science of charting planets and their correspondence to units of time. In 1751, he commented on astrology as one of the most "ancient Sciences" that had fallen into neglect thanks to better understanding of human affairs. "Empires make Leagues, and Parliaments Laws" without consulting astrologers beyond "the best Time of cutting Corns, or gelding Pigs." But the publication of William Whiston's memoirs had given astrology new life. A mathematician at Cambridge

and a disciple of Isaac Newton, who developed the school of theological reflections based on the study of nature, Whiston had argued that his mentor's discovery of comets' movements was the beginning of the coming of the millennium. Poor Richard was in fact amazed to learn that Whiston had predicted the return of Christ in 1766 on the basis of planetary movement. The humble almanac author could not help but remark that such speculations should give plausibility to "a little Rain or Sun-shine" for 1751.[20]

The next year witnessed the British Empire's adoption of the Gregorian calendar, a development that sent almanac producers scrambling to adjust for the eleven days that vanished from September in order to allow the marking of time to catch up with the solar year. Poor Richard kept pace and provided historical background. The year itself was a function of human curiosity and desire for routine—to give order to the seasons and see their connection to the sun. The Egyptian year had 360 days, the Roman 304, which left the Tropical calendar to come closest to the actual state of affairs with 365 days, five hours, and forty-nine minutes. Poor Richard credited to Pope Gregory XIII who, in a remarkably different approach from Pope Urban VIII, the pope responsible for condemning Galileo, assembled astronomers to calculate the solar year and reset the calendar by removing ten days. Richard knew that it took almost a century for Protestant nations to implement the Gregorian calendar—the English almost 150—but refused to editorialize. He acknowledged that the new calendar was "far from . . . perfect." It still did not account for eighty minutes each year, which would constitute an entire day every seventy-two centuries. But just as the "People called *Quakers*" agreed to adopt the new calendar, so would Poor Richard "for the Satisfaction of the Publick."[21] Such adding and subtracting may explain why Franklin's almanacs ceased to include the anniversaries of birthdays for prominent historical figures. Indeed, this "who's who" of religious, literary, and scientific lore was an indication, if not of Franklin's own regard, at least of what he thought readers wanted. Nicolaus Copernicus, Oliver Cromwell, Joseph Addison, and William Penn, and Martin Luther, Francis Bacon, John Calvin, and Isaac Newton were the celebrities that almanac readers in the English-speaking world knew.

What made Franklin's almanac popular and what resonated most with the generically English Protestant culture of the colonies was his gift for maxims. Whatever their merit, Poor Richard kept writing them and included at least thirty in each print run. The range of subjects mainly covered self-improvement, or in contemporary parlance, doing well by doing good. At the same time, Franklin knew enough of humanity's dark side to leaven his advice with realism:

> Be slow in chusing a Friend, slower in changing.
> Early to bed and early to rise, makes a man healthy wealthy and wise.[22]
> Blessed is he that expects nothing, for he shall never be disappointed.
> Rather go to bed supperless, than run in debt for a Breakfast.[23]
> Take Courage, Mortal; Death can't banish thee out of the Universe.
> The Sting of Reproach, is the Truth of it.[24]
> Paintings and Fightings are best seen at a distance.
> He that best understands the World, least likes it.
> He that is of Opinion Money will do every Thing, may well be suspected of doing every Thing for Money.[25]

The maxims all proceeded from a man whom Franklin portrayed as moderate about almost all aspects of life. In 1746 Poor Richard elaborated what he thought was a median between wisdom and wit, a table that was ample but open to the poor, cautious about being right and willing to be corrected when wrong, "Thankful if well; if ill, we kiss the Rod; Resign with Hope, and put our Trust in GOD."[26]

The popularity of Franklin's maxims led to *The Way to Wealth*, his most reprinted work (even more than his *Autobiography*). In 1757, while in London in search of a royal charter for Pennsylvania's Assembly (see Chapter 10, below), Franklin recognized that Poor Richard's time had come to an end. His preface to the 1758 almanac was his last and his longest—twelve pages rather than one. He introduced a new character, Father Abraham, a mix of biblical wisdom and comical cluelessness, who when asked about the economic condition of the country resorted to most of the aphorisms that Poor Richard had written. The tone for this advice added an undercurrent of ambiguity, as if Franklin knew how simplistic he sounded. On the one hand, he added self-deprecation to maxims such as "The first Mistake in publick Business, is the going into it." On the other hand, Franklin undercut Father Abraham's concluding remarks with observations

that suggested the author understood how pointless his advice was. Father Abraham cautioned, "do not depend too much upon your own *Industry*, and *Frugality*, and *Prudence*." Though excellent virtues, "they may be blasted without the Blessing of Heaven." The people who heard Abraham "approved the Doctrine, and immediately practised [sic] the contrary," a disregard that put Franklin's advice in the same category as the "common Sermon." In fact, the summation of practical wisdom did little to dent the people's indiscriminate spending and fear of taxes. Poor Richard conceded that Father Abraham's mention of him "must have tired any one else," but "my Vanity was wonderfully delighted with it.[27]

The tie between Franklin's almanacs and *The Way to Wealth* tapped the generic Protestantism to which publishers appealed in colonial America. As Tomlin argues, "every element of the almanac steadily proclaimed the Protestant vernacular between 1730 and 1820." The almanacs' reading of planets and the cycles of the solar year directed readers to "the creator-God" who controlled the cosmos. These annual guides also made readers aware of their dependence on God for the natural order. They "presented a pan-Protestant God powerful enough to bring rain to earth and people to heaven." Furthermore, the relationship between the cycles of the calendar year and those of personal biography called readers of almanacs to "moral living and accessible reassurance that doing so would lead to a joyous afterlife." Tomlin insists that histories of religion in the colonies, by focusing on church life, miss the ways that almanac-makers provided Americans with an alternative, "pan-Protestant" spirituality. That piety enabled readers to "come to terms with both the world around them and the world to come."[28] If true, then Ben Franklin through Poor Richard and Father Abraham was at the center of colonial Protestantism.

Books for People of the Book

Franklin's relationship with the evangelist George Whitefield (see Chapter 7, below) has intrigued historians if only because as Whitefield biographer, Harry S. Stout, wonders, why the "creed-despising Franklin" would cultivate and become such a good friend with the "deist-despising Whitefield?" Similarities in their backgrounds and lives is one answer, as Stout, indicates. Another reason was the

profitability of printing books by or related to the evangelist. As J. A. Leo Lemay observes, Franklin beat every other colonial publisher to the idea that "publishing the amazingly effective itinerant evangelist . . . might be profitable."[29] Since Franklin's work ethic and money-making were mutually reinforcing, the financial advantage to the Philadelphia publisher from personal ties to Whitefield is no proof of hypocrisy. Franklin was proud that moral uplift could be profitable. Why would capitalizing on Whitefield be any different?

Before he retired in 1748, Franklin printed, as near as historians can tell, a little over 430 books, or an average of roughly twenty-three each year. Over half of these titles (fifty-six percent) were instances of vanity publishing—authors or institutions paying for the printing of their own book. According to James N. Green, a colonial historian, none of the colonial printers before Franklin or his competitors approximated this output. Andrew Bradford, for instance, a rival printing business in Philadelphia, produced thirty-eight books or pamphlets during the 1730s compared to Franklin's 118 imprints. Such productivity made sense because it was "extremely profitable."[30] That he charged authors three times the cost of paying tradesmen to set the type and print the sheets explains Franklin's markup. He also added the cost of paper to the bill if customers did not supply their own.

The awakenings inspired by George Whitefield's arrival and tour of the colonies between 1739 and 1741 produced a spike in book publishing from which Franklin and other printers benefitted. Indeed, part of what made the awakening great was the Anglican itinerant evangelist's use of print. Green explains that Whitefield's own words, "together with pamphlets for and against him, streamed from the presses in Boston and Philadelphia." It did not take electrical science for someone with Franklin's powers of observation to see the market for religious books after Whitefield's arrival in the colonies. As Franklin put it in the *Gazette*, "No Books are in Request but those of Piety and Devotion; and instead of Songs and Ballads, the People are Every where entertaining themselves with Psalms, Hymns, and Spiritual Songs."[31] He also took Whitefield's advice about which titles to print. These included Ralph Erskine's *Gospel Sonnets* (1740), a book that included versifications of biblical texts, Isaac Watts' *Psalms* (1740) and *Hymns and Spiritual Songs* (1741), one of the popular song books that

broke the dominance of exclusive Psalm-singing among Reformed Protestants. In addition to song books, on Whitefield's recommendation, Franklin published Joseph Allein's popular book, *Alarm to Unconverted Sinners* (1741), a volume that failed to provoke pangs of guilt and desire for conversion in the publisher himself. According to Green, these were "good-sized" volumes, though easier to print without having to include musical notation. He also observes that Franklin's output during the Great Awakening "represented the largest religious publishing venture the middle colonies had ever seen aside from a history of the Quakers. But the Friends had underwritten the text on their history whereas Franklin took the risk of producing books that depended on sales to offset costs.

Edifying literature was only one aspect of Franklin's religious publishing, which included polemical pamphlets and books about the value and defects of the piety fanned into flame by revivalism. Indeed, Philadelphia publishers, the Bradfords and Franklin, had their greatest output during the highwater mark of the awakening—1740–1742. Franklin befriended Whitefield and received permission to print the evangelist's *Sermons* and *Journal*. Even though "four tiny duodecimo volumes," they were "the largest books" published in America during the awakening.[32] Aside from Whitefield's works, Franklin also produced forty-three books and pamphlets that either defended or criticized Whitefield, as well as nineteen pamphlets about Count Nicolas Zinzendorf's proposal to unite German Protestants (primarily Lutheran and Reformed) under the umbrella of the intense piety that the awakenings generated.

Franklin's own views on religion and its utility sometimes dovetailed with the revivalists', but his printing decisions invariably followed the demands of the market. Early on, in 1729, he published a book of psalm paraphrases by Isaac Watts which had sold well in London. The colonists, however, were more partial to the older and traditional psalter of Brady and Tate and Watts' collection proved a failure. Four years later, Franklin switched to printing the older psalter with copies of Watts still in inventory.[33] He also took a risk in printing Samuel Richardson's epistolary novel, *Pamela; or Virtue Rewarded*, a book Franklin considered a secularized version of John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*. The novel "mix'd Narration and Dialogue" to engage the reader in ways similar to Bunyan's. Because of all the

printing associated with the awakenings, producing the seventeen sheets required for *Pamela*'s length took Franklin two years to complete. By then, the market for *Pamela* had passed and he had to sell copies, stitched not bound, to other colonial booksellers. Another book that tested Franklin's business acumen was the New Testament, a product that in England required a royal license. Aside from questions of legality, cheap copies of the Christian half of the Bible were readily available in the colonies thanks to affordable imports from Dutch and Scottish publishers. But Franklin in 1745 went ahead with a New Testament and wound up having to send it in sheets to New York and Boston in hopes of passing it off as a foreign import. Even so, the price was almost twice as much as other editions for sale and Franklin's edition still needed to be bound.

Someone might be tempted to conclude that Franklin's ignorance of colonial church life was responsible for some of his questionable decisions in religious publishing. As plausible as that point may be, it loses some of its force with the realization that book printing and sales were merely a small part of Franklin's business. In fact, the Great Awakening gave life to other printers whose businesses shut down after the revival's heat cooled. Franklin's greatest profits came from the sale of stationary which included everything from loose paper to bound blank books. Next in profitability was newspaper advertising, followed by almanacs. For colonial printers, books were a side venture.

Print and Protestantism

Although books were a small part of Franklin's printing business, he did write occasionally about publishing in ways that suggested it was a big part of his identity, even his vocation. In one essay, he noted the substantial errors that printers had made in publishing the Bible, such as leaving out the "e" to change the text to "I am fearfully and wonderfully **mad**," or omitting "not" in "Thou shalt **not** commit adultery," or forgetting the "c" in "we shall all be **hanged** in a moment, in the twinkling of an Eye." Moral lessons were never far from Franklin's reasoning and he could not resist a point, while cataloging these errors, that "whoever accustomes himself to pass over in Silence the Faults of his Neighbours, shall meet with much

better Quarter from the World when he happens to fall into a Mistake himself."[34] At other times, Franklin took criticisms to heart and defended his work by highlighting printers' public service and answering misunderstandings. Printers were in the business, he noted, of publishing opinions and this allowed the reading public to hear both sides (or more) of a contested matter. Such work inevitably involved giving offense to many readers, a problem that shoemakers and carpenters did not have. By publishing both error and truth, Franklin argued, the latter was "always and overmatch" for the former. Even so, readers should not assume that printers approved of everything they published, which was a good thing if only because reading would be much less interesting if texts were limited to "the Opinions of Printers."[35]

In another piece that coincided with the start of the *Gazette*, Franklin issued an "Apology for Printers" in response to readers who had taken offense from an advertisement for a ship that would not accept "sea hens" or "black gowns" as passengers "on any terms." Both of these phrases were short-hand epithets for Church of England clergy, though Franklin protested that he had no idea of sea hens' meaning. His apology included the revelation that he had good dealings with ministers in Philadelphia, that many were his customers, and that he tried to avoid mocking clergy even though pastors were easy targets. The heart of his apology was a plea to readers to become accustomed to encountering diverse and conflicting outlooks. "If all the People of different Opinions," Franklin wrote, "would engage to give me as much for not printing things they don't like, as I can get by printing them, I should probably live a very easy Life." At the same time, if "all Printers" lived by this rule, "there would be very little printed."[36]

Access to print and diversity of ideas was the genie that Protestantism released from the bottle of Christendom's assumed uniformity of thought and belief. In fact, the response to Protestants from Roman Catholic bishops at the Council of Trent (1545–1563) included rules for publishing. Books from "the heads or leaders of heretics," such as Martin Luther and Ulrich Zwingli, were "utterly prohibited," while books that "professedly treat of religion" by other heretics were "altogether condemned." Books "translated by Catholic authors into the vulgar tongue" about religion that increased faith and piety needed to be approved by local priests in consultation with their

bishop. The bishops at Trent also made provisions for bishops to establish inquisitors to oversee the work of local publishers and insure correct teaching.[37] As much as Rome tried to contain and corral the output of print that poured from presses in sixteenth-century Europe, Protestants benefitted from the relatively cheap availability of Bibles, pamphlets, song books, and other instructional matter. In contrast to Roman Catholicism which relied upon Latin texts for upper layers of the church hierarchy, Protestantism employed vernacular texts across ranks and classes in the church and so encouraged a literate market for book makers and printers. John Foxe, the English martyrologist, captured the difference between Protestants and Roman Catholics when he contrasted the former who "sit listening to the Word with Bibles in their laps" to the latter who fingered the beads of their rosaries. Foxe even claimed that the rise of printing and book production was the outworking of providence such that the church extended its influence "not with the sword . . . to subdue his exalted adversaries, but with printing, writing, and reading: to convince darkness by light, error by truth, ignorance by learning."[38]

To be sure, Foxe's positive estimate of the revolution in print did little to account for printers like Franklin whose products were not always on the godly side of history. Indeed, the lack of restraints on printers provided a platform for all sorts of ideas that the Protestant Reformers would have disapproved and to which the pious faithful, even those living in Philadelphia, objected. But the circulation of erroneous ideas along with religious texts of great worth was the price of doing business in the publishing world that Protestantism facilitated. Franklin may not have always acknowledged his debt to the religion of his forebears. He may have even credited his own skills and acumen for his success. At the same time, without the Reformation and the world of print that English Protestants cultivated, Franklin might have been an overqualified candle-maker.

Notes

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2. Ralph Frasca, *Benjamin Franklin's Printing Network: Disseminating Virtue in Early America* (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 2006), 2.

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5
Family Man

Ben Franklin's marriage to Deborah Reid was conventional in most respects but not because the printer adhered to Protestant norms (which in the main he did). The Franklin marriage followed the prevailing patterns because it was tied directly to business responsibilities. Ben recalled that his wife "assisted me cheerfully in my Business, folding and stitching Pamphlets, tending Shop, purchasing old Linen Rags for the Paper makers, etc." Deborah usually measured up to Franklin's standards of industry and frugality, though he complained once that she had impertinently purchased a silver spoon and a "China bowl." She had spent an extravagant sum of three pounds and twenty shillings for what she thought her husband "deserved."[1] Except for that indulgence, Deborah was an essential partner in Franklin's business. He printed upstairs while she ran the shop downstairs and kept the accounts. Deborah may not have been the Proverbs-Thirty-One woman of exceptional virtue and ceaseless provision because, like most women married to tradesmen, she worked in the business which was part of the home. The division between domestic and business life would have to wait for industrialization and the accompanying division of labor.

Deborah Franklin's role in the print shop was particularly apparent in the song Ben composed in 1742 on the occasion of their wedding anniversary:

> Of their Choles and Phillisses Poets may prate
> I sing my plain Country Joan
> Now twelve Years my Wife, still the Joy of my Life
> Blest Day that I made her my own.
> My dear friends,
> Blest Day that I made her my own.

Not a word of her Face, her Shape, or her Eyes,
Of Flames or of Darts shall you hear;
Tho' I Beauty admire, 'tis Virtue I prize,
That fades not in seventy Years,
My dear Friends, etc.

In Health a Companion delightfull and dear,
Still easy, engaging, and Free,
In Sickness no less than the faithfullest Nurse
As tender as tender can be,
My dear Friends, etc.

In Peace and good Order, my Houshold she keeps
Right Careful to save what I gain
Yet chearfully spends, and smiles on the Friends
I've the Pleasure to entertain
My dear Friends, etc.
She defends my good Name even when I'm to blame,
Friend firmer was ne'er to man giv'n,
Her Compassionate Breast, feels for all the Distrest,
Which draws down the Blessing from Heav'n,
My dear Friends, etc. . . .[2]

The song includes four more stanzas.

Franklin's paean to Deborah has also been the source for some discussion of their marriage and its challenges. Franklin scholars debate the year Ben wrote the song. Although the third line, a reference to twelve years of marriage, identifies its age, it did not appear in print until 1758 within *The Way to Wealth*. There, however, the text showed a revision from roughly 1754. In either case, Franklin did not mention Deborah's virtues as a mother, a sign that points to the earlier date, 1742, when she had no child of her own. She was then rearing William as a stepson, who came into the marriage as Benjamin's illegitimate child. Her first child, Francis, died in 1736 at the age of four. Franklin composed the song both out of gratitude for Deborah and in response to a challenge from colleagues that men only wrote songs about their mistresses. In fact, Franklin's text was, as his biographer, J. A. Leo Lemay, observes, "too realistic to be entirely complimentary."[3] Franklin apparently wanted to counteract the sentimentality that generally afflicted romantic songs. In so doing,

he also thought he had a better chance of pleasing Deborah since his verse rendered her as much more than an object of desire. Similar sentiments were evident years later when Franklin wrote to Deborah from London during one of his diplomatic trips. He saw a mug that reminded him of his wife: "I fell in love with it at first sight, for I thought it looked like a fat, jolly dame, clean and tidy, with a neat blue and white calico gown on, good natured and lovely."[4]

Lines like that have not inspired biographers to rank Franklin's marriage to Deborah as a rival to John and Abigail Adams or George and Martha Washington. Walter Isaacson, another biographer, remarks that the Franklins "settled into a partnership that was both more and less than a conventional marriage," with ties becoming firmer as the couple's economic interdependence increased. Isaacson also admits that Franklin outgrew Deborah. He was "more worldly and intellectual than she was, or ever wanted to be."[5] Brown University historian, Gordon Wood, categorized the match as one that did little to advance Franklin's prospects. Deborah was, frankly, "loud and lowly and scarcely literate." Franklin's settling for her indicated that his "social ambitions were still quite limited." In fact, Deborah was always a reminder of Franklin's own humble origins. Other founders thought of marriage "in dynastic terms, as a means of building alliances and establishing or consolidating their position in society."[6] Franklin's union with Deborah showed "no great advantage." Wood even wonders if, as Franklin rose in the ranks of colonial society, Deborah became an embarrassment since Philadelphia's gentry never included her in invitations to their homes.

To be sure, the circumstances surrounding Franklin's marriage were markedly different from those that he experienced later in life as a statesman and diplomat. At the same time, marriage and family life contributed considerably to the success and fame he would later enjoy. In turn, responsibilities as a husband and father were additional factors in Franklin's recourse to his English Protestant heritage since life as a family man sometimes required more than his innate ingenuity.

A Union of Ordinary Lives

Franklin's abandonment of a materialistic and determinist deism basically coincided—expressed in his *Dissertation on Necessity and*

Liberty—with his decision to marry. If maturity for Franklin meant giving up philosophical speculation, it also included finding a spouse. Both were practical moves on the path to respectability. Franklin had enough sense to know that only a god fearer could be a trustworthy business partner, citizen, and neighbor, which may explain the proximity of theism and marriage in his *Autobiography*. In the paragraph just before he elaborated his "Articles of Belief," Franklin described the frugality of his wife with an old proverb: "He that would thrive must ask his wife."[7] It was part of his reflections on virtue, his reading habits to cultivate discipline and morality, the benefits of marriage (even though Deborah served Ben breakfast in a "china bowl with a silver spoon"!), and his belief in higher powers. This was not the first reference to Deborah in the *Autobiography* but the proximity of marriage to faith and virtue was telling.

Ben's prospects for marriage as a young man in search of a trade were not promising. He had tried to negotiate one marriage with the niece of Thomas Godfrey, a glazier and amateur mathematician whom Franklin knew through a club of intellectually inclined laborers (known as the Junto), but to no avail. The family's financial resources were meager. "I was not to expect Money with a Wife unless," he wrote, "with such a one, as I should not otherwise think agreeable."[8] Part of what hurt Franklin, despite his charms and work ethic, was his line of work. He himself conceded that printing was a poor trade. Still, these were not reasons for a highly eligible bachelor to have such trouble finding a wife.

Lemay is right to argue in his comprehensive biography that Franklin's greatest obstacle was an illegitimate son, William. Franklin (as did William) maintained that the birth occurred between 1730 and 1731, a story likely designed to make the boy look like the fruit of Franklin's eventual marriage to Deborah. But thanks to cross-checking later activities in William's biography (such as serving as an ensign in Captain John Diemer's company in 1746), Lemay fixed the boy's birth two years earlier. If that is accurate, then Ben needed to find a wife who would agree to rear his son. (Lemay suggests the other woman was a person of prominence who could not afford to have her identity revealed—in contrast to a "low" woman or prostitute about whom Franklin could not be sure of his own paternity).[9]

The woman who eventually agreed to wed Franklin was not much more respectable than Ben himself. Read's father, John, a Quaker who in 1711 moved the family to Philadelphia, had been a carpenter until his death in 1724, around the time that Franklin originally proposed. Deborah's mother called the romance off just before Franklin left for London at the end of 1724. While Franklin was away in London, Deborah married John Rogers, a potter known for charm. When Deborah found evidence to suggest that her husband was already married to a woman in England, she moved back in with her mother. In 1727 Rogers compounded the situation by stealing a slave and relocating in the West Indies where he may well have been killed (Franklin's story in his *Autobiography*). This left Read without assets and vulnerable to a charge of bigamy (which could have received such punishments as lashings, prison, and hard labor). After Franklin's return to Philadelphia, he and Deborah resumed their romance and in 1730 obtained a common-law marriage, a fairly rare occurrence in colonial America. Part of their agreement likely involved Deborah's concession to rear William as if her own child.

It was by most measures a pragmatic alliance and illustrates, according to Isaacson, Franklin's "complex" character, "his desire to tame his hard-to-govern passions by being practical." For Franklin, love was less romantic than the sort of "affection that grew out of partnership, self-interest, collaboration, camaraderie, and good-humored kinship."[10] That may explain why Franklin described Deborah fondly as "much dispos'd to Industry and Frugality." Ben's Puritan forbears themselves were not overly idealistic about marriage. According to the Westminster Confession, a textbook of seventeenth-century British Calvinism, marriage's purpose was "for the mutual help of husband and wife, for the increase of mankind with legitimate issue, and of the church with an holy seed; and for preventing of uncleanness". Husbands and wives, pious or not, had much more to do and bind them than romance.

Franklin's own "Rules and Maxims for Matrimonial Happiness" were not as matter of fact as the Confession of Faith, but were no less conventional. The "happy state of Matrimony" was the font of most human goodness, from "Tenderness and Affection" to the "grand Point of Property" and the "Cause of all good Order in the World." Owing to the "Perverseness" of human nature, marriage could easily

become "a State of the most exquisite Wretchedness and Misery." The essay read not like the idealistic aspirations of a twenty-six-year-old who had been married only four weeks before, but the seasoned reflections of a middle-aged man. It also read like a man's instructions to his wife since Franklin's advice was all in one direction—to widows, wives, and "Spinsters." Every morning a wife should resolve to be cheerful and good-natured and at all times women should not dispute their husbands. "Deny yourself the trivial Satisfaction of having your own will," he wrote. He also recommended adding a clause in daily prayers for "Grace to make you a good Wife," wearing a wedding ring as a reminder of marriage vows, and constant self-scrutiny about wifely duties. All in all, "a Woman's Power, as well as Happiness, has no other Foundation but her Husband's Esteem and Love."[11] If Franklin had Deborah in mind—how could he not?—either he was offering advice to calm domestic unrest (perhaps owing to William's presence) or presenting himself and his marriage as completely respectable to compensate for William's place in the home. He did add that these maxims were "as proper for Husbands as for Wives." Still, as a newly established businessman, Franklin was not going to rock the boat of marriage the way he had fussed with the eternal decrees in his "Dissertation."

Such commitments held firm at least until Franklin became well established and wealthy. When away from Deborah on trips, his lifelong pursuit of moral perfection ran up against his somewhat illicit delight in the company of women. On top of his dalliances with "low women" in London before marriage and an affair that yielded an illegitimate son, while traveling to New England in 1755 he met Catherine Ray, a twenty-three-year-old, with whom Franklin carried on a "steamy correspondence." "Katy," as Ben called her, rebuffed his advances, at least according to his letters which complimented her for and lamented her "virgin innocence, white as your lovely bosom, – and as cold." A few years later, during his first diplomatic tour of England, Franklin took an interest in Polly Stevenson, the eighteen-year-old daughter of his landlady. This was another relationship conducted largely through letters and was "flirty" but not sexual. In one letter, for instance, Franklin explained the effects of Spanish fly, and in another, after Stevenson had married, Ben joked that her first child looked like him.[12] Later in life while in France, and after

Deborah had died, Franklin flirted with his married neighbor, Madame Anne-Louise de Harancourt Brillon de Jouy. Their conversations and correspondence were both romantic and intellectual. In person, Brillon sometimes sat on his lap. To check his flirtatious advances, she downgraded her love for Ben to affection for a father. They often talked about the afterlife, even to the point of possibly consummating their relationship there, where Ben promised to love her "for all eternity."[13] Before fulfilling that pledge, Franklin had one more romantic fling with another French woman, this one more his age, and also eligible, Anne-Catherine de Ligniville, Madame Helvétius, the widow of a prominent philosopher. The way Franklin carried on with her during the negotiations for ending the War for Independence, shocked John and Abigail Adams. Abigail objected that Madame Helvétius showed "more than her feet."[14] Franklin often proposed to the French aristocrat but in a playful way to avoid humiliation should she decline, which she always did.

Battle of the Sexes

Not very far into their marriage, while Franklin was still trying to establish his business and, while he and Deborah adjusted expectations, Ben resuscitated an old pseudonym to comment on the challenges of domestic life. Anthony Afterwit, a name he had used while working for his brother, James, in 1732 wrote a letter to the *Gazette* about family expenses. His main point was to observe the gap between a wife's appetite for trinkets and furniture and the household budget. Franklin could not help observing the difficulty that husbands faced when fathers-in-law refused to provide wives with a proper dowry after promising to help the newly weds. His own circumstances were different since Deborah's father had died before their marriage. At the same time, Franklin acquired very little assistance from the Reads when he married Deborah. When Anthony wrote that he had a home "tolerably furnished" and that if he and his wife lived "with Care and Industry we might live tolerably easy," he was close to the mark of the Franklins' early life together. But then Anthony's wife discovered her "strong Inclination to be a *Gentlewoman.*" This prompted a redecoration of the home, complete with a mirror, a new table, and matching chairs. Anthony thought they might adjust to these expenses. And

then came china, silverware, a maid, and the clock—"*a great Ornament to the Room!*" The solution to this "Way of Living [that] was utterly inconsistent with my Circumstances" was to sell off most of the trinkets his wife had bought while she was away visiting relatives. Out went the "Pacing Mare" and in came the "Milch Cow." Anthony also replaced the tea table with a spinning wheel. He did keep the mirror because his wife's heart was "set upon it."[15] But even it would go if she did not adapt to his economizing.

If Franklin identified with Anthony because of his own observations about Deborah's sometime extravagance, he also knew enough about men's vanity (and wives' complaints) to give equal time for the distaff side of domestic disputes. He turned to Celia Single, another alias, through whom he registered both wives' arguments and a man's acquisitive nature. Her letter to the *Gazette* reported on a dispute with her husband over knitting socks; Celia's husband had seen Anthony Afterwit's wife knitting stockings for her husband. When Celia suggested that the maid knit the socks, the husband responded that the helper had too many other chores. He also repeated the sort of aphorisms that would later make Franklin famous (and that implied Ben knew his advice bordered on cliche): "Well, but my Dear, *says he*, you know a penny sav'd is a penny got, a pine a day is a groat a year, every little makes a mickle." Even so, aside from mocking the wisdom that justified frugality, Single's letter provided a platform for exposing a husband's vices, perhaps observed by Franklin himself or what he had heard from Deborah. Single asked the editor where the pieces on male idleness and waste were, such as "Mr. *Billiard*, who spends more than he earns at the Green Table," or Mr. *Husselcap* who often all day long leaves his Business for the rattling of Halfpence in a certain Alley," or "Mr. *Finikin*, who has seven different Suits of fine Cloaths, and wears a Change every Day, while his Wife and Children sit at home half naked."[16] She concluded by warning Franklin that printing criticisms of wives (or husbands) would finally boomerang on the publisher himself.

If Afterwit and Single revealed that Franklin could satirize his roles both as husband and editor, he would not let relations between the sexes go. In fact, Anthony Afterwit returned a few years later to correct misapprehensions about marriage. "A Piece of Advice" in an earlier issue of the *Gazette* had complained that a man who entered the

state of marriage discovered that his "expected Bliss dissolves into Care in Bondage," that every Woman is a Tyrant," that he "loses his Liberty and his Friends," and that even the best woman is "no better than a Plague." Anthony took issue with the entire list of liabilities. Some of his reply involved simple affirmations, such as that marriage was an "inestimable Blessing of Life." Some required analogies such as comparing marriage to tending a garden as a way to explain why the cares and burdens of being a husband produced the pleasure of acquiring "greater Skill and Wisdom" in cultivating relations with a wife. Anthony refuted the charge of wives' tyranny by observing that women generally know "best the Affairs of [their] family." The idea that women were plaguelike in their influence was silly since every son knew instinctively that his mother was "better than a pestilence." In the end, Anthony recommended marriage because men were notoriously idle, negligent, and harmful to families. Indeed, the bottom line, not a very romantic notion, was that marriage was good for business since it gave a man more freedom to leave home, rely on his wife to maintain operations, so that "the good Couple relieve one another by turns, like a faithful Pair of Doves."[17]

A decade later Franklin returned to the subject of marriage mainly to recommend older women over "*young ones*." For a man almost fifteen years into his life with Deborah, marriage was "the most natural State of Man," the one most likely to produce "solid Happiness." In fact, "Man and Woman united" made "the compleat human Being." But the best prospects for a good marriage came with old mistresses. Some of Franklin's reasons were typically functional and moralistic: with more knowledge of human existence, better conversation; with diminished beauty, older women strove to be virtuous; and without prospects for childbearing such a marriage could avoid "the hazard of Children." Franklin did not refuse the chance to comment on "corporal Enjoyment with an old Woman." For one, "debauching a Virgin" could make her unhappy "for Life." For another, a miserable girl inevitably grew into a woman who became impossible to please. To the question of beauty and sexual appeal, Franklin conceded that age took its toll on a woman. The face and neck fell, breasts and arms grew plump. Still, in those bodily parts "below the Girdle," men could not tell the difference between an old and young woman. Just as "in the dark all Cats are grey," so in the

bedroom sex with an old woman was "at least equal, and frequently superior" to relations with a young lady.[18] What is more, old women "are so *grateful!!*"

Male readers may have found such observations playful—women, and Deborah in particular, may have objected. Yet, aside from the demands of generating an audience for the *Gazette*, marriage was an institution that Franklin tried to improve without the conventions of Protestant teaching. His most systematic effort came in 1746 with an anonymous pamphlet, *Reflections on Courtship and Marriage*. Franklin drew inspiration from two authors, Jonathan Swift, whose *Letter to a Very Young Lady on Her Marriage* (1727), concluded Franklin's pamphlet. The other was Cotton Mather, whose *Ornaments for the Daughters of Zion* (1692) a Boston publisher in 1741 had reprinted at the urging of George Whitefield. That Franklin chose to take on two ministers—Swift was an Anglican dean at St. Patrick's Cathedral in Dublin—indicated that advice about matters domestic should move from the realm of divinity to ordinary humans. It was also proof that Franklin thought the old Puritan view of marriage needed updating and that Swift's ideas about courtship among the upper classes made no sense in the North American colonies.

Franklin's *Reflections* qualified as an early brief for equality of the sexes in marriage even though a male bias was still evident. The booklet contained two letters. The first, on courtship, stressed the sort of practical realities of middle-class life, such as not marrying for money, sexual desire, or egotism. The best marriages resulted from honesty in courtship and a realistic estimate of the potential spouse and the duties of marriage. He mocked the emotional fits that typically attended romantic love, such as the man who turned his lover into an "*Arcadian Princess*, an *Angel Form*, and a *heavenly Mind*, the *Pride of Nature*, and the *Joy of Man*, a *Source of immortal Pleasures*, *Raptures* that will *never satiate*, *Bliss uninterrupted*, and *Transports too big for Expression*."[19] The second letter addressed marriage itself, again in realistic terms, by recommending that couples avoid gaining the upper hand, quarreling, and neglecting business and domestic responsibilities. Franklin also advocated modesty in public and private affairs, which led to one of the pamphlet's most quoted sections—namely, a description of a wife who neglected the basic norms of cleanliness:

> Let us survey the Morning Dress of some Women. Down Stairs they come, pulling up their ungarter'd, dirty Stockings – Slip-shod, with naked Heels peeping out – No Stays or other decent Conveniency, but all *Flip Flop* – A sort of Clout thrown about the Neck, without Form or Decency – A tumbled, discoloured Mob, or Night Cap, half on, and half off, with the frowsy Hair . . . Shrugging up her Petticoates, that are sweeping the Ground, and scarce ty'd on, – Hands unwhashed – Teeth furr'd – and Eyes crusted.[20]

Franklin added that he pitied "the poor Wretch her Husband, who, perhaps, for some Hours every Day in the Week, has the comfortable Sight and Odour of this Tatterdemalion. God help his Stomach." For some reason, most comments on *Reflections* have avoided tying this account to Deborah. Attributing all of these details to Franklin's conversations with married colleagues seems a stretch.

In fact, *Reflections* became one of Franklin's first literary efforts to go through several printings. His realistic assessment of marriage as a partnership between equals had some appeal to audiences in Charleston, New York, and Annapolis, where the book sold reasonably well. Within six years, printers in London and Edinburgh had released additional editions. Lemay calculates that by 1807 *Reflections* had come out in sixteen separate editions and may have influenced John Adams' courtship of Abigail. Adams had read Franklin around the time that he met his eventual wife.[21] For some, such as David E. Cloyd. author of *Benjamin and Education* (1902), *Reflections* was a argument primarily about the education of women, who thanks to superficial training employed "artificial behavior . . . for the purpose of catching men's eyes."[22] In *A Colonial Woman's Bookshelf* (2016), Kevin J. Hayes claims the popularity of *Reflections* owed to the book's secular, rather than religious, character.[23] The most straightforward interpretation emphasizes equality in marriage. For instance, in their recent anthology about marriage and courtship, Leon Kass and Amy Kass read Franklin as essentially modern in outlook. "With his eye firmly fixed on partnership as the key to marital happiness," they write, Franklin "warns equally against both the mercenary or economic and the passionate or romantic views of marriage."[24]

When the Kasses compiled their anthology on courtship and marriage they did not include Cotton Mather's *Ornaments for the Daughters of Zion*, and for good reason. The Boston pastor filled his counsel with

reflections on a woman's piety, a topic with limited appeal to a secular audience. Even so, Franklin and Mather's views on marriage did overlap in several ways. Although Mather spent the bulk of his short book on the sorts of practices and affections that Puritans upheld as the ideal of Christian devotion, he also included practical advice that resembled Franklin's. For instance, Mather counseled against ephemeral and external measures of beauty. Worldly conceptions of beauty were "vain" while a proper understanding involved "a Comely Presence, an Handsome Carriage, a Decent Gesture, a ready Wit agreeably expressing it self, with all other Graceful Motions, and whatsoever procures *Favour* for a Woman among her Neighbours."[25] Mather also, like Franklin, recommended modesty. "For a Woman to Wear what is not evidently, consistent with *Modesty*, *Gravity*, and *Sobriety*," Mather wrote, " is to wear not an *Ornament*, but a *Defilement;* and she puts off those Glorious *Virtues*, when she puts on the Visible *Badges* of what is contrary thereunto."[26]

To be sure, Mather was more concerned with how a wife comported herself in public than when she rose in the morning. But his advice paralleled Franklin's in underscoring the practical realities of a household income and a husband's as well as a wife's expectations. The big difference was that Franklin left out Mather's Puritan assumptions. This absence reflected Franklin's attempt to find a marriage ethic comparable to Protestant teaching for those, like himself, who could not abide the church.

Problem Children

For all of Franklin's propensity to give practical advice, he was surprisingly silent about child rearing. He did later in life counsel his daughter Sarah (Sally) about bringing up her son, Benjamin Franklin Bache (Benny). Benny and William Temple Franklin (William's son) had accompanied their grandfather to Paris during negotiations with the French. Ben was reluctant to let Benny (nine years younger than William) attend French schools. For that reason, he sent Benny to Geneva. His reason for choosing the capital of Calvinism (though hardly strict in 1778) was that Benny would have to live in a "Protestant country and a republic," so better to be educated in a municipality where the "proper principles prevail."[27] Franklin also advised

Sally about Benny's younger brother, Willy; she had asked her father what she should do about her son praying to the Greek hero, Hercules. Sally wondered if she should "instruct him in a little religion." Franklin replied that since Hercules' deity was "now quite out of fashion," Sally should "direct [Willy's] worship more properly."[28]

In the case of his own children, Franklin left fewer trails. The reason likely owed to his difficult relationship with his first son, William, the child of a woman whose identity has remained a mystery. According to one of Franklin's friends, in a letter discovered in the nineteenth century, the mother remained in Philadelphia, was poor, received modest support, and was disagreeable.[29] Lemay regards that report as "vague" and speculates that the mother was the wife of a friend, away on business.[30] Since conventions required mothers to rear their children, the fact that Franklin assumed responsibility for William has led some to think the mother was someone for whom the child would have hurt her standing. Of course, Lemay's argument that Franklin and his liaison needed to keep the pregnancy secret raises the obvious question of how they hid changes in the mother's body during pregnancy. If she were married to one of Franklin's friends, would not her husband have noticed?

Whoever the mother was, Franklin's complicity in illegitimacy haunted him throughout his life (and mired his legacy). Even in 1747, after Deborah had delivered two children, Franklin pseudonymously penned a letter to the *Maryland Gazette* about the harshness of colonial laws against unwed mothers. Miss Polly Baker, who had broken Connecticut's laws against "bastard children" five times, contended that either the penalties of the church or the fortunes of heaven and hell were sufficient for her crimes. She also pointed out the consequences of such laws, namely, how the fear of shame had driven mothers "to imbrue, contrary to Nature, their own trembling Hands in the Blood of their helpless Offspring!" Murder was clearly worse than "the great and growing Number of Batchelors in the Country" who left "Hundreds of their Posterity to the Thousandth Generation." But the colonial legislators generally ignored the plight of "poor young Women" who could not count on husbands and for whom "Laws take no Care to provide them any" support.[31] As much as Polly Baker's letter may hint at William's mother, it also indicates that Franklin could not leave his indiscretion behind.

Franklin's common-law marriage removed the scandal of his own son, but that did not make William's relationship with his parents an easy one. According to H. W. Brands in *The First American: The Life and Times of Benjamin Franklin* (2000), Deborah refused to claim William as her own child.[32] Contemporaries also commented on the strained relations between mother and stepson. One of the clerks who worked for the Franklins reported that Deborah called William "the greatest villain upon earth" and used invectives against him that were "the foulest terms I ever heard from a gentlewoman."[33] At the same time, Franklin indulged his son according to most accounts, and in general adored his children. This meant that Deborah could not show her contempt for William in front of her husband. Franklin's best-known and most widely read work, his *Autobiography*, was originally intended for William and reflected the father's worry that the son, even as a middle-aged man (William was roughly forty when Franklin started the book) needed help. Like his father, William was a profligate sexually. At the age of thirty in 1760 William fathered his own illegitimate son, William Temple Franklin. Franklin attributed William's indiscretion, though, to growing up in privilege rather than simply yielding to the passions of young men. William's moral failing did not stand in the way of becoming the royal governor of New Jersey. Even then, he was a source of distress to his father when, during the Revolutionary War, he became a leading Loyalist whose contacts with British officials forced George Washington to put him in solitary confinement. (See Chapter 10, below, for Franklin's role in the politics of American independence.)

In 1743, after thirteen years of marriage, Deborah gave birth to Sarah (Sally), the other child who survived into adulthood. Since both partners came from large families—Deborah had six siblings, Ben sixteen—and since Franklin was not bashful about the benefits of procreation, some have wondered about the small number of children in the Franklin home. Isaacson posits that the Franklins either "lacked abundant intimacy" or had trouble conceiving.[34] That may account for Franklin's devotion to the children he fathered (including leniency with William). When Sally was six, Franklin wrote to his mother that his daughter was a "fine girl" and "extremely industrious with her needle and delights in her books." He enthused that she had the "most affectionate temper" and was "perfectly dutiful and obliging."[35]

Franklin's parenting was caught between the ideals of being bookish and being practical. He encouraged Sally to read and exposed her to the world of publishing that he had discovered as a boy. At the same time, he wanted Sally to be able to adapt to any circumstance. Her education included the basics of reading, writing, and math. Sally tried French but gave up. For the most part, though, her training involved learning skills suitable to marriage—from running a household to managing the books of a business enterprise. When Sally was eligible for marriage, Franklin tried (in 1760) to form ties with a printer in London, William Strahan. That match failed. Seven years later Sally was wed to Richard Bache, a merchant in Philadelphia who had recently immigrated from England. Bache's finances were questionable, so much so, that a previous engagement had failed. Franklin himself was dubious about Bache and took a year before he could write a conditional letter of acceptance: "My best wishes attend you, and that if your prove a good husband and son, you will find me an affectionate father."[36]

Whatever pain Sally's marriage may have caused, it was minor compared to the loss of Francis (Franky), the first child born to Deborah—in 1732—who lived only four years. He died in 1736 of smallpox. Both parents adored the boy. Franklin's epitaph for his second son was "The delight of all who knew him."[37] Ben's memories of Franky were doubly haunting since he had failed to have the boy inoculated. Although he had mocked Cotton Mather earlier in life for advocating smallpox vaccinations, by the time Ben had established himself in Philadelphia he had reversed his views. In 1730 he editorialized in support of vaccinations and wrote a story about an outbreak of smallpox in Boston. He observed that most people who had received a vaccination had survived. Because of his support for inoculation, many readers assumed that Franky had died from vaccination. Franklin could not escape his notoriety to grieve privately but needed to explain the cause of his beloved son's death. In the *Gazette*, he wrote, "I do hereby sincerely declare . . . that [Franky] was not inoculated, but received the distemper in the common way of infection." Franklin added that smallpox vaccinations were "safe and beneficial."[38] The question lingered, however. If the *Gazette*'s editor were such a proponent of modern science, why did Franky not receive a vaccination? The answer was that Francis was ill with flux (synonymous with dysentery)

and his symptoms made him vulnerable to the active agents in the vaccine. Franklin had planned to have inoculation administered once Franky returned to health. The best he and Deborah could do after Francis succumbed to smallpox was to commission a portrait of their boy as a baby.

Behind the scenes, Franklin and Deborah likely had a significant disagreement over inoculation that adds another wrinkle to their marriage. In 1757, when Franklin went to London as a representative for the Pennsylvania Assembly, he began almost three decades of living in Europe (in separate intervals), twenty years apart from Deborah, who died in 1774. Such separation may have indicated the distance that characterized the Franklin marriage, especially after Franky's death. In a recent article, Stephen Coss speculates that Ben's absence from Philadelphia was not necessarily disagreeable to either spouse. Letters reveal that Deborah did miss Ben dearly. But she had laughed when she first saw Franklin in 1726, fresh off the boat from New York. Deborah was also not keen on rearing his illegitimate child, William. Once Ben began to establish himself in Philadelphia, Deborah likely worried that he was outgrowing her. The birth of Franky, Cott contends, was a way to keep Franklin firmly in the marriage. Once the boy died, the tenuous nature of the marriage returned. Sally helped to rekindle their affection for each other. Even so, the Franklin marriage fails in comparison to the example set by John and Abigail Adams. Cott writes, the Adams "had a storybook union that spanned a century." The Franklins "spent but two of their final 17 years apart. Why?"[39]

Sadly, Deborah died while Ben was in London. Her health declined after a stroke in 1769. Franklin promised to return but did not before a second stroke which killed her. Even then, Franklin did not return to Philadelphia until 1775.

The coldness implicit in the end to their marriage, as Cott argues, may go back to arguments over vaccinating Franky. Even before that, they had quarreled over infant baptism. Deborah, as communicant at Christ Church, wanted to have Franky baptized. Ben opposed it. Yet, when he was away on business, Deborah went ahead with the rite. Evidence of a disagreement about vaccination comes almost entirely from Ben. In some cases, Franklin explained that Franky "had not recovered sufficient strength," or was too sick to have the vaccine. On

the other hand, Franklin sometimes wrote as if inoculation had been a real possibility (or that Franky was not that sick). In that case, Ben would have faced Deborah's objections and fears, and refused the vaccination. In his *Autobiography* he wrote, "I long regretted bitterly & still regret that I had not given it to him by Inoculation."[40] In other pieces about vaccination, Franklin wrote about the challenge of parents disagreeing over the procedure. In 1759, he wondered about the "perpetual blame that should follow" if one parent declined vaccination and a "disastrous event" followed. Thirty years later, Franklin again expressed regret over Franky and explained that he mentioned it "for the Sake of Parents, who omit that Operation on the Supposition that they should never forgive themselves if a Child died under [the inoculation], my Example showing the Regret may be the same either way."[41] Cott concludes that Franklin took the blame for not having Franky inoculated. Ben and Deborah's differences over Franky and his early death may well have been responsible for a distance between them whether he was in Philadelphia or overseas during the last years of her life.

Marriage After Puritanism

As tragic as the end of the Franklin marriage may be to modern readers, observers at the time had a less romantic understanding of spouses' relations. In fact, the matter-of-factness that Franklin showed to Deborah and that colored his writings about marriage were an extension of Puritanism. Moderns may associate Puritanism with H. L. Mencken's aphorism, "Puritanism is the haunting fear that someone, somewhere may be happy," but those English Protestants understood marriage in ways far less repressive than commonly supposed. In fact, many assumptions about the Puritans and marriage stem from misunderstandings about medieval and modern family life. Compared to the Roman Catholic teaching that dominated medieval Europe, the Puritans were, to use an anachronism, progressive. Rather than regarding women as chiefly sexual beings, incapable of living a religious life, Puritans elevated women's status in society and the home. Instead of advocating celibacy as the best way to please God, Puritans recommended married life as well as a host of secular occupations as worthwhile religiously. Furthermore, instead of

insisting on submission as the ideal for wives, Puritans invariably recommended companionship. According to James Eglington, a student of Puritans, William Goege, one of the leading Puritan voices on marriage, said that husbands and wives should have sex "with good will and delight, willingly, readily, and cheerfully." To Thomas More, the Roman Catholic who refused to accede to Henry VIII as the head of the Church of England, this Protestant understanding of marriage sounded libertine and lustful. More quipped, the reformers "eat fast and drink fast and live fast in their lechery." According to Eglington, between 1550 and 1700, "the Puritans were seen by their detractors as anything but puritanical."[42]

Ben Franklin did not follow carefully in the paths that Puritans had trod on marriage, family life, and sex. His ideas veered from English Protestants if only because he rejected the doctrines and piety that were supposed to support Puritan ideals in the home. If today Franklin sounds liberated and progressive on marriage, the reason owes more to ignorance about Puritanism (which was hardly Victorian) than to explicit departure on his part. To claim that Franklin's notion of marriage was a secularized version of Puritanism is simplistic. At the same time, without Protestantism's revisions to Christendom's norms, Franklin's ideas about and practice of marriage would have looked radical.

Notes

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6
Civic Uplift

Robert Putnam begins his important study of social capital in contemporary America, *Bowling Alone* (2000), by observing the death of the Glenn Valley, Pennsylvania, Bridge Club.[1] A group of people who had met for the better part of five decades to play a card game, vanished and Putnam could not find any of its previous members to explain why. The book uses the demise of small groups, like the one in Glenn Valley, to describe changes among American expectations for community, neighborliness, and social ties. Instead of joining a bowling team that competed weekly in a local league, Putnam showed, Americans were increasingly bowling alone.

Ben Franklin was a loner in 1726 when, at the age of twenty, he returned to Philadelphia from London. In the next twenty-five years, he was responsible for starting (at least) eight voluntary associations (aside from the newspaper and almanac he published that encouraged their own forms of sociability). Only a year after arriving, he founded the Junto, a group of artisans and tradesmen that read and presented papers the aim of which was moral improvement. The Junto became the genesis in 1731 for the colonies' first lending library, later known as the Library Company of Philadelphia. In 1736 Franklin founded the Union Fire Company, the first such institution "in the world."[2] Four years later, he started a charity school for youth who could not afford an education. In 1743, Franklin founded the American Philosophical Society for the purpose of promoting useful knowledge. In 1747, he created a private militia consisting of approximately 10,000 volunteers for the defense of Philadelphia. In 1751, he was a significant figure in founding North America's first hospital. That same year he was behind an academy that later became the College of Philadelphia. The next year Franklin established the first insurance company

in North America to protect property owners against losses from house fires. Even as Franklin initiated these various institutions, in 1732 he joined the colonies' first Masonic lodge and wrote its by-laws. By 1749 he had risen to Pennsylvania's Masons' Grand Master. The only circumstance that seemed to put a damper on Franklin's remarkable organizational skills and sociable nature was his move to London to negotiate Pennsylvania's rival political interests with the Penn family.

Unlike Glenn Valley's Bridge Club, many of these Philadelphia institutions, which owe their existence to Franklin's abilities, still exist. The Library Company and American Philosophical Society are important repositories of colonial materials and part of Philadelphia's cultural establishment. The schools that Franklin founded eventually blossomed into the University of Pennsylvania, one of the nation's elite institutions of higher education. So too, Pennsylvania Hospital is now a teaching facility and part of the University of Pennsylvania's vast health care network. One of the reasons Franklin's creations still exist is that they evolved from local, personally administered and privately supported organizations, into professional, bureaucratic institutions with resources for self-preservation that extend well beyond the efforts of a few committed local residents. Had the Bridge Club in *Bowling Alone* matured into a body with governing officers, a board of trustees, by-laws, and a fund-raising office, it might not have gone out of existence.

The advantages of modern professional organizations should not obscure Franklin's sense that neighborliness and personal interdependence were essential to urban life. For instance, in one of the first issues of the *Pennsylvania Gazette*, Franklin wrote about his experience of falling on the town's slippery sidewalks during a cold spell. He noticed that local residents fell into three categories, the better, common, and lower sort, and all corresponded to the way each maintained their sidewalks. "The humane, kind, compassionate, benevolent Class, I shall easily distinguish by the Ashes at their Door-posts," Franklin wrote. The way to spot the lower sort was by the mirth they showed at a passerby's fall (which he reported he did twice during his walk).[3] Franklin's response was not to form an organization to keep the walks clear. Instead, he encouraged homeowners to keep supplies of ashes handy.

Franklin was an uncanny observer of human experience. This extended to the ways that people shared common spaces. Franklin followed the Aristotelian insight that humans are inherently social creatures and that living together is never free of adversity. To help himself and others benefit from, rather than resent, their interdependence was one of Franklin's many gifts. According to biographer, J. A. Leo Lemay, Franklin was "the most civic-minded colonial American."[4] In his biography, Walter Isaacson agreed. Franklin's "essence" was that he was "a civic-minded man," someone more "interested in building the City of Man than the City of God."[5] Concluding that Philadelphia's most famous citizen was explicitly rejecting his religious past in pursuit of civic improvements is debatable. Since Protestantism arose and thrived in cities, Franklin could well have been mirroring The Reformation's civic mindedness.

Town Watch

Lemay devotes one chapter to Franklin's civic awareness and calls it "Concerned Citizen" but from a different angle he could have been called, "Busy Body" if Franklin had not already used that phrase for anonymous essays from his first days in Philadelphia. At roughly the same time that Franklin, as *censor morum*, or Busy-Body, was writing about the "Vices and Follies of my Country-folk" in eight essays that promised gossipy news about colonial Philadelphia, he was doing his best impersonation of an elder in John Calvin's Geneva.[6] The French-speaking refugee pastor may well have taken some pleasure from Franklin prodding and poking his neighbors to live better. For instance, in 1727 Franklin wrote (anonymously then) a letter to the *Gazette* about the dangers and immorality of city fairs, open markets, and festal gatherings that took place in the spring and fall. He called these occasions "manifest Nuisances" because they undermined the "Morality, Sobriety, and Good Manners of the People."[7] Drunkenness, prostitution, indiscriminate mixing of races, and generally indecent behavior were everywhere on display. Even after the fairs closed for the evening, crowds lingered and abused the regular citizens who went about their ordinary affairs. Franklin hoped for the city's government either to abolish or regulate the fairs. Lemay remarked that Franklin's letter revealed a "surprising persona" in the young

man, one more suited to a "busy-body killjoy." Lemay wondered whether Franklin's attitude reflected "his New England background.[8] Whatever the answer, Franklin was a hard critic of the class to which he belonged.

Improving life on the streets at night was another matter that Franklin pursued in his non-working hours as a young man. In 1735 he wrote a paper that suggested new ways of charging residents to pay for night watchmen. The Constables were ineffective and sometimes overpaid thanks to a taxing scheme that assessed poor and wealthy at the same rates. Franklin's proposal languished until 1748 when he was elected to Philadelphia's Common Council. By then, reforming night-watchmen led to calls to install streetlamps. Again, the city's officials were slow to respond and the first instance of installing lights stemmed from the efforts and contributions of private citizens. Franklin pitched in by studying the best kinds of lights—globes from London were inefficient and smoky compared to a plan with four flat panes that he had a hand in designing. Foot traffic on Philadelphia's streets was another matter to attract Franklin's attention. He complained, thanks to firsthand experience, of the challenge of walking in his neighborhood whenever it rained. Pedestrians endured pain when "wading in Mud while purchasing their Provisions."[9] Franklin solicited support for creating paved sidewalks that were part of private residents' voluntary contributions. Plans to pave the entire city's streets and walks would not come for another three decades. Yet, Franklin had sowed the seeds of this basic feature of urban life.

Another reform that Franklin attempted—and for which he failed to win support—was the toll that local tanneries exacted from the city. The stench of the tanning process, combined with the trash that piled up in the pits along a creek that ran through the city and emptied into the Delaware River, provoked Franklin to petition authorities and take advantage of his perch in the *Gazette*. In this episode, Franklin battled a rival newspaper, Andrew Bradford's *Weekly Mercury*, which took the tanners' side. This feud even sent Franklin to the floor of Pennsylvania's Assembly, an event that led him to concede that he was not an orator. The tanners made a few adjustments, such as minor cleansing around the pits, but Pennsylvania's legislature took no action until the 1760s. In fact, Franklin lost popularity thanks to his opposition. Even so, he understood that people living together

in relative proximity needed to compromise at least some of their interests for the sake of social harmony.

Franklin's attempts to remedy his neighbors' vices were much less playful than the tone he took in his Busy-Body essays. In those pieces written soon after arriving in Philadelphia, he combined censure with playfulness. People were fallen and self-interested but also tried to present themselves as virtuous and well-intentioned. The Busy-Body essays expressed amusement at the contradictions that lay at the heart of human existence. Indeed, in the first of his eight essays, Franklin warned readers that if they became subjects of his exposure of the city's vices and follies, they should be patient and wait for the satisfaction of seeing "their good Friends and Neighbors" have their private faults made public.[10] He mostly maintained a light touch of pointing out human foibles. In one essay, Busy-Body Number 4, he trod into city politics by questioning the tastes of the city's elites. These people were "the common Objects of Popular Dislike" but Franklin called on them, "the Learned and Ingenious" to join him in "improving the Taste of the Town." He hoped, apparently, that some of the city's leading merchants, such as James Logan, Isaac Norris, or David Barclay, would submit "a little Essay on some moral or other Subject" and thereby attract readers to the Busy-Body essays before proceeding "Immediately to the Foreign News."[11]

Franklin as a busybody in print, however, was distinct from the man who sought to remedy the thoughtless ways his neighbors used the space that residents shared. When Franklin turned from human folly to civic decay, he could sound stern. His public interventions stemmed not merely from his own experience but also from a sense of the interdependence that characterized urban life. He understood the basic realities of urban life and sought improvements that benefited most, if not all, residents. One of the most pressing realities of colonial town life was the threat of fire. Houses were made of wood, set in close proximity to each other, and inhabitants heated them with fires in brick fireplaces. Fires broke out occasionally and always had the potential to end lives and destroy residences. As early as 1733, Franklin wrote under the pseudonym, "Pennsilvanus," an appreciative essay about residents' responses to a local fire. Soon "after it is seen and cry'd out, the Place is crowded by active Men of different Ages, Professions and Titles." These brave men, which included "Good

Housekeepers," pitched in "not for Sake of Reward of Money or Fame." Instead, they had "a Reward in themselves, and they love one another." Two years later, under a different persona, this time a "decrepit or infirm" elderly man, Franklin broached the subject of legislation for the prevention of fires. Such laws would include prohibiting wooden molding around fireplaces and requiring regular chimney sweeps. In fact, the problem for fighting fires in Philadelphia was not goodwill or able bodies but "Order and Method."[12] Franklin knew that Boston had seen a drop in the number of fires by passing laws that created clubs with members, officers, and regular meetings where firemen formulated the best methods for preventing and extinguishing fires. He hoped Philadelphia would follow suit, but city officials were reluctant to pay for such services.

In response, Franklin along with nineteen neighbors in 1736 formed the Union Fire Company. This was an organization whose articles specified membership dues, a rotating office of clerk to be occupied by each member seriatim for a month and required members to have leather buckets and related equipment in good working order. The Company's rules even specified how to prevent looting at a fire. Initially, the founding members called for a group of twenty-five but within two years membership grew to thirty, most of whom were Franklin's closest friends and associates. Once the organization became self-sustaining, Franklin attended its meetings less often and paid a fine for each absence. It was an organization of completely private citizens in plain clothes. The story that Franklin introduced suspenders as a mark of membership in the Company was legendary, but other accounts indicate that by 1788 members were wearing a distinctive hat during firefighting.[13]

Defending the Quaker City

Uniforms did become a consideration for Franklin almost ten years after he formed the fire company, this time in the context of designing attire for Philadelphia's militia. The occasion for Franklin's plans to form a company of voluntary soldiers to defend the city was King George's War (1744–1748), a chapter in the ongoing enlistment of native Americans by the French and English to expand or oppose (respectively) each side's imperial ambitions in North America.

In 1746, William Franklin, only seventeen years old, signed up to fight the French and Indians in Canada, a decision that Franklin could hardly oppose given his own adventures as a teen. Soon after William's departure, French and Spanish privateers made raids on settlements along the Delaware River which were clearly a threat to Philadelphia. Franklin spearheaded the formation of a militia. His idea was to recruit volunteers from all ranks in the city, though he played up his appeal to the people in the middle ranks, "tradesmen, shopkeepers, and farmers" both in the city and the surrounding countryside. The pamphlet he wrote, "Plain Truth," under the name of "a Tradesman of Philadelphia," was so successful that it persuaded ten thousand men throughout Pennsylvania to organize themselves into one hundred companies. In addition to the argument for a militia, Franklin proposed "Devices and Mottos" to be painted on the silk colors of the city's regiments. His thirteenth was a "Representation of a Glory, in the Middle of which is wrote [sic] *Jehovah Nissi*, in English, The Lord our Banner."[14]

Franklin's entrance into the colony's politics may have been one of his most vigorous identifications with Protestantism. A major factor in his motivation was the Quaker government that had dominated Pennsylvania since 1683 when William Penn formed the colony and laid out the city. If anyone wants to imagine how wonderful a pacifist government might be, consider the Quakers who ran Pennsylvania and refused to use one of the principle means of political power since the rise of the nation-state—monopoly on violence. Without police or military, how does a government protect its citizens and maintain its sovereignty? That was the question that Franklin considered under the threat of war. A related piece was an essay on self-defense and the legitimate use of force.

In the latter, "The Necessity of Self-Defense" (1747), Franklin tried his hand at biblical commentary, inspired in part by a sermon from the Presbyterian pastor, Gilbert Tennent. Franklin addressed the gospel accounts of Christ instructing Peter to put away his sword after lopping off the ear of a Jewish soldier and gave the greatest attention to Matthew's account which featured the phrase, "for all they that take the Sword, shall perish by the Sword." This text also led to consideration of Christ's claims that his kingdom was not an earthly one and so did not depend on weapons or force. Franklin agreed with

other pastors who distinguished between "the Kingdom of Christ, and those of temporal Princes" such that "carnal Weapons" were useful and necessary to secular rulers but "unlawful," "improper," and "ineffective" in matters of religion.[15] He also spent a significant part of the short essay on Christ's instructions to his disciples to take money, food, and a sword as he sent them out to preach and heal (Luke 22:35). For Franklin, the obvious meaning was that to defend their lives, the disciples needed a weapon, which meant physical force for self-protection could hardly be inherently wrong. Franklin observed that Christians had no trouble providing themselves with money and food but some, like the Quakers, drew the line at weapons. This was folly since "it is most plain some Use was to be made of Swords," not for the spread of Christianity but for self-defense. Since the matter before the colony in 1747 was not the health of Christianity but the "Protection of the Helpless and Innocent," Pennsylvania's Quaker authorities needed to show how self-defense was neither "consistent with Christianity" nor "beneficial to Mankind."[16]

Franklin's pamphlet, *Plain Truth*, written at roughly the same time as his apology for self-defense, also took aim at the Quakers who refused to respond to the threats of French and Spanish raids on nearby English settlements. Again, he demonstrated his considerable knowledge of Scripture to argue for a Pennsylvania militia. In this case, the example was the account in Judges 18 when the Tribe of Dan sent spies into Laish and found the city was not prepared to defend its people and property. Franklin could not resist a bit of Protestant antipathy to Roman Catholics when he mentioned spies found priests who were sympathetic to their cause. In case readers missed the parallels, Franklin was happy to connect the dots: "Are there no Priests among us . . . that might, in the like Case, give an Enemy as good Encouragement? . . . we have Numbers of the same Religion with those who of late encouraged the French to invade our Mother-Country." Aside from the Protestant/English vs. Roman Catholic/French/Spanish divide, Philadelphia was vulnerable because of the region's prosperity. Yet, the constant objection from the city's elites was that the expense of acquiring a ship to defend the port was too high. The people who could afford self-defense, he deduced, were too foolish to protect their own investments. The other vulnerability, Franklin acknowledged, was Quakerism which all potential invaders

knew to be opposed to the use of force. Their political rivals, the great merchants, were too petty to spend money of defense of their economic competitors. Franklin's experience of Philadelphia politics made a tale plausible that he had always disbelieved, the man "who refused to pump a sinking Ship, because one on board, whom he hated, would be saved by it as well as himself."[17]

If Franklin saw the threat to Pennsylvania through the lens of Christianity—Roman Catholic invaders and Quaker incapacity—he saved his most forceful logic, based on a knowledge of church history, for peroration. He pleaded for a union of the English and German residents of the colony and appealed to their mutual heritage of resisting tyranny. In the case of the English, Franklin's religious pride in England's Protestant succession was overt. The Puritans to the North, in their own military preparedness, were a "convincing Proof" to the world of the zeal Britons had for "the *Publick Good*, that *military Prowess*, and that *undaunted Spirit*," which had always distinguished their nation. "What Numbers have we likewise," he added in reference to Parliament's rejection of James II at the Glorious Revolution, "of *those brave People*, whose Fathers in the last Age made so glorious a Stand for our Religion and Liberties, when invaded by a powerful French Army, join'd by Irish Catholicks, under a bigotted Popish King!" Franklin also appealed to the "*Courage* and *Conduct* of those *noble Warriors*," the Germans, who have "actually borne Arms in Service of their respective Princes." To be sure, sometimes the Germans "fought well for *Tyrants* and *Oppressors*." But surely now they would fight even harder for their "*newly acquired* and most precious *Liberty* and *Property*."[18]

Franklin refrained from mentioning Martin Luther or opposition to Rome's tyranny. Yet, since he had already invoked Protestant animus against Rome's priest, Franklin might well have stoked German Protestant zeal. To aid his appeal to non-pacifist Protestants, Franklin included a prayer inspired by the part of the Bible where believers regularly went to war in God's name:

> *May the God of* WISDOM, STRENGTH, *and* POWER, *the Lord of the Armies of Israel, inspire us with Prudence in this time of* DANGER*; take away from us all Seeds of Contention and Division, and unite the Hearts and Counsels of all of us, of whatever* SECT *or* NATION, *in one Bond of Peace, Brotherly Love, and generous Public Spirit . . .*[19]

Improving Mind and Body

For all that Franklin did to better Philadelphia's physical environment, he did not lose sight of intellectual life and its usefulness for personal health. Since the 1730s he had considered the importance of education for the city's children and concluded that colonial societies foolishly postponed the creation of institutions that provided the literacy and skills necessary for the public's good. Not until he retired from the printing business in 1748, however, did Franklin have the time and social standing to take the lead in creating a school for Philadelphia. Compared to the Puritans in Massachusetts who founded Harvard only six years after their arrival, Quakers and their neighbors in Philadelphia needed six decades. One important difference is that Quakers did not need pastors and Pennsylvania lacked an established church, both of which were important factors in founding colleges in America until 1900. To make his case, Franklin used the press. His "Proposals Relating to the Education of Youth in Pensilvania," however, was no whimsical essay or pseudonymous letter printed in the *Gazette*. This was serious pamphlet that laid out a case for public education with appeals to ancient and modern authors, and a detailed description of the curriculum. At the same time, this was exactly what the title said, a proposal. With it, Franklin hoped to start a conversation. In the preface he called on residents to "communicate their Sentiments as soon as may be, by Letter, directed to B. Franklin, Printer, in Philadelphia."[20]

Although the academy did not have in view the preliminary studies for pastors, it did follow a pattern of instruction that Protestants had borrowed, using clergy for faculty since ministers generally had the best formal instruction among colonists. With English as the language for teaching, Franklin's list of authors included the likes of Milton, Addison, Pope, and Swift. At the same time, the course of studies followed the Renaissance humanist program—History, Rhetoric, Logic, Moral and Natural Philosophy—that Protestants had advocated as an alternative to the medieval university's curriculum of the trivium and quadrivium. Franklin himself acknowledged that such instruction was an aid to "Religious Character among Private Persons," a lesson about the "Mischiefs of Superstition," and a brief for the "Excellency of the Christian Religion above all others."[21] To be

sure, Franklin proposed instruction in subjects well beyond the humanities, such as agriculture, commerce, and technology. Although the school was non-sectarian, it was also congenial to Protestants. One reason was Franklin's cooperation with local clergy. He sent the Connecticut Anglican, Samuel Johnson, a draft of his initial proposal and later invited him to teach at the academy. Johnson offered positive comments on the former but declined the offer. Another Anglican, William Smith, who later emerged as a political foe, was the academy's first provost and was partly responsible for the institution's Anglican reputation among some parents in the city.

Franklin's initiative bore fruit in 1750 with the academy's opening and pledges from both private citizens and the colonial government for financial support. Ever the successful fund-raiser, Franklin had George Whitefield preach sermons to encourage contributions. The evangelist went along even though opposed to a non-sectarian institution. Franklin served as president of the trustees from 1749, when he retired as publisher, until 1756, when other responsibilities drew him away from home. (In 1757, Franklin traveled to London where he remained for the next eighteen years.) Even before resigning, he had left the school's day-to-day operations to other officials. Among the decisions that Provost Smith made was granting college degrees, which the governor, Robert Hunter Morris, approved. Franklin was not part of this shift, but he had always seen a college as another step in the city's need for educational institutions.

The last of Franklin's significant urban associations was the Pennsylvania Hospital, founded in 1751 thanks to his fund-raising efforts. A year later the hospital began to offer care on a modest scale, and in 1756 had its own building. Initially, public hospitals in the eighteenth century were alternatives to health care in the home. The wealthy and middle-class could afford to pay for doctors' visits but not the poor. In England, hospitals for the poor had started as one humanitarian response to the twin challenges of sickness and low income. The Pennsylvania Hospital was the first in North America. Franklin had voiced concern for the sick poor as early as 1731. In a short essay, he appealed to neighbors to be mindful of suffering, primarily on Christian grounds through the parable of the Good Samaritan. Even so, the impetus for the hospital twenty years later came from the physician, Thomas Bond, one of Franklin's

companions in a variety of social organizations. When the doctor realized he needed someone with a knack for fund-raising, he included Franklin in the hospital's leadership. By 1755, Franklin was president of the managers responsible for the institution. He also oversaw the hospital's construction.

Franklin's contribution to this endeavor, aside from his standing as a scientist, was in soliciting donations, private and public. Christianity was a major part of his appeal. One successful administrative strategy was a plan that called upon Pennsylvania authorities to match with public funds the voluntary contributions from residents. Another, which showed Franklin's attentiveness to gifts of all sizes, was to encourage members of the hospital's managers to place contribution boxes outside their homes and businesses. The boxes were painted with the phrase, "Charity for the Hospital." Franklin took this idea from Cotton Mather, who had proposed a similar scheme in *Bonifacus* for boxes designated to assist Boston's poor.[22] When the hospital's managers chose an image of the Good Samaritan as the institution's icon, in another attempt to garnish public support, they were echoing Franklin's 1731 essay about compassion for the sick and poor. There he explained that caring for and visiting the sick, as Jesus himself instructed, was "essential to the true Spirit of Christianity." In fact, "when the great Physician sent forth his Disciples," he always charged them to "*heal* all *the Sick*, without distinction."[23] Twenty years later when Franklin wrote "Appeal for the Hospital," he adopted "ostensibly" the persona of a Protestant minister and returned to the parable of the Good Samaritan. He implored Pennsylvanians to imitate the "great Author of our Faith" by always showing "the greatest Compassions and Regard for the SICK." In a subsequent piece written a week later, Franklin used an epigram from Cicero on care for the sick to argue that if the "Dictates of Reason" were so clear, Christians, who had such a vivid example of healing in the figure of Jesus, should excel in this virtue. Indeed, the history of Christianity showed that "from the earliest Times," when Christians had sufficient access to public influence, "publick Funds and private Charities have been appropriated to the building of Hospitals."[24] Just as in the case of equipping a militia for self-defense, Franklin appropriated Christian themes to solicit public support for the hospital. He was as versatile with Christianity as he was as a fundraiser.

Belonging

Franklin's civic projects were extensions of a man who delighted in fraternity and companionship. These institutions, designed to enrich civil society, built on the bonds he had formed in the Junto, an intellectual gathering of tradesmen interested in philosophical discussion, civic improvement, and friendship. The group began in 1727 at Franklin's instigation and drew inspiration from a variety of men's clubs that were common in colonial town. Some scholars believe that Junto bore the fingerprints of Cotton Mather's Neighborhood Benefit Societies. When Franklin specified that Junto meetings should start with detailed questions for discussion, he was likely following Mather's similar prescription for Boston's societies. Others believe that John Locke, who promoted small groups for intellectual conversation, was the inspiration for the Junto. Franklin likely combined Locke and Mather to give order to the Junto's meetings. The group was high-minded in aspiration at a time before academic training defined intellectual endeavor. It was also an accountability group for members interested in self-discipline and even self-help. But the Junto provided space for camaraderie and entertainment as well. As Lemay wrote, Junto was a reflection of Franklin's "personal interests, desires, and values."[25]

The original members were generally of the same age, though a few were older; many were business associates who later became the backbone of the organizations that Franklin founded. It also reflected his quest for order. Limited to twelve men, the group met every Friday night. Members were supposed to submit one essay every three months. At one point, Franklin considered having the original twelve members sponsor junior versions of the Junto on their own. This scheme for reproducing members mirrored John Wesley's small group ("class") meetings or even Amway. Potential members needed to answer twenty-four questions that tested for religious tolerance, a desire to do good and emulate those who did, and a lively curiosity about philosophical, economic, and political questions. Some of Franklin's most memorable essays—"Self-Denial not the Essence of Virtue," "On the Providence of God in the Government of the World," and "On Protection of Towns from Fire"—grew out of presentations to the Junto. Likewise, his ideas for civic projects, such

as the fire company, an insurance company, and militia were part of discussions at the club. The Junto lasted until 1765, although when Franklin left for England in 1757 its meetings became less regular. He was the "heart and soul" of the group. Although the Junto reflected Franklin's convivial nature, it was an organization that had, in Lemay's estimate, "touched and improved nearly every life in Philadelphia."[26]

Another social outlet was Freemasonry. Franklin had met the founder of the English Masons when he was in London in pursuit of a printing press. Back in Philadelphia he heard about the first city lodge in 1730 and was slightly envious that members had not included him. To gain the lodge's attention, Franklin wrote a good-natured satirical piece in the *Gazette* that poked fun at the Mason's secrecy. Members finally admitted him in early 1731 to an association that had almost none of the threat in North America that its reputation in Europe fostered. Instead of an elite and radical organization, the Masons in Philadelphia were almost all tradesmen and inclined to social improvement. As much as this sounds like modern-day Rotarians or seemed to be another version of Franklin's Junto, it was one more manifestation of his abiding sociability. He became Grand Master of the Philadelphia lodge, St. John's, three years after joining, around the time that he printed the first Masonic book in America, the *Constitutions of the Free-Masons*. Franklin eventually became the grand master of all lodges in Pennsylvania. Although the Junto provided more outlets for philosophical curiosity and social improvement, the Masons connected Franklin to an international network of like-minded people. As Gordon Wood writes, the Masons were a perfect fit for Franklin's personal and business interests. It was an organization where the ambitious could mingle with elites, a place for men seeking status.[27] Perhaps most important, it supplied city dwellers with a regular mechanism for belonging in settings where the abundance of people proved too large for meaningful relationships.

Protestant Urbanism

Protestantism emerged in the sixteenth century as a form of Christianity readily adaptable to urban settings. Its chief sites of strength during the 1510s and 1520s were cities like Wittenberg and Zurich.

Some of this affinity owed particularly to political circumstances that allowed princes or city councils greater autonomy from the Holy Roman Emperor for implementing church reforms. But much of it also stemmed from the incompatibility between Roman Catholicism's hierarchical structures and world-denying piety. In places with decentralized political structures, associations of laborers and tradesmen, and merchants without an obvious outlet in the church's top-down governance, Protestantism found a niche and provided an alternative. The old theory of Max Weber about the affinities between the Protestant work ethic and the rise of capitalism may be shot through with errors, but the study of Protestantism has generally confirmed the links between the new Christian churches of the sixteenth century and the urban settings and people who found the inherited norms of Roman Catholicism ill-suited to work, business, and local politics. Christendom may have mirrored the Great Chain of Being that ran from God down through kings, bishops, commoners, and monks. But it had only minor resonance with the hub of energy, initiative, and innovation in Europe's cities.[28]

Whether Franklin's urban sensibility owed to his Protestant heritage is open to challenge, but his own efforts as a businessman and citizen dovetailed with the social context on which Protestantism (in most forms) depended. He embodied the Protestant work ethic, instinctively rallied to projects of civic improvement, and took delight in the sort of secular forms of association that the Reformation had at least implicitly encouraged if not approved outright. At the same time, Franklin operated in a political setting that had far less structure than those European cities where Protestantism took root. Indeed, Philadelphia possessed the decentralized character that gave entrepreneurs and organizers the room to work and organize.

As close as the affinities are between Protestantism and Franklin's urbanism, the point stands that the ambitious and dutiful Philadelphia printer conducted his affairs without the religion that had provided a way for councilmen, merchants, and philanthropists to be good Christians while also secular in pursuit. Indeed, Protestantism's weakness may have been to welcome ordinary secular affairs without noticing that people like Franklin did not need faith to prosper. Still, Protestantism possessed a flexibility about urban life, thanks to a decentralized structure and refusal to sacralize earthly endeavors,

that made it possible for Franklin to use his incomparable skills to enhance the life of the city without turning (himself or his neighbors) against Christianity.

Notes

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4. Lemay, *Life, Volume 2*, 402.
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11. Benjamin Franklin, "Busy-Body, No. 4," in Lemay, ed., *Franklin: Early Writings*, 99–100.
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15. Benjamin Franklin, "The Necessity of Self-Defense," in Lemay, ed., *Franklin: Early Writings*, 316.
16. Franklin, "The Necessity of Self-Defense," 318.

17. Tradesman [Benjamin Franklin], *Plain Truth.*
18. Tradesman [Benjamin Franklin], *Plain Truth.*
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20. Benjamin Franklin, *Proposals Relating to the Education of Youth in Pennsilvania*, in Lemay, ed., *Franklin: Early Writings*, 323–44.
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22. Lemay makes this point, in J. A. Leo Lemay, *The Life of Benjamin Franklin, Volume 3: Soldier, Scientist, and Politician, 1748–1757* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006), 277.
23. Benjamin Franklin, "Compassion and Regard for the Sick," in Lemay, ed, *Franklin: Early Writings*, 170.
24. Benjamin Frankli n, "Appeal for the Hospital," in Lemay, ed, *Franklin: Early Writings*, 362, 364.
25. J. A. Leo Lemay, *The Life of Benjamin Franklin, Volume 1: Journalist, 1706–1730* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006), 332, 333.
26. Lemay , *Life, Volume 1*, 356.
27. Gordon S. Wood, *The Americanization of Benjamin Franklin* (New York: Penguin Press, 2004), 43–44.
28. See, for instance, Steven E. Ozment, *Reformation in the Cities: The Appeal of Protestantism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1975).

7
Church Life

Of the many organizations and associations that Franklin joined, the church was not one of them. Finding outlets for his sociability almost everywhere else beyond the church—from the Junto to the Pennsylvania militia—might indicate Franklin's inability to believe. His neglect of church life, however, does not reveal antipathy to Christians as much as it shows he could not assent to the truths of English Calvinism. Rather than looking at society as if believers were inferior to the enlightened few, he simply rejected core teachings of Christian orthodoxy even as he associated with all sorts of people.

The story of Franklin's attendance at Philadelphia's only Presbyterian congregation is well known. It is one of the most detailed episodes of church life recorded in the *Autobiography*. There Franklin recalled that he tried to support the Presbyterian church in Philadelphia—the denomination with which Franklin identified throughout his life—by paying his annual subscription. He worshiped with Presbyterians largely in hopes of finding allies for civic improvement. The pastor, Jedediah Andrews, another Bostonian, was friendly with Franklin and during one of their meetings prevailed on the printer to attend services. Despite using Sundays for his own reading and instruction, Franklin attended services for five straight weeks. That was enough time to determine that he could make better use of his time. He faulted the pastor, Andrews, for appealing to Scripture—in this case, Paul's epistle to the Philippians—to prove the distinct teachings and practices of Presbyterians. Instead of using the apostle's call to truth, goodness, honesty, and loveliness to summon the congregation to virtue, Andrews turned the text into an exhortation to keeping the Sabbath holy, respecting ministers, heeding Scripture, and participating in the Lord's Supper. In effect, Andrews' sermons were little more than "Explications of the

Doctrines of our Sect" (another indication of Franklin's self-identification). He found such preaching to be "disgusting" and resolved never to worship at the Presbyterian church again.[1]

Once he married Deborah, who was a practicing Anglican, Franklin rented a pew for his family at Christ Church, Philadelphia's first Church of England parish. This was also where many of America's founders worshiped when doing business in Philadelphia, the nation's capital from 1790 to 1800. Deborah's parents had reared her as an Anglican and Ben posed no obstacle to her attending services after they wed. When William was old enough to attend services, Franklin doubled his payments for seating, even though he did not regularly accompany his family. In fact, his facilitation of Deborah's religious practice for Alfred Owen Aldridge, the author of *Benjamin Franklin and Nature's God*, qualifies Franklin as a nominal Anglican for the "greater part of his life."[2] One indication of Deborah's religious resolve came after the birth of her first child, Francis, when she and Ben disagreed about having the boy baptized. Franklin saw no advantage to infant baptism, but Deborah had the last word thanks to Ben's absence. (See Chapter 5, above.) When the sickly boy died of smallpox four years later, his parents agreed to have him buried at Christ Church's cemetery. Born eleven years after Francis' birth, Sarah (Sally), the couple's only daughter, also received baptism at Philadelphia's Anglican parish. This time the period between birth and sacrament was six months. Franklin had apparently become more accustomed to the routines of Christian parenting. The family also chose Christ Church for Sarah's marriage ceremony to Richard Bache. The Bache children were also baptized and reared in the parish. When Deborah died in 1774, she was interred with Francis in the church cemetery, which also became Franklin's resting place roughly fifteen years later.

Deborah also owned a copy of the *Book of Common Prayer* (the standard for Anglican worship, public and private) but in 1737 someone stole her book. Ben ran an advertisement that reminded readers of the duties involved in the Eighth Commandment. That Franklin had to run the same ad three times, with three weeks separating the first and last installments, suggests that the appeal to the Decalogue was not persuasive. Franklin's description of the prayer book—"bound in Red, gilt, and letter'd DF on each corner"—hinted at Deborah's attachment to the liturgical manual.[3] In the 1760s when

he was in London and Deborah wrote to complain about one of Franklin's opponents, William Smith, leading worship at Christ Church, Ben's response was curious. She wondered whether she should go to services and thereby implicitly show support for Smith, her husband's adversary. Franklin wrote back that no matter who preaches, the "Acts of Devotion in the common Prayer Book are your principal Business there" and will do more toward "mending the Heart than Sermons generally can do." The people who composed the prayer book were "Men of much greater Piety and Wisdom" than our "common Composers of Sermons can pretend to be."[4] Such respect did not lead him to join the Anglican Church. In fact, throughout his life, Franklin's financial support for religion was wide ranging. He gave money to any church that asked for contributions, including late in life to the local Jewish synagogue. But he gave more to Christ Church, especially during a project to add a steeple and church bells. The vestry also asked Franklin to serve as the manager of the building project's funds. He accepted.

Because Franklin regarded Christianity in basically utilitarian ways, he was willing to work alongside a wide range of congregations and traditions, and recognized local Protestants as welcome contributors to civic virtue. This outlook meant that he invested his own energies in other institutions to improve public and personal morality. Yet, although Franklin never joined a church, his upbringing left an impression that was responsible for his most pronounced and vigorous polemical writing about Protestantism. When local Presbyterians squabbled over doctrine and when the First Great Awakening commenced thanks to George Whitefield's arrival, Franklin weighed in. This was an indication that Franklin had not left Reformed Protestantism behind. As much as he wrote about and interacted with Roman Catholics and other Protestant groups, Franklin was the most engaged when Presbyterians disagreed.

Clarifying Presbyterianism

If a small businessman, wanting to grow his business, with an interest in civic reform and recognizing the need for public support, looked for a Presbyterian pastor to support, Samuel Hemphill was *not* the man. The Irish Presbyterian pastor had arrived in Philadelphia in the fall of

1734 after studying at Glasgow University and ministering in Northern Ireland since 1729. His call was to serve as an assistant to Jedediah Andrews at First Presbyterian. At the time, Presbyterianism in the colonies was a relatively small communion that depended heavily on ministers coming from either Puritan New England or from Northern Ireland and Scotland. American Presbyterianism, unlike other Protestant denominations in North America, began independently, without a mother-daughter relationship to a European state church. This gave American Presbyterians flexibility. It also meant they were dependent on ministers being willing to relocate and work in an unsettled context. Hemphill's youth may have explained his own willingness to relocate. American Presbyterians' need for pastors likely makes sense of Hemphill's appeal. Beyond those mutual interests, Hemphill's landing was rocky. Franklin made it worse. His performance during the Hemphill affair ran completely contrary to his own advice about being agreeable and cooperative with all classes of people.

From the start of Hemphill's work as a pastor, he faced opposition thanks to suspicions of harboring heterodox views. Before joining Andrews in Philadelphia, he had preached two sermons in New London that initiated reservations about his doctrinal soundness. Even before that, an Irish Presbyterian pastor sent a letter to Presbyterians in Philadelphia that raised doubts about Hemphill's preaching. Once he became an assistant in Philadelphia, opposition to Hemphill grew. While Franklin attended church to hear the new pastor, members of the congregation questioned Hemphill's teaching on basic doctrines of Protestant orthodoxy. The senior pastor, Andrews, according to Franklin, visited congregants who spoke openly of Hemphill's Socianism (denial of Christ's divinity) and Deism. Andrews believed the number of free thinkers (like Franklin) who flocked to hear Hemphill was revealing. Franklin's own esteem for Hemphill stemmed from the Presbyterian's promotion of virtue and avoidance of the gritty specifics of Presbyterian doctrine.[5]

But for Andrews, who brought eight charges against Hemphill to the Presbytery (the local regional body of ministers), the new pastor skirted lightly over received teachings from the Westminster Confession by stressing Christianity's reasonableness. The eight accusations seemed scatter shot, designed perhaps to catch Hemphill on at least a

minority of defections. They ranged from details like the atonement and what the crucifixion said about divine character—God's vindictiveness—to broader topics like the relationship between reason and revelation. However much Hemphill's views veered from orthodoxy, his case represented a classic instance of two brands of Protestantism talking past each other. For Andrews, who held to the doctrines as elaborated in the Westminster Confession of Faith, Protestant orthodoxy stood for the sort of convictions that emerged during disputes with Roman Catholics at the Reformation, and later refined by academic theologians. For Hemphill, in contrast, the aim of Protestant ministry was to calibrate Christian truth to the new understanding of nature and human experience to emerge with the Scientific Revolution and its application across the spheres of human experience. Hemphill may have indicated where liberal Christianity was headed, but Andrews enjoyed the support of the colonies' Presbyterian pastors. Hemphill's trial in Philadelphia lasted only two sessions, between April 17 and 26, 1735, and the Presbytery unanimously sided with Andrews. But they also referred the matter to the upcoming September meeting of Presbyterians' higher court, the Synod. During the intervening months came the discovery that Hemphill had plagiarized some of his sermons. The only trouble Synod had in barring Hemphill from the ministry was the accused's letter renouncing the church's authority over him. By a unanimous verdict, the Presbyterian pastors ruled that Hemphill was unqualified to be a pastor.

A week before the April trial, Franklin published a "Dialogue between Presbyterians" in the *Gazette* that, although anonymous, may have been his attempt to knock sense into Hemphill's foes. Two themes were particularly salient in the case. The first was the aim or end of the Christian religion. For Franklin, speaking through one of his Presbyterian interlocutors, faith was not the end of Christianity but a means to the real end, which was virtue. "Faith in Christ," he wrote, "may be and is of great Use to produce a good Life" but it is no use in procuring salvation "where it does not conduce to Virtue." This was plainly the case, he explained, from numerous biblical examples, such as the devils who believed in God but were far from virtuous. If Hemphill emphasized morality in his sermons over faith, what did it matter? "Where can be the Damage of being exhorted to Good Works?"[6] That was a question that showed Franklin had little

understanding of the Protestant doctrine of justification by faith alone which taught that believers only became good in the sight of God through the merits of Christ legally credited to them through faith.

The other theme that stood out in Franklin's assessment of the Presbyterian controversy was the question of intellectual freedom. Christianity, he believed, has a "primitive Simplicity" at its origin that soon became encrusted in church dogma. Roman Catholicism was the first to bury the pure teachings of Jesus under the rubble of additions and accretions that he called "Apostasy." Lutherans and Presbyterians committed the same error, the latter in particular "fancying themselves infallible in *their* Interpretations, they also ty'd themselves down by the *Westminster Confession*." This sort of ecclesiastical tyranny prevented pastors "from setting the People right" who sat under a majority of pastors that were wrong.[7] To use a creed or confession as the standard for correct teaching was to prevent the promulgation of truth, or new and better ways of expressing it. By deeming Hemphill's views to be "exactly agreeable to Christianity" and his opponents as intransigent interpreters of Christianity opposed to rival views, Franklin rendered the struggle as one between arbitrary dogmatists and proponents of reason and virtue. He was giving voice to Enlightenment thinkers' fundamental disappointment with the Reformation. Instead of creating room for intellectual freedom, Protestants had apparently replaced one dogmatism with another.

Franklin did not let the Hemphill controversy drop. In July, the same year (1735) about the midway point between the Presbytery and Synod meetings, Franklin wrote anonymously, *Some Observations on the Proceedings against The Rev. Mr. Hemphill; with a Vindication of his Sermons*. This pamphlet took time and effort since the author was suffering from pleurisy and even feared, once again, that he might die. It was a thirty-two-page pamphlet that sold out within two weeks. It recounted the charges against Hemphill, the minutiae of Presbyterian procedures, and offered a remarkably extensive defense for a man with whom Franklin had little acquaintance. Franklin repeated the arguments implicit in his earlier "Dialogue." His contempt for the Presbyterian pastors' intolerance was palpable: "they have no Pattern for their Proceedings, but that hellish Tribunal the *Inquisition*, who rake up all the vile Evidences, and extort all the Confessions they can from the wretched Object of their Rage."[8] Franklin was indeed on to

something with his objections to the trial's fairness. On the Sunday in between Presbytery's two meetings, two of the ministers preached sermons that attacked Hemphill's views. When the accused raised questions about the propriety of these same ministers serving on the commission to conduct the trial, the response was essentially that the sermons did not mention Hemphill by name.

At the same time, Franklin's vituperative denunciation of the Presbytery showed little effort to recognize what Presbyterians taught. He viewed the work of Christ as mainly a way to recover the innocence that Adam lost in the Garden of Eden. "[O]ur Saviour's Design in coming into the World, was to restore Mankind to the State of Perfection in which Adam was at first created," Franklin wrote. The point of the Christian religion, with its system of prayers and sacraments, and reliance on Christ's mediation was to provide "new and stronger Motives than either the Light of Nature or the Jewish Religion could furnish us with" for the original duties given to Adam.[9] Such an understanding of sin was far from the Augustinian, Lutheran, and Reformed notion that the corruption of human nature left humans without any hope of salvation apart from the perfect obedience and sacrifice of Christ. Dependence on Christ for acceptable levels of holiness also implied that good works were not necessary for salvation, a notion that often prompted charges of antinomianism, such as those hurled by Roman Catholics at Protestants in the sixteenth century.

Yet, Franklin only saw antinomianism in Presbyterian orthodoxy's understanding of Christ's merits. "[T]o believe that Good Works or a holy Life is necessary in order to our Acceptance with God, is depreciating the Sufferings of Christ, who is sufficient without our Compliance." That was the view against which Hemphill preached and to which Franklin objected. But it was also, although somewhat simplistically rendered, what Presbyterians professed. Franklin had no time for it. It was "the most impious Doctrine that ever was broached, and it is the Duty of every christian Minister to explode such Errors, which have a natural Tendency to make Men act as if Christ came into the World to patronize Vice, and allow Men to live as they please."[10] Franklin wanted a religion that encouraged virtue and Presbyterian ideas about human depravity and dependence on Christ's death were not helping. At the same time, with an understanding of Christianity

that was distant from Reformed Protestant orthodoxy, Franklin's objections to the Presbytery's inquisitorial ways reflected his own intolerance, as if he were the arbiter of Christian truth.

Franklin was not finished with Hemphill. Just as the Presbyterian Synod was meeting, he came out with another tract, *A Letter to a Friend in the Country*, the anonymity of which prompted some scholars to attribute only the preface to Franklin and the rest to Hemphill. But it, and its sequel, published a month later, *Defense of Mr. Hemphill's Observations*, belonged to Franklin and were further evidence of how much the affair gripped him. The arguments were very similar even if he extended them to forty-nine and forty pages of text respectively. In the first (September 25, 1735) of these defenses of Hemphill, *Letter to a Friend*, Franklin repeated his concern about the tyranny inherent in using creeds to insure intellectual conformity. To the argument that private associations—even like the Junto—had every right to impose rules for membership, Franklin agreed, but insisted that churches were different than such temporal institutions. A "christian Society" had no authority to make rules that differed from the ones set by Christ himself, principles that everyone acknowledged to be "perfect and compleat." The standard for admission to the church was to acknowledge Christ as "King and Head," believe his rule to "contain his Will in full," and resolve to "act accordingly." One important difference between this rule for the church and the Presbyterians was that Christ had "not deputed any one to be here on Earth his Vicegerent, or to interpret that Will as he pleases, and impose that Interpretation on any." Again, Franklin was guilty of doing exactly what Presbyterians had done—barring "Creed Imposers" from the true church by his own interpretation of the Bible. He added, "Let no Man then presume to judge of another Master's Servant . . . and therefore every Man is to be left at Liberty to work it out by what Method he thinks best."[11]

In his *Defense of Mr. Hemphill's Observations* (October 30, 1735) Franklin elaborated his earlier argument that Christ's teaching was an extension of the law and light of nature. His argument was more of an appeal to common sense than a close analysis of the points of contention. Franklin's method was mainly to point out the folly of anyone who did not agree with the proposition that "*Christianity*, [as to its most essential and necessary Parts,] *is plainly Nothing else, but a second*

Revelation of God's Will founded upon the first Revelation, which God made to us by the Light of Nature." Of course, anyone with a right mind could hardly disagree with the notion that "this second Revelation of God's Will," the one that came with Christ, "is not agreeable to the first, nor is it an Illustration and Improvement of the Law of Nature." Although Presbyterians may have agreed with parts of that assertion, they knew that Franklin went off the rails (and seriously hurt Hemphill) by applying this broad point about revelation before the fall, before Christ's advent, and after Christ's death and resurrection to the doctrine of justification by faith. When discussing the fine points of that doctrine, he wondered, did Presbyterians mean "that the Almighty transfers the personal and perfect Righteousness of Christ to Men, or that he infuses it into them, and looks upon it, as the same thing with their own actual Obedience to his Law?" This was, in fact, what the Westminster Confession taught and what Protestant reformers had contended during sixteenth-century disputes with Rome. Yet, Franklin deemed this doctrine "ridiculous and absurd in itself."[12]

One argument that Franklin had to his advantage, even if only implicitly, was that Presbyterians in North America were overreacting to the views of a young pastor who had no substantial following. That was certainly how it must have appeared to residents of Philadelphia and nearby churches. For those with a broader awareness of Presbyterian developments, however, Hemphill's views were part of a general liberalizing trend that had generated similar controversies in England, Scotland, Ireland, and now Pennsylvania. First, among Dissenters in England in the 1710s, then within the Church of Scotland between 1718 and 1732, then in the 1720s among the Presbyteries in the north of Ireland, and finally in Philadelphia, churches that used the Westminster Confession of Faith faced opposition for requiring doctrinal uniformity. Invariably, the controversies started with ministers who stressed the human character and exemplary behavior of Jesus. Once other ministers objected that such views departed from the Confession of Faith, a controversy ensued over creedal subscription and church authority. Liberal Protestants favored the reasonableness of Christianity to show that reason and faith were compatible. But that preference ran headlong into the older teachings of Protestantism and the use of church structures to preserve the faith once delivered.[13] Franklin may not have been aware of this background but

his Presbyterian adversaries certainly were, especially since many were immigrants themselves who had firsthand acquaintance with controversies over the nature of Christ and church authority.

At the same time, Franklin's involvement in the Hemphill affair was curious for a man who was usually above the fray of partisan positions—he did maintain distance by writing anonymously. Lemay surmises that Franklin invested in the controversy because the printer wanted to try out ideas about religion and could do so under the cloak of anonymity. In addition, Franklin's own battle with pleurisy and the death of his brother, James, a few months before the trial, according to Lemay, provoked Franklin to consider his own legacy of toleration and his brother's courage in standing up to Boston's "theocracy."[14] Another personal connection was the presence of Ebenezer Pemberton on the Presbytery's commission. This pastor was the son of Franklin's childhood minister, Ebenezer, Sr. and his place in the trial may have dredged up the editor's "old resentments" about not going to Harvard and the privilege that Boston's clergy enjoyed. Not to be missed—Franklin profited handsomely from his pamphlets.

Whatever the explanation, Franklin's output during the Hemphill trial and his discussion of Christian doctrine was remarkable for a young man whose deism could well have prompted him either to sit out the debates or to use them to observe the foibles of ecclesiastical life. One way to read Franklin's pamphlets is as a plea for the kind of Christian church to which he wanted to belong. It was one that was clearly on the Protestant side of the Reformation, but that took issue with Puritans or Presbyterians establishing their own forms of dogmatism and authoritarianism. That was not the way Protestantism was supposed to go. If it had moved smoothly from Luther and Calvin to Locke, John Tillotson's latitudinarianism, and Hemphill's moralistic Presbyterianism, Franklin may have had no trouble joining a church and self-identifying as a Protestant. But as long as Protestants produced their own version of Roman Catholic strictness, which he believed was a betrayal of Christ's simplicity, he remained an outsider.

Awakening

Soon after the Hemphill trial, the affairs of Protestants took center stage in Philadelphia and the rest of the colonies owing to the

incomparable force and magnetism of George Whitefield, an Anglican priest who preached as an itinerant evangelist throughout the colonies and prompted the so-called First Great Awakening. That Franklin became a friend and advocate of an evangelist is an aspect of his religious outlook that did not align readily with his arguments during the Hemphill trial. After all, Whitefield's version of fire and brimstone preaching that reminded audiences of their eternal fate as sinners unless they embraced true religion would appear to be another version of Protestant dogmatism and intolerance. Yet, Franklin wrote openly and in support of Whitefield. The reason had much to do with the evangelist's own disdain for the rigors of creeds, church government, and formal religion.

Whitefield was a relatively obscure religious figure in 1738 when he first traveled to North America. At the time, he was a colleague of John and Charles Wesley who were conducting religious work among settlers in the new colony, Georgia. The deaths of adults from diseases prevalent in the warm climate—and a lack of immunity—left children without parents and Whitefield with a burden to establish an orphanage in Georgia. He returned to England to find funding and land for such a project. In the process he crafted his considerable gifts as an itinerant preacher—with a booming voice and physical stamina—that allowed him to preach as effectively outside to large crowds as indoors. His preaching created a sensation in British newspapers and some of those stories circulated in the colonies before his second trip in 1739 to North America, again for the purpose of raising funds and saving the lost. He arrived at Lewes, Delaware in late October with the intent of speaking to Philadelphia's residents. Large crowds greeted Whitefield; they were so big that he needed to speak outdoors. The phenomenon of Whitefield's popularity was one in which crowds, publicity, the novelty of such events, and the speaker's own elocution (he had trained for the theater) fed off each other to create North America's first celebrity. Some historians have suggested that Whitefield was the first household name in the colonies.

Franklin immediately saw a business opening and a way to score points against Hemphill's sectarian opponents. It also became another opportunity to express his own identification with the simple teachings of Jesus. The editor not only covered Whitefield's speaking events but also recognized a potential audience for printed collections of the

evangelist's sermons and personal journals. Franklin covered his expenses by arranging for subscriptions. Soon after advertising in the *Gazette* for these publications, Franklin had more buyers than he could satisfy with his print run of 200 copies. According to Lemay, 1740 was the peak year for Whitefield's works, when Franklin "published more imprints more successfully . . . than in any other year."[15]

The revivalist's unconventional methods, combined with his at times acerbic rhetoric, also drew fire from local clergy across denominational lines, which could well have prompted Franklin to return fire against "orthodox" Protestants in colonial society. In one of his famous sermons, "The Kingdom of God" (1741), the evangelist tried to rouse nominal Christians from their pious slumbers by claiming that church membership, correct theology, and sacraments did not matter with God. "The kingdom of God, or true and undefiled religion," Whitefield exclaimed, "does not consist in being of this or that particular sect or communion."[16] He did qualify his remarks to explain that among Arians, Socians, and others who denied the deity of Christ, "the devil is a priest of such congregations." That was a shot across the bow at the sort of liberal theology that Franklin hoped to see take root among Presbyterians. In fact, in one of Whitefield's letters, published by Franklin no less, the evangelist had remarked that Archbishop Tillotson "knew no more of Christianity than *Mahomet.*"[17] This sort of criticism reflected Whitefield's conviction that a born-again experience was the hallmark of genuine Christianity. True religion did not consist in "outward ordinances."[18] It was a matter of the heart.

In the context of the Presbyterians against whom Franklin had written so forcefully, Whitefield threw fuel on the flames of division. The source of that controversy, just after the Hemphill trial, was the way some ministers, such as Gilbert Tennant, then a pastor in New Brunswick, New Jersey, who eventually moved to Philadelphia, had insisted on conversion not only for ordinary members but also for clergy. He had provoked opposition by preaching without invitation in some places and in stirring up congregations to question their pastor if he did not support revivalism. In fact, Tennant preached a famous sermon in 1740, "The Danger of an Unconverted Ministry," that assumed his critics were un-Christian because they opposed a work of God. Hemphill's teaching had revealed unanimity among

Presbyterians in opposition to his brand of rational Christianity. The awakenings of the 1730s and 1740s, however, showed that Presbyterians were divided between those like Tennant, who put experience before formal or outward standards of church life, and strict pastors, who insisted that church traditions needed to be followed even in the event of a revival. Whitefield's arrival and fame, in addition to his elevation of conversion over external or observant forms of Christianity, divided Presbyterians and other denominations between pro- and anti-revival factions. In fact, Presbyterians split in 1741 between Old (anti-revival) and New Side (pro-revival) synods and remained separate until 1758. In this setting, Franklin sided with the awakened side of Protestants even though the revivalist-friendly wing of colonial Protestantism was deeply suspicious of a Christianity that elevated reason and virtue at the expense of sin and grace.

Sided is likely too strong a word, though Franklin did write positively about the English evangelist in the *Autobiography*. He verified Whitefield's amazing voice (he could speak outdoors to thousands) and remarkable ability to persuade listeners to contribute financially to his causes. One of Franklin's friends borrowed money from another hearer to support the orphanage even after having resolved to give nothing. The *Gazette* devoted minor attention to Whitefield's travels and speaking, especially when he arrived, and later peppered issues with advertisements for merchandise related to the evangelist. In May of 1742, Franklin ran a notice for sale at the post office, of "All Sorts of fine Paper, Parchment, Ink-powder, Sealing Wax, Wafers, fountain Pens, Pencils, Brass Ink horns"—the list went on and concluded with "fine Pewter Stands proper for Offices and Counting-houses . . . and grav'd Pictures of Mr. Whitefield."[19]

Sometimes, Franklin wrote in ways that revealed his sympathies. One indication of his fondness for Whitefield and his retinue came in 1740 when pastor William Seward, the evangelist's assistant and publicist, went up against local citizens. The overt issue was a room that Philadelphians used for dancing, which Seward called "one of Satan's strongest Holds in this City."[20] Seward persuaded the owner to stop renting out the room for dancing and eventually interpreted it as a sign of the revivals' success; God had convicted dancers to give up the devil's play. At issue was whether Whitefield had actually appealed to the city's gentlemen, "the *better* sort"—the way Seward publicized

it—or whether, in fact, these gentlemen objected to the piety foisted on them. Those words, "better sort," were responsible for Franklin taking up his pen, though he wrote under the pseudonym, Obadiah Plainman. Ben was no fan of dancing so had little to lose in this skirmish. But, aside from implicitly defending Seward and Whitefield, Franklin was also an egalitarian and recoiled from the idea that some residents of Philadelphia were better than others. In a letter responding to the story about the dancing club, Franklin wrote, "*We* take Notice, that you have ranked yourself under the Denomination of BETTER SORT of People, which is an Expression always made use of in Contradistinction to the *meaner Sort*, *i.e.*, the Mob, or the Rabble."[21] Franklin, through Plainman, also objected to the logic of Whitefield's critics, which in effect was an apology for the evangelist. But he did not debate the merits of Whitefield's message or its effect on the city. After reactions to the first letter, Franklin wrote another, which reiterated the point about the contempt implied by the words, "better sort." At one level, the awakening was on the side of egalitarianism and that was at least one reason for Franklin's defense.

Readers of the *Gazette* sometimes detected a bias in the way that Franklin wrote about Philadelphia religion. In June of 1740 he returned to the subject of Presbyterianism. Ministers were in the city, as part of the synodical meetings, to conduct annual business. This was the same body that had condemned Hemphill five years earlier. But now Franklin appeared to bask in the glow of piety that Whitefield had cultivated. The report noted that ministers had preached fourteen sermons to large crowds even while small groups met in homes. Never had the city been so devout. "No Books are in Request but those of Piety and Devotion; and instead of idle Songs and Ballads, the People are every where entertaining themselves with Psalms, Hymns, and Spiritual Songs."[22] All of this owed to "the successful Labours of the Reverend Mr. *Whitefield*." At that point, Ebenezer Kinnersley, a Baptist minister and friend of Franklin who opposed the emotional excess of the revivals, had had enough. He submitted a critique of Whitefield and the awakening that he hoped Franklin would print. The publisher delayed and Kinnersley became convinced, and circulated the idea, that the newspaper would not print any criticism of Whitefield.

Such a complaint from a friend and another man of science (Kinnersley and Franklin had similar interests in electricity) forced Franklin to publish a letter from the Baptist. But he did so with a statement of the *Gazette*'s editorial policy. Franklin took the high ground by asserting that the first principle among printers was that "when Truth has fair Play, it will always prevail over Falsehood." His confidence that truth would prevail, that weaknesses of comments and assertions would become evident, was the reason for printing points of view that editors or readers might not approve.[23] Franklin observed that the colonists enjoyed the freedom of the press and so could read widely about subjects from various perspectives. This was the prelude to a mini-publishing skirmish among Baptists about the merits of the awakening. Franklin's editorial policy presumed to take no side. He remained unwilling to criticize Whitefield.

The truth was that Franklin and Whitefield were forming a friendship that would last far beyond the evangelist's first visit to Philadelphia. One strand in the bond between both men was the building that Whitefield and his supporters had constructed at Fourth and Arch Streets. Because some of the churches barred the evangelist from using their facilities, he needed a place for services. That nondenominational hall was designed for use by all Protestant pastors who were "acquainted with the Religion of the Heart and Experimental Piety," even though Franklin presented it as non-sectarian and open to all Protestants.[24] Over time, Franklin became a member of the board that oversaw the building and when it fell into disuse it became in 1750 the site for the Pennsylvania college and academy.

Professional interests in common, like the building and the publishing business, were further reasons for Whitefield staying in Franklin's home whenever he returned to Philadelphia (1744, 1746, and 1752).[25] On one of those visits, Franklin wrote to Whitefield, "You know my House, if you can make shift with its scanty Accommodations, you will be most heartily welcome." (In his *Autobiography* Franklin recalled this exchange and commented that he and the evangelist disagreed over whether such hospitality should be done "for Christ's sake.") They continued to correspond until Whitefield's death in 1770.

Arguably, one of the best indications of Franklin's regard for Whitefield was his proposal that they start a colony together. "I sometimes wish," Franklin wrote in 1748, "that you and I were jointly employ'd

by the Crown to settle a Colony on the Ohio." He added, "What a glorious Thing it would be to settle in that fine Country a large Strong Body of Religious and Industrious People" and what an "Advantage to Britain, by Increasing her People, Territory, Strength and Commerce."[26]

The Puritan Difference

Franklin was congenial to all manner of believers and never seemed to let his beliefs (or lack of them) become an obstacle to carrying on his affairs. He was friendly, hardly a surprise, with a variety of Quakers, among them Benjamin Lay, whom Franklin described as a "Pythagorean-cynical-christian Philosopher."[27] He also recognized the value of Quaker worship, for its simplicity, independence from clergy, and moral forthrightness. Because Pennsylvania was home to numerous German Protestants, Franklin maintained contacts with a number of sectarian groups. He wrote about one Dunkard, a small pietistic German group, Michael Wohlfahrt, who had preached on the streets of Philadelphia and published a pamphlet by him. Franklin also printed books and hymnals for the community of Dunkers, the Ephrata Cloister, a commune in Lancaster County. Another German pietistic group to settle in Pennsylvania, the Moravians, were another of Franklin's printing customers. He also published sermons by their leader, Count Nicolaus Zinzendorf, and followed the pastor's exploits in the news.

In the world of Anglicanism, Franklin worked with priests and leading lay people on the college and academy, though he did have disagreements with William Smith (more over politics than religion). Later in life, Franklin coordinated relations between the American Congress, the Vatican, and Roman Catholics in North America about the appointment of papal representation in the fledgling nation. Yet, Franklin was no fan of the Yale graduate, John Thayer, who tried to work for the American delegation in France during efforts to secure national independence. When Thayer converted to Roman Catholicism, Franklin responded, "I hope he got something to boot, because that would be a sort of Proof that they allow'd our Religion to be, so much at least, better than theirs."[28] In sum, Franklin was generally adaptable to the religious conditions and persons he encountered.

With Whitefield, Franklin adopted a different posture. Although he called his relationship with the evangelist "a mere Civil Friendship," Franklin's regard for Whitefield was no passing or honorific bond. As Harry S. Stout contends, their friendship was "stronger *because* there was no spiritual affinity." He adds, each man "humanized" the other, and reinforced traits that were close to the core of their own selves. "Without the common foundation of methodist society or junto," Stout writes, "each was freed to see in the other a true friend who transcended party interests," someone who could be "trusted in a profoundly untrustworthy world."[29]

Yet, Franklin's investment in the Presbyterian controversies of the 1730s and bond with Whitefield suggest an ongoing identification with the low-church English-speaking Protestantism in which Puritanism, Methodism, and revivalism lived. He knew he could not belong to either the Congregationalism of his parents' church or to the Presbyterian church in Philadelphia pastored by Jedidiah Andrews. As Franklin explained to Ezra Stiles near the end of his life (a closer reading of this letter appears below in Chapter 11), he believed in one God who governed the world providentially, who ought to be worshiped, whom humankind should serve by "doing good to his other Children," and that people would be "treated with Justice in another Life," according to their treatment of others. He avoided being dogmatic about Christ's divine nature and even conceded it could be beneficial if it made Jesus' "Doctrines more respected and better observed." The reason was that Jesus of Nazareth's "System of Morals" and religion were "the best the World ever saw."[30] This was what Hemphill taught. Whitefield too, though more inclined to hell fire and brimstone, extracted Christianity from what Franklin called the "corrupting Changes" [to Stiles] that Roman Catholicism first introduced, and that Protestants later included. Franklin very well may have joined a church if any of those in Philadelphia had broken with Protestant orthodoxy. The Quakers were too different from the main trajectories of English Protestantism. Whitefield did not know of a church or denomination that embodied revivalism's zeal and holiness.

Although Franklin could not join a church, he broke the path that Americans later followed: they applaud religion for its contributions to public morality and ignore or criticize faith when it is sectarian or divisive. From prayer and Bible reading in public schools, which

provided a generic Protestant moralism all the way down to the 1960s, to Fox News commentators who celebrate conservative Christians and National Public Radio journalists who applaud black church leaders' contribution to the Civil Rights movement, the public has generally approved of faith for its capacity to improve people and society morally. If churches and pastors emphasize the details of worship, doctrine, or church government, the reaction is generally like Franklin's—either negative or non-existent. Ben Franklin was the original American to establish that standard of religion's civic utility. In that sense, he was hardly a skeptic but the forerunner of Protestants who in the nineteenth century sought to civilize the frontier, later employed the Social Gospel to reform cities and industry, and evangelical Republicans who advocated family values and public standards of decency.

Notes

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4. Franklin to Deborah, November 8, 1764, quoted in Lemay, *Life: Volume 2*, 25.
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29. Harry S. Stout, *The Divine Dramatist: George Whitefield and the Rise of Modern Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1991), 233.
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8
The Intellectual

J. A. Leo Lemay had multiple images from portraits of Franklin to feature on the three volumes of biography the University of Delaware professor lived to complete. For the first installment that covered Franklin as journalist, Lemay chose a portrait from 1767 by David Martin (the third of eight during his life). A Scottish artist who captured Franklin while conducting diplomatic work, Martin presents a bespectacled Franklin, still in a wig, and as the Metropolitan Museum of Art put it, a "brilliant blue coat" with gold embroidering on the cuffs and lapel, chin on thumb, pondering a document under the gaze of Isaac Newton's bust. This image was a long way from Franklin's efforts in his humble print shop while editing and publishing the *Pennsylvania Gazette*. But it was a fairly truthful depiction during the 1760s when Franklin was well known for his scientific experiments.

On Lemay's second volume, which examines Franklin as printer and publisher, is the very first portrait, commissioned by the subject himself. In 1746, Robert Feke portrayed Franklin, then forty, and two years away from retirement, as a gentleman (with the aristocratic airs that rank implied in eighteenth-century British society). Franklin stood for this painting and wore a brown wig and dark green suit with ruffled white shirt cuffs prominently protruding above his hands. His left hand is tucked into his coat—a pose associated later with Napoleon—and his right hand points down in a commanding way. Feke's painting said as much about Franklin's aspirations as it did about his work or his actual status. As Gordon Wood put it, Feke's painting "announces the arrival of a gentleman: there is not of the famous Franklin simplicity of dress" and he "stands in an aristocratic pose, stiff and mannered."[1]

On the cover of Lemay's third volume, the one that comes closest to presenting Franklin as an intellectual (in the realms of science and

politics), the biographer chose a 1762 portrait by Mason Chamberlin, an English painter. At this stage of life, Franklin was near the end of his first tour of diplomacy in London where he sought better terms with British officials for Pennsylvania's Assembly. Here the colonist emerges as a man of science, the one that American school children later learned, with Franklin performing an experiment during a thunderstorm with a key attached to a kite. That highly relatable version of Franklin's scientific feat does not come close to Immanuel Kant's estimate of the event. For the German philosopher, Franklin was "the Prometheus of modern times" who had stolen fire from the heavens.[2] The Chamberlain portrait goes into great detail to capture the way that in 1762 most Europeans knew him—not as a printer-tradesman, journalist, raconteur, tinkerer, civic reformer, postmaster, inventor, local politician, in sum, jack-of-all trades—but as one of the leading scientists in the West.

Close to the end of his printing business career, Franklin had conducted a series of experiments about electricity that turned him into a famous scientist. As the explanation of Chamberlin's painting by the Philadelphia Museum of Art puts it, the subject was more of a "[Joseph] Priestley than a [Edmund] Burke: one of the leading scientists in England; a distinguished Fellow of the Royal Society."[3] The Philadelphian's investigation of electricity was and remains, in the words of historian of science, I. Bernard Cohen, Franklin's most "permanent and lasting contribution to scientific thought."[4] Initial viewers of the painting and the man who commissioned it, Philip Ludwell III, a Virginia planter who had moved to London and was Franklin's neighbor there, knew the colonist not as prominent figure in Pennsylvania politics but as a man of science. The painting showed "a plain man, with a mole on his left check, simply dressed, wearing a powdered wig (as he did until 1775), no spectacles (these did not appear until after 1776), and lights the portrait in the most ordinary, school-of-Thomas-Hudson, way." Chamberlin also included visuals of the three experiments that had made Franklin famous. In the upper left corner was the apparatus that Franklin used, in his words, "to draw the lightning down into my house, in order to make some experiments on it, with two bells to give notice when the rod should be electrify'd."[5] Chamberlin placed the second experiment also in the upper left-hand corner, slightly in front and to the right of the

electrical bells. Here were two cork balls, one charged positive, the other negative, to show that they repelled each other. For the third experiment, in the upper right corner, Chamberlin used houses in a storm, one with a lightning rod, the others under threat of being struck by lightning. These were model houses that Franklin had constructed to illustrate his findings. The man who sat for the portrait was so pleased that he had a copy made and distributed prints to friends.

Franklin the intellectual, the man praised by Kant, is not generally the way most Americans remember him. Thanks to his pragmatic know-how, the Franklin of national folklore is more tinkerer than thinker. The children's biography, *Ben and Me: An Astonishing Life of Benjamin Franklin* (1998), by Robert Lawson, for instance, includes a string of endeavors by which a family of mice knew Dr. Franklin—"scientist, inventor, printer, editor, author, soldier, statesman, and philosopher."[6] The list is accurate even if children's literature fails to capture Franklin's originality. To start the list with scientist is to miss what had gone before. Yet, for students of the Enlightenment, to explore Franklin as a philosopher is to lapse into the defects of children's picture books. Many works on Franklin treat him as if he were only second to Jonathan Edwards in eighteenth-century colonial intellectual output. The reasons are plausible enough. Franklin was a man with ideas who left behind vast reservoirs of texts, the sources upon which intellectual historians depend. Considering his presence at the founding of the United States, along with his writings and recognition as a scientist, and you have a mind that readily ranks with Thomas Jefferson, John Adams, James Madison, and Jonathan Edwards. Franklin was arguably even more accomplished intellectually than George Washington and Thomas Paine (Figure 8.1).

In Jerry Weinberger's book, *Benjamin Franklin Unmasked: On the Unity of His Moral, Religious, and Political Thought*, the political scientist was direct. Contrary to the accounts of leading colonial historians like Gordon Wood and Edmund Wilson, or popular biographers like Walter Isaacson, Franklin was for Weinberger a first-rate mind. He was "no Babbitt or Nietzschean last man," Weinberger insists. Instead, Franklin was, "despite appearances to the contrary, a deeply serious thinker." Franklin's spiritual and religious journey was "indeed marked by a deeply serious and disturbing encounter with the big questions of life – God, the soul, morality and justice, happiness."[7]

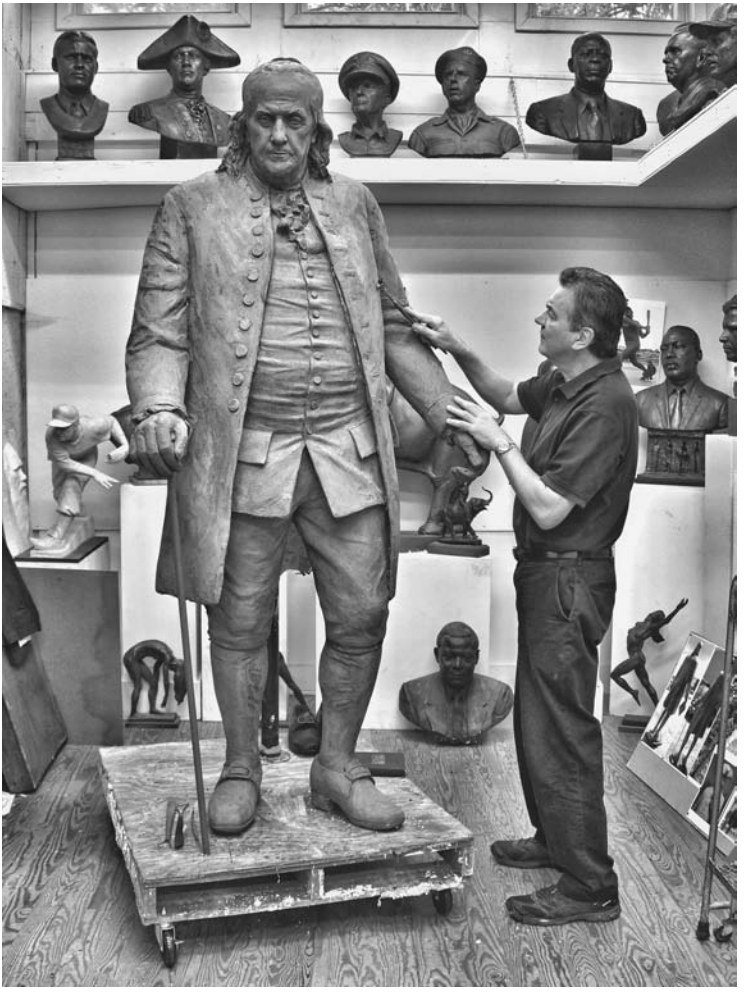

Figure 8.1 The sculptor, Zenos Frudakis, constructing one image of Franklin (according to the artist's website, still "in progress") that captures the man as a statesman and showing signs of infirmity.

Weinberger's case has merit if only because Franklin's papers run to forty-seven (projected) volumes in Yale University Press's critical edition. At the same time, Franklin's most famous and popular books, *Way to Wealth*, and *Autobiography* were not systematic treatments

of the big questions. They were manuals of advice about success. Researchers may find a paragraph here and a *Gazette* article there. But Franklin did not conduct sustained reflection about the big questions that philosophers and theologians tried to answer. He dabbled in ideas the way he tinkered with stoves and eyeglasses.

He did not dabble in science, however, at least by contemporary standards. For that reason, the Chamberlin portrait is arguably the best for establishing Franklin's reputation during his own life and assessing his contribution as an intellectual. It is also a portal into the Protestant outlook that framed the rise of scientific inquiry in the Anglophone world.

Colonial Pragmatism

The formation in 1727 of the Junto, also known at the Leather Apron Club, to designate its tradesman origins, was likely the best proof of Franklin's recognition that, in metaphysical studies, he was out of his depth. To be sure, the men who gathered for intellectual stimulation and camaraderie did not rule out considerations about the mysteries of human existence. In 1730, for instance, Franklin presented a talk on the providence of God that basically reversed his earlier *Dissertation on Liberty and Necessity*. Here he described the attributes of God as a "Being of great Wisdom," of "great Goodness," and of "great Power."[8] For another meeting, Franklin presented a paper on "Self-Denial Not the Essence of Virtue." Coincident with these philosophical and borderline theological topics were practical considerations: "On Protection of Towns from Fire" or "Whence comes the Dew that stands on the Outside of a Tankard that has cold Water in it in the Summer Time?" or "Would not an Office of Insurance for Servants be of Service, and what Methods are proper for the erecting such an Office?" or "If the Sovereign Power attempts to deprive a Subject of his Right . . . is it justifiable in him to resist if he is able?"[9] Franklin was curious about almost everything as a young man and his inquiring spirit kept pace. But the associations he formed, even the intellectual ones, wound up steering his interests into the ways of the natural world, human experience, and society. The Junto was arguably the best indication that Franklin's curiosity was mainly pragmatic with aspirations for metaphysics.

Perhaps Franklin's contemporaries were as curious about the natural world as he was and simply did not leave behind a record of their observations, but from early on the printer and future diplomat displayed a fascination with his surroundings. On his return to Philadelphia from London in 1726, for instance, Franklin passed the time by collecting seaweed. His observations of the plant led to documenting pelagic crabs that were numerous and possessed "a set of unformed claws" within "a kind of soft jelly." Each day he watched and described in his journal the crabs' evolution, which led to a hypothesis that the shells that protected these creatures were similar to those of silkworms and butterflies.[10]

Franklin's curiosity extended to the human body and its ailments. When his father, Josiah, experienced symptoms of a kidney stone, Franklin prescribed soap, salt, honey, and molasses. For his brother, John, he designed a flexible catheter. He followed news about lead poisoning in the distillation of rum while a teenager in Boston and later worried about the effects of using lead type on printers and their workers. Franklin believed a chemical he used in his shop was responsible for pain in his hands. When his friend, the farmer and amateur botanist, John Bartram, discovered ginseng's medicinal benefits, Franklin published an account in the *Gazette*. Very few scientific or medical developments escaped Franklin's notice—he theorized about perspiration and human skin, the workings of the heart, cures for the common cold and diphtheria, as well as the effects of the city's water supply on fevers.

In the realm of technology—a natural interest for a man who worked with machines—Franklin was also a font of information, speculation, and solutions. Improvements in printing were clearly useful to his product and profits. For instance, he used skills learned from printing copies of leaves—nature printing was an old technique among naturalists—to include such images in printing currency and thereby prevent counterfeiting. Franklin also experimented with methods to give paper (and currency) greater strength and so contribute to its longevity. He oversaw methods of making paper that added rags, mica, and asbestos. The printing process also led Franklin to follow the methods of placing images and texts on ceramic tiles and copperplate engravings.[11]

Franklin's interest in tiles stemmed in part from his admiration for hand-painted Dutch Delftware that he wanted to adorn the mantles around fireplaces. These tiles had images and texts from Scripture which Franklin complained were "wretchedly scrawled." But the thought of surrounding a fireplace with uplifting instruction was genius. Franklin's idea was to substitute lessons from the Bible with tiles about the moral virtues, like those described in a 1726 book, *Moral Virtue Delineated* (by Marin Le Roy de Gomberville). Franklin imagined introducing Gomberville's "moral prints," which contained the virtues Horace recommended, around "our Chimneys, and constantly in the Eyes of Children when by the Fire-side." They would function as object lessons to teach and impress "moral Sentiments" on their children. [12]

Of course, Franklin's ideas about heating homes became far more consequential than his ideas for turning the hearth into a classroom. In 1737 he began to tinker with stoves by purchasing steel and observing the mechanisms of existing designs. By 1741 he had created a stove based on his own improvements. Franklin persuaded friends in the iron business to construct them, and sold a small number to acquaintances. Three years later he was ready to market and sell the "New Invented Pennsylvania Fire-Place" on a grander scale. His *Account* of this particular unit was vintage Franklin. It included a description of the six most commonly used fireplaces, from the "large open Fireplaces used in the Days of our Fathers," to iron pots that relied upon open fires fueled by charcoal.[13] Franklin claimed that his design took the best features of all the others, but without their defects. The Franklin stove could be set inside an existing fireplace, it had a damper (a new feature) that could adjust the intake of air, and it facilitated ventilation both inside the stove to release smoke to the flue and within the house to heat the room. The damper and register allowed for control of the fire, both to start and extinguish the flame. The best feature was its capacity to generate heat. Franklin gave his own endorsement: "My common Room, I know, is made twice as warm as it used to be, with a quarter of the Wood I formerly consum'd."[14] In addition, the stove maintained the pleasant sight of a fire, while also providing a way to heat water for tea, to warm flat irons, and to keep food warm. While some could read this pitch as a classic case of self-interest, others may have known that calculations about warmer

temperatures and less wood were part and parcel of the investigations that marked Franklin's life. One of his first experiments (from 1732) was to calculate which colored fabrics absorbed the most heat. He did it by laying patches of cloth on snow. Franklin discovered that the black patch "sunk so low as to be below the Stroke of the Sun's Rays."[15]

These informal ventures into scientific inquiry were a prelude to Franklin's major accomplishment, the one that gained him international fame and entry into Royal Society of London (for Improving Natural Knowledge), namely, his research on electricity. That award in 1753, the Copley Medal, according to some the "world's greatest prize for scientific achievement," went to Franklin only five years after he had retired from printing, and was the first time the body had bestowed their honor on a non-member.[16] It was also the first time the Royal Society recognized someone from the colonies and indicated the growing intellectual accomplishments of people in North America. The basis for the prize was Franklin's distinction between positive and negative electrical charges, an explanation of the Leyden jar (which investigators used to store electricity), a design for an electrical battery, and the invention of sharp points to attract "Electrical Fire"—also known as the lightning rod. These achievements forced Europeans "to take notice of the colonials as scientists in their own right" and marked an "American revolution against an economy of knowledge" that Europe had monopolized.[17]

Franklin's research on electricity began in earnest in 1746 shortly before he retired from business. The process of discovery "that Electrical Fire" was not the product of friction but an element "diffused among, and attracted by other Matter," might today look like grade school experiments conducted for a science fair.[18] But in 1746 it was cutting edge research. Franklin used three people standing on glass or wax and one of them rubbing a tube. The generation of a spark from the rubbing and the insulation of certain materials allowed Franklin to conclude that electricity was inherent in matter and that its positive and negative charged could be isolated. Other observations included the use of a Leyden jar and explaining how these tubes could store electrical charges. Despite the apparently crude circumstance, Franklin was engaged in serious science that had other naturalists following some of his experiments and theories. The Society functioned as the

gatekeeper for his ideas—sometimes publishing and sometimes disregarding what Franklin sent. His fascination with electricity corresponded with leaving the printing business and may explain how and why Franklin was able to pursue the nature of electrical charges and its presence in the atmosphere with seemingly obsessive determination.

His own theories about lightning were set by 1749 and included the novel idea that clouds were electrified and lightning itself was electrical in nature since it could destroy animals, melt metals, and ignite inflammable substances. Franklin's ideas were flawed since for a while he thought lightning went from the earth to clouds. He had not pondered that clouds themselves might have electrical charges. But his experiments with the shape of objects to attract charges led to insights about lightning rods. Meanwhile, his construction of a kite, the plaything of children, complete with silk covering instead of paper, and a dry hemp string with an attached key, confirmed that lightning was electricity. Had Franklin known that his device exposed him to the danger of being struck by lightning, he might had devised another experiment. As it was, the confirmation of his theory was not lightning striking the kite or key, but the string standing erect, thus demonstrating it was electrified.[19] That experiment in 1752 set the scientific world abuzz and made the prosperous gentleman from Philadelphia into a trans-Atlantic sensation that rivaled his friend George Whitefield's fame.

Even as Franklin broke ground about the nature of electricity, he never strayed far from the practical effects of investigation. Indeed, knowledge about lightning strikes generated fire-prevention and reinforced Franklin's older concern for civic improvement. Soon after the kite experiment, he had lightning rods installed on Pennsylvania's statehouse, the Philadelphia Academy, and his own home, the first of their kind in the world. By the next year in his almanac, Poor Richard was offering directions to home owners about installing a lightning rod—a small knitting-needle sized piece of metal about six feet above the house's highest point, brass wire running into the ground, and staples to secure the wire to the house. As Jonathan Lyons has observed, Franklin embodied one of "the most cherished notions of the Age of Enlightenment," namely, the idea that scientific knowledge and discovery "is directly proportional to its practical import or utility."[20] Although this side of the Enlightenment tended to place new discoveries over received wisdom, the utility of truth was even

more consequential for the appeal of scientific discovery. Franklin's discoveries about electricity set up the narrative of scientific investigation shedding light on areas that traditional authorities—church and state—had kept obscure. Nevertheless, Franklin used his experiment less to boast about scientific method or to disparage the dead hand of the past than to promote an invention that fellow Philadelphians could use to improve their lives and their city.

Franklin's utilitarian disposition situates him firmly in the Skeptical side of the Enlightenment, as Henry F. May, an esteemed intellectual historian, explained the trajectories of early modern intellectual life in America. In his important 1976 book, May broke with understandings of the Enlightenment that missed its internal disagreements, regional differences, and variations over time. Such attention to particulars resulted in four strands—the Moderate, Skeptical, Revolutionary, and Didactic Enlightenments which followed intellectual developments in the Anglo-American world that ran from the physicist, Isaac Newton, to the Scottish philosopher, Thomas Reid. May situated Franklin among the doubters and skeptics, and even compared him to Voltaire. "Like the aged Voltaire, and unlike any other American I can call to mind," May wrote," Franklin was relaxed in his skepticism – without the belligerence of the village infidel, the arrogance of the skeptical aristocrat, the self-torture of a Mark Twain, or the adolescent show-off manner of a Mencken." Even so, what went hand-in-glove with the Skeptical Enlightenment was fascination with utility. May credits Franklin with the invention of "useful gadgets" even as he was curious about "the nature of light or electricity" and the cause of smokey chimneys. This reflected a complete rejection of curiosity about "ultimate causation or metaphysical meaning."[21] Here May quoted from Franklin's 1750 essay on electricity:

> Nor is it of much importance to us to know the manner in which nature executes her laws; it is enough if we know the laws themselves. It is of real use to know that china left in the air unsupported will fall and break; but *how* it comes to fall, and *why* it breaks, are matters of speculation. It is a pleasure indeed to know them, but we can preserve our china without it.[22]

Deep thinkers do not generally avoid theory. That likely explains why people today read Franklin, if they still do, for advice about success or

his *Autobiography* as an example of such self-help. Yet, in his own day, Franklin's curiosity and mechanical know-how captured the attention of Europe's leading minds. As much as that says about the amateur character of eighteenth-century science, it underscores once again the remarkable achievements of a hard-working and frugal tradesman in a colonial outpost. Franklin's rags-to-riches story applied to his scientific investigation as much as to his business success.

Philadelphia and the Republic of Letters

Another way that Franklin sometimes qualifies as an intellectual comes unexpectedly and indirectly from his work as a postmaster. The Republic of Letters was an international network of philosophers, scientists, and writers whose ideas transcended national loyalties and forged a platform for circulating the results of new experiments or theories both about the natural world and human relations. Voltaire was in many respects at the center of this Republic thanks to his escape to and refuge in the Chateau de Cirey, 140 miles from Paris, a place where he could correspond with those sympathetic and receptive to his ideas. Republic of Letters is not simply a phrase that historians impose on this network but also one that some of the participants themselves invoked. It pointed to its political aspirations; a republic was a protest both against the rule of monarchs and a recognition of the equality that all members enjoyed based on their intellectual pursuits. The vehicle for an exchange of ideas and scientific discovery was not academic journals or professional societies, but epistolary communication, hence a Republic of *Letters*.

Scholars who follow this informal communication among European intellectuals, most of whom were also representatives of the Enlightenment, designate Franklin as one of the Republic's major figures and the most important North American member. In 2009, for instance, a digital historical project that attempted to map the lines of communication among leading scientists included Franklin. This network placed him, for instance, in the company of Antonio Vallisneri, an Italian physician who followed Galileo in overturning Aristotelian scientific models, the Dutch historian, Joseph Scaliger, who expanded the study of antiquity beyond the Greeks and Romans to include Persian, Babylonian, and Jewish sources, Carl Linnaeus, a

Swedish botanist known as the "father" of modern taxonomy, Voltaire, the French philosopher and historian, and René Descartes, the famous French philosopher who overturned most of the received categories of formal philosophy. That is a rarefied set of thinkers in which to place a successful printer and inventor from a small colonial city. But at least by sheer dint of his experiments with electricity and his correspondence with other naturalists, Franklin ranks among the foremost minds of the eighteenth century. Epistolary output is one criterion for membership in this Republic—Valisneri wrote 13,600 letters, Scaliger 1,650, Linnaeus 6,000, Voltaire 19,000, Descartes 20,000, and Franklin 22,700. Whatever the Philadelphian lacked in speculative capacities, he made up for in sheer volume of correspondence.[23]

Situating Franklin in this international network of scientists and philosophers, however much it seems strange to place a tradesman, who was more Horatio Alger than David Hume, in the highbrow ranks of intellectual elites, requires qualifications. On the one hand, Franklin over-achieved, considering his origins and social resources. As a resident of Philadelphia, the population of which was roughly 25,000 when Franklin pursued his electricity experiments in earnest, he lacked "the same resources as someone who lived in a European capital." With 565,000 residents in Paris and 700,000 in London, Franklin's intellectual output was more impressive than others, since he lacked the number of peers who could challenge, push, and confirm insights as were available to thinkers in Europe's largest cities. Isolation in a colonial society on the other side of the Atlantic Ocean posed another barrier to Franklin forming ties with comparable minds, not to mention how long communication took between North America and Europe once he found sympathetic or reliable correspondents.[24]

The actual epistolary network that Franklin forged reveals the colonial settings' limitations. Before he went to London in 1757 as a successful (retired) businessman and Pennsylvania diplomat, Franklin had received no letters from Europe. Indeed, almost all of his correspondence prior to 1757 was with fellow colonists. While in London, for the five years that researchers have used to map Franklin's correspondence, almost all of his letters were to recipients in England. Once he returned to Philadelphia in 1763 for a brief stay, his correspondence returned to its old pattern of being dominated by contacts with

colonials. But he did not lose his European interests and one-quarter of his letters went back to friends and peers in England and on the continent. At the same time, the top-five recipients of Franklin's missives reflected the ordinary aspects of his life—he was hardly a man who threw aside common affairs in pursuit of scientific breakthroughs. Of his most frequent correspondents, five stand out: Isaac Norris, a Quaker politician and speaker of the Pennsylvania Assembly; Mary Stevenson, the daughter of Franklin's landlady in London; David Hall, the man who managed the printing press that co-owned Franklin's printing press; Deborah Franklin, his wife; and finally, William Strahan, the director of the Stationers' Company in London, the publisher responsible for producing the works of Edward Gibbon, David Hume, and Samuel Johnson. (Franklin had served as an agent for Strahan's books in North America.[25])

On the scales of cosmopolitanism, a factor used to rank Enlightenment intellectuals, Franklin's colonial origins prevent him from competing with Voltaire. According to Caroline Winterer, one of the leading scholars on the Republic of Letters, Voltaire was "king" and Franklin was an "illustrious member."[26] Thanks to his travels and labors in England and France during the last two-fifths of his life—compared to James Madison who never traveled outside North America, Franklin emerged as "undoubtedly the most cosmopolitan" of the Americans, according to Gordon Wood. The Philadelphian's membership in the republic was not based solely on his scientific experiments, though these did create the fame that made Franklin a worthy correspondent. He was also an assembler and transmitter of knowledge, what Winterer calls "a human switchboard." When Franklin's duties as a diplomat took center stage, he brushed up his French and was able to communicate reasonably well with France's officials, a fortuitous turn for his place in the network because French was replacing Latin in international relations. The addition of politics to his reputation as scientist elevated Franklin to a new the rank of "the philosopher-statesman," a person on the order of Edmund Burke, who combined "a major political role with substantive, internationally influential reflection on a variety of learned matters."[27]

Yet, Franklin was not the first American to participate in the international networks of intellectual camaraderie. The first important correspondent from North America was John Winthrop, Jr.

(1606–1676), the son of Massachusetts' first governor. During the middle decades of the seventeenth century, even while he governed the colony of Connecticut, Winthrop used Latin, French, Greek, and Dutch to correspond with a number of natural scientists in England and Germany—a so-called "republic of alchemy"—in which members exchanged ideas about the natural world and human relations. Winthrop, in fact, rose to such a level of knowledge that he became the first colonial member of the Royal Society. Franklin followed in paths forged by the likes of Winthrop. But he also produced at least three times more correspondence than Winthrop. Franklin's scientific contributions and the pivotal role he played in transmitting ideas as both correspondent, publisher, book seller, and distributor also surpassed Winthrop.[28]

The Republic of Letters in which Franklin achieved international recognition was not simply a product of the Enlightenment. Its roots went deeper in history, back to the Renaissance and Protestant Reformation. Princeton University historian, Anthony Grafton, described this republic as taking "shape in the consciousness of scholars around 1500, as Erasmus became the leader of a self-conscious avant garde . . . bent on reforming the Church and the universities." The Reformation and the division it created across Europe, along with the persecution that ensued, provided both an obstacle to the republic but also a reason to persist. As Grafton explained, "across this ocean of darkness . . . small bands navigated in fragile craft: little communities of scholars, whose members did their best to maintain a different kind of society, with its own rules and its own values." It included Protestants and Roman Catholics. The original network of scholars examined the predicament and output of French Protestants (Huguenots), a "refuge not only of Protestant intellectuals and artisans, but also of an Erasmian ideal of tolerance." It eventually extended to the Society of Jesus (Jesuits) who, like the Huguenots, even "as they denounced one another—cultivated the same fields of study, from natural science to the art of reading history." Meanwhile, these thinkers' residences, despite belonging to an ethereal intellectual community that matter more than place, were more often than not living in cities where Protestantism had taken root. "Their favored places, the capitals of their imagined state, included Strasbourg, a border town, cosmopolitan and tolerant; Leiden and Amsterdam, the Dutch trading centers,

in which Catholics and Calvinists, Anabaptists and Jews rubbed elbows in mutual tolerance." Of course, they eschewed Geneva, the city Calvin made famous for executing Michael Servetus and home to "the Genevan Inquisition." But nearby, Basel was a city where "Erasmus and other irenic souls found a spiritual home—a city ever hospitable to refugees from oppression in their native countries." London and Berlin also qualified since both "cities harbored many of the refugee French Protestants who made up a major share of the republic's population."[29]

Even if Geneva and Calvin functioned as the foil for the Republic's ideals of inquiry and tolerance, John Calvin was himself a Huguenot refugee who also participated in a version of a literary republic. Indeed, Philip Benedict, in his magisterial social history of Reformed Protestantism before 1700, maps the correspondence of pastors like Calvin in Geneva and Ulrich Zwingli in Zurich in part to show the spread of Protestant ideas outside the initial centers of church reform. In the latter's case, Zurich became a hub for a network that "reached from the southern and eastern confines of Switzerland into that part of the Holy Roman Empire located south of a line running from Strasbourg through Ulm to Augsburg."[30] Calvin's correspondence networks were even more extensive. France, his homeland, remained constant, but Geneva's importance as a home for refugees together with the creation of the Geneva Academy in 1558 catapulted Calvin into an international figure. His correspondence—and book dedications—went to rulers in England, Denmark, and Sweden, and to pastors and theologians as far as Scotland, Poland, and Italy.[31]

Recognizing literary networks among Protestants that resembled those in which Erasmus and other humanists participated does not mean that Franklin's later membership in the so-called Republic of Letters placed him in a group of intellectuals that stretched back to 1520s Zurich. It does, however, suggest that the seeds of the intellectual changes that culminated in the Enlightenment and modern scientific investigation sprouted from sixteenth-century soil that included ecclesiastical and theological developments and publishing networks. These were products in turn of church and political reform. Olivier Millet, an intellectual historian, may be correct to call this a "Protestant Republic of Letters" in order to distinguish Calvin's explicitly religious interests from those of less dogmatic or religiously

zealous intellectuals.[32] But if the transfer of ideas and cosmopolitan affinity of writers and thinkers grew up to a significant degree around the French Protestants who were persecuted and then migrated elsewhere, distinguishing the Republic of Letters from Protestantism is not an easy line to draw.

Franklin likely did not understand that the Republic of Letters of which he was a citizen was partly the creation of Protestant clergy whom he regarded as sectarian. As Meredith Hindley, another student of the Republic, writes, at a time when "monarchical government, class hierarchy, and religious divisions" dominated European society, "the members of the 'republic' saw themselves as engaging each other on intellectual—and therefore equal—terms." They maintained their membership, as Franklin did, through correspondence that communicated intellectual and political developments throughout Europe. These republicans "tried out new theories, critiqued ideas, relayed the newest gossip, and chronicled the mundane matters of life." Hindley adds, "The more international your network, the more cosmopolitan you were thought to be."[33] This was equally true for the Protestants who emerged out of the established hierarchies of Christendom. "Letters were one of the major means churchmen used in this period," Benedict writes of the Protestant Reformation, "to keep abreast of events unfolding throughout Europe, to advise and console kindred spirits in distant lands, and to win converts to their views." Just as Franklin's discoveries about electricity circulated by means of correspondence, so too by pastor's letters, Protestantism "reached far beyond their cradle" in cities like Zurich and Geneva.[34] Franklin's membership in the Republic of Letters was one more way that he drew upon his family's spiritual legacy.

Warfare between Dogma and Science

Another tie between Franklin and his Protestant forebears, indirect to be sure, was an understanding of the natural world that owed to the Reformation's disenchantment of the cosmos. In the specific case of lightning, Christians, Protestants included, had often interpreted its destructive effects not as the inherent part of the natural order but as divine judgment for sin. Cotton Mather, for instance, in *The Christian Philosopher* (1721) had written that thunder was "the voice of God" and

its counterpoint, lightning, were "the Arrows of God." Thunderstorms, accordingly, were calls from God for humans to repent thoroughly from their sins. Jonathan Edwards, likewise, heard the "awful voice of God's thunder" in a storm and recollected that the experience led to "sweet contemplations of my great and glorious God."[35] Franklin himself was not immune to such thinking. In his almanac for 1751, at the very same time that he was in the thick of exploring the nature of lightning, Franklin, as *Poor Richard*, wrote about the weather in ways similar to Mather and Edwards:

> Ere the Foundations of the World were laid,
> Ere kindling Light th'Almight Word obey'd,
> Thou were; and when the subterraneous Flame,
> Shall burst its Prison, and devour this Frame,
> From angry Heav'n when the keen Lightning flies,
> When fervent Heat dissolves the melting Skies,
> Thou still shalt be; still as thou wert before,
> And know no Change when *Time* shall be no more.[36]

Franklin may have attributed such sentiments to Poor Richard because he knew that explanations of nature that undermined God's direct agency—lightning as simply the outworking of changes in the atmosphere rather than instances of divine displeasure—could be controversial. He was, for instance, grateful, as he wrote to Cadwallader Colden in 1752, that he did not live at a time, as Galileo had, of "the Inquisition for Philosophical Heresy." Three years later he might not have been so sure. Thomas Prince, a senior minister in Boston and pastor at Franklin's home congregation, Old South Church, wrote in an appendix to a 1727 work, *Earthquakes as Works of God*, that acknowledged the new scientific understanding of lightning. It also interpreted it as part of God's judgment. "The more *Points of Iron* are erected around the *Earth* to draw the *Electrical Substance* out of the *Air*," Prince wrote, "the more the *Earth* must needs be charged with it." The prevalence of lightning rods in and around Boston, accordingly, was responsible for the damage from an earthquake that had rocked New England in the fall of 1755. "There is no getting out of the mighty Hand of God," Prince concluded. "If we think to avoid it in the *Air*, we cannot in the *Earth*; Yea it may grow more fatal."[37]

The republication of Prince's book on earthquakes prompted a debate with John Winthrop, natural philosopher at Harvard. He delivered a lecture in which he claimed, "I cannot believe, that in the whole town of *Boston* . . . there is so much as one person, who is so weak, so ignorant, so foolish, or to say in one word, so atheistical, as ever to have entertained" the thought that a few yards of wire could remove someone from "the mighty hand of God." John Adams, then a young man, purchased a copy of Winthrop's lecture and wrote in the margin of his copy that most people living in Massachusetts "consider Thunder, and Lightening as well as Earthquakes, only as Judgments, Punishments, Warnings &c. and have no conception of any Uses they can serve in Nature."[38]

This debate over the meaning of lightning in God's plan was similar to one that had played out repeatedly between pastors and scientists over the course of modern scientific discoveries. The so-called warfare between theology and science, as Andrew Dickson White called it almost 150 years later, meant for advocates of science that Christianity had impeded the advance of inquiry and understanding the natural world. Franklin also trafficked in this notion of a conflict between the church and natural philosophy.

Yet, assumptions about divine providence, the natural world, and the capacity of human reason were as much responsible for his experiments as a barrier to application. That, at least, is one way that historians of science have explained the relationship between Christianity and modern scientific inquiry—namely, that a created order supplied by a divine maker who also gave humans special abilities to discern the workings of nature was an important factor in the rise of modern science. Beyond the general contours of a Christian understanding of the natural world, in Franklin's case, the Merton Thesis, an argument by the sociologist R. K. Merton about the ties between seventeenth-century English Protestantism and natural philosophy, deserves mention. Here the general idea is that Puritanism contributed to modern science through habits of mind and cultural associations Protestants took for granted. According to John Morgan, most appropriations of the Merton Thesis have discerned such common traits among Puritans and natural philosophers as "an anti-authoritarian view, a critical approach to scholastic learning, a favorable disposition toward the great powers of human reason, a

desire to reform the universities toward the new philosophy, a progressive outlook, a utilitarian spirit, and a belief in the centrality of law in creation."[39]

Histories of the Enlightenment reveal additional connections between Protestantism and modern science. Henry F. May, for instance, argued that any understanding of the esteem for reason that emerged among eighteenth-century advocates of natural philosophy and its application to all spheres of life needed to account for the religious context out of which such ideas emerged. Proponents of the modern regard for reason, including Franklin, "seldom thought about any branch of human affairs without referring consciously to some general beliefs about the nature of the universe and man's place in it, and about human nature itself." For this reason, May classified a Presbyterian "divine" like John Witherspoon, president of the College of New Jersey, "who likes everything simple and clear and hates mystery, has one foot in the camp of the Enlightenment." So too a skeptical figure like John Adams, who might well fall on the scientific side of the Enlightenment-Protestant divide, held on to the belief that "human beings are fundamentally impenetrable and contradictory," a piece of his "Protestant upbringing." For May, the basic disposition among Enlightenment intellectuals rested on two propositions: "that the present age is more enlightened than the past" and "that we understand nature and man best through the use of our natural faculties."[40] What separated Franklin from an ordinary Protestant like Jedediah Andrews, according to those convictions, was the idea that reason and experience led more reliably to truth about human nature than divine revelation. Otherwise, Protestants and natural philosophers swam in a stream of overlapping expectations.

Whether Christianity, Protestantism, or even Puritanism as the Merton Thesis had it, was directly responsible for the rise of modern science, the Christianity that emerged from the Reformation was a necessary condition for important aspects of scientific inquiry. One significant reason ironically is the common complaint that Protestantism disenchanted the world. Instead of looking at nature as permeated with miraculous and spiritual currents, Protestantism separated grace and nature such that common and ordinary affairs moved from having redemptive significance to ordinary parts of the natural world. For instance, marriage went from a sacrament to a civil

institution. So too, lightning instead of an act of divine judgment became a natural occurrence. Protestantism's insistence on the difference between the book of nature and Scripture's teaching on salvation even created conditions that freed natural philosophy as a sphere of inquiry distinct from theology. As John Morgan recognized, the "study of nature, beyond acknowledging the power and authority of God and beyond also immediately utilitarian aspects" was for many Puritans a "form of adiaphora." Since many questions in natural philosophy had no obvious "soteriological value," science became an endeavor that was only indirectly connected to Christian piety.[41] In that sense, Puritanism paved the way for tinkerers like Franklin to examine nature without having to check his findings against biblical or church teaching. He may not have done so to the glory of God, as many Puritan members of the Royal Society had before him. But that was the point. Protestantism had freed large realms of human existence from pious scrupulosity, so that explaining thunderstorms was the purview not of theologians and pastors but of scientists.

Notes

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3. Mason Chamberlain, Portrait of Benjamin Franklin, 1762 at Philadelphia Museum of Art https://www.philamuseum.org/collections/permanent/56760.html accessed August 9, 2019.
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5. Philadelphia Museum of Art.
6. Robert Lawson, *Ben and Me* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Co., 1939), 7.
7. Weinberger, *Benjamin Franklin Unmasked: On the Unity of His Moral, Religious, and Political Thought* (Lawrence, KS: University of Kansas Press, 2005), xii–xiii.
8. Franklin's 1730 speech to the Junto on the providence of God, quoted in J. A. Leo Lemay, *The Life of Benjamin Franklin, Volume 1: Journalist, 1706–1730* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 2006), 348.
9. Lemay, *Life, Volume 1*, 341.

10. Franklin journal for September 30, 1726, quoted in J. A. Leo Lemay, *The Life of Benjamin Franklin, Volume 2: Printer and Publisher, 1730–1747* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006), 454.
11. Lemay, *Franklin, Volume 2*, 466–67.
12. Franklin on Dutch tiles from his works, quoted in Lemay, *Franklin, Volume 2*, 467.
13. Benjamin Franklin, *An Account of the New Invented Pennsylvanian Fire-Places* (1744), quoted in Lemay, *Franklin, Volume 2*, 469, 470.
14. Lemay, *Franklin, Volume 2*, 471.
15. Franklin to Mary Stevenson, September 1760, quoted in Lemay, *Franklin, Volume 2*, 474.
16. Jonathan Lyons, *The Society for Useful Knowledge: How Benjamin Franklin and Friends Brought the Enlightenment to America* (New York: Bloomsbury Press, 2013), 81.
17. Lyons, *Society*, 82.
18. J. A. Leo Lemay, *The Life of Benjamin Franklin, Volume 3: Soldier, Scientist, and Politician, 1748–1757* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006), 69.
19. Lemay, *The Life, Volume 3*, 105.
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22. Franklin on electricity, quoted in May, *Enlightenment*, 129.
23. Meredith Hindley, "Mapping the Republic of Letters," *Humanities*, Dec. 2013 at https://www.neh.gov/humanities/2013/novemberdecember/feature/mapping-the-republic-letters accessed August 9, 2019.
24. See, Caroline Winterer, "Where is America in the Republic of Letters," *Modern Intellectual History* 9.3 (2012), 597–623.
25. This paragraph summaries Hindley, "Mapping."
26. Winterer, "Where is America," 608.
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28. See Winterer, "Where is America," 608–611.
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30. Philip Benedict, *Christ's Churches Purely Reformed: A Social History of Calvinism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), 36.

31. On Calvin's corr espondence networks, see Benedict, *Christ's Churches*, 110–112.
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33. Hindley, "Mapping."
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35. Mather, quoted in Lemay, *Franklin, Volume 3*, 120.
36. *Poor Richard* for 1751, quoted in Lemay, *Franklin, Volume 3*, 125.
37. Quotations from Lemay, *Franklin, Volume 3*, 121.
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41. Morgan, "Puritan Thesis," 60.

9
Pennsylvania's Protestant Politics

Franklin had been active in Philadelphia's social and political life during his days as a printer. In fact, almost from the start of his life in Pennsylvania's port city (1730), he worked as the colony's printer, a political appointment. By 1736 he was also clerk of the assembly. The next year he added another set of responsibilities that gave him access to politicians and their networks. Dissatisfaction with postal service in Philadelphia led Colonel Alexander Spotswood of Virginia, the British Postmaster General for the colonies, to replace Andrew Bradford with Franklin as Philadelphia's postmaster. As public spirited as the city's young printer was, Franklin also saw the economic advantage to this office. As he later wrote, being postmaster "facilitated the correspondence that improv'd my newspaper, increas'd the number demanded, as well as the advertisements to be inserted, so that it came to afford me a considerable income."[1]

Roughly a decade later, when Franklin retired from full-time printing, he had forged a host of relationships with Pennsylvania's political leaders and proved his indispensability to the city's well-being. This experience made his election to the city council a natural step and recognized both his natural talent, and knowledge of Philadelphia's political machinery. In rapid succession, he emerged as a fixture in Pennsylvania politics. In 1748, he became a member of Philadelphia's City Council, the next year he received an appointment as justice of the peace, and by 1751 he was a city alderman. The latter post made Franklin available to serve, which also occurred in 1751, as one of twenty-six members in Pennsylvania's Assembly. He used his new responsibilities to give his son access to Pennsylvania's politics by securing William's appointment as successor to his father as clerk of the Assembly. Meanwhile, Franklin threw himself into the affairs of the assembly and the city council. According to Gordon Wood, he

"served on every kind of committee," "drafted messages and responses to the governor," investigated the colony's expenses for native Americans, offered advice on bridges in Philadelphia, and even "regulated the number of dogs in the city."[2] Franklin was a tinkerer all the way down. At the same time, he became powerful not by drawing attention to himself. Franklin seldom spoke in the deliberative political bodies to which he belonged. He gained influence by his willingness to serve and sheer energy for work. By 1753, Franklin had become the leader of the Quaker party in the Pennsylvania Assembly.

Obviously, Franklin was not a Quaker and membership in a party of that name was not a formal, card-carrying reality but an indication of the partisan division that had emerged in Pennsylvania. William Penn originally had conceived of the colony as a "holy experiment," perhaps not with the baggage of John Winthrop's notion that Boston should be "a city on a hill," but still with the intent of putting Quaker beliefs—communal love, pacifism, equality, frugality—into practice. By the middle of the eighteenth century, however, the Penn family had drifted from Quakerism into Anglicanism, a form of Protestantism more congenial to those with aristocratic sensibilities. As a proprietary colony, the Penns also governed Pennsylvania without the sort of oversight that managed royal colonies. Proprietors owned all unsettled land and often pursued policies that increased their commercial interests rather than administering the colony as part of the commonwealth of British settlements. What drove Franklin to side with the Quakers instead of the Proprietors, aside from his own esteem for the British Empire, was the question of the Penns not paying their share of the colony's costs.

Posing political partisanship in Pennsylvania along the lines of religious affiliation should not imply that members of the assembly were devout, but religious allegiances did represent local interests that played out in the colony's partisan politics. According to one estimate of Carl and Jessica Bridenbaugh, Quakers constituted about twenty-five percent of Philadelphia's population but by the middle of the eighteenth century were in significant decline.[3] In contrast, Presbyterians, though divided between pro- and anti-awakening factions, were the strongest religious body in the city, even more so in 1758 when they buried the hatchet and reunited in one denomination. Anglicanism was growing in appeal and sometimes lured away Quakers (like

the Penns) and Presbyterians. As one of the British colonies that still made few demands for religious conformity in public officials (beyond a belief in the Trinity and an affirmation of the Bible), Pennsylvania was home to a number of German groups. Lutherans and Reformed had a presence in Philadelphia while they shared space with any number of German pietists and Protestant sectarians in the heartland west of the city. Meanwhile, the colony also attracted Baptists, Moravians, Roman Catholics, and Jews.

This diversity meant Franklin needed to rely on his considerable gifts for winning friends and influencing people to negotiate Pennsylvania's contested terrain. Throughout his political career before American independence, his own interest was to enhance the colony's economic prospects and create the political stability that commerce needed. Those interests drove Franklin to regard a royal government as far preferable to the seemingly arbitrary policies of the Penn family. But not even Franklin's focused pursuit of what seemed to be in the best interests of the entire colony could satisfy Pennsylvania's varied religious constituencies. Even if he could not please them all, Franklin showed almost no exasperation with what could have been dismissed as religious bigotry or sectarianism. He accepted the religious sensibilities that informed colonial politics as part of the air he breathed and refused to present himself as someone above the religious rabble.

Pennsylvania's Pious Partisan Divide

Almost twenty-five years after his arrival, Franklin knew Pennsylvania affairs well when he became a local politician. He also recognized his humble origins. For that reason, he may have experienced an internal conflict between his abilities to fix aspects of Pennsylvanian society and the differences between himself, as someone who had established his position as a tradesman, and the gentlemen who dominated the colony's politics. A window into his psychology may have come in a short piece he wrote for the *Gazette*, published in 1750, shortly after joining the Pennsylvania Assembly, about "Making Oneself a Disagreeable Companion." His first line in this four-point tongue-in-cheek advice about how to lose friends and alienate people said it all: "Your Business is to *Shine*: therefore you must by all means prevent the shining of others, for their Brightness may make yours the less

distinguish'd." From there proceeded tactics for contradicting opponents, even to the point of criticizing your adversary's grammar. If someone said something agreeable and sensible, "interrupt him; or draw away the Attention of others." Such antics will insure that "modest Men" will "chuse ever after to be silent in your Company." That way, you could have the entire floor to yourself "without Fear of a Rival."[4] Whether Franklin was mocking the tactics of his colleagues in the Assembly or indicating the sort of intimidation he experienced as a newcomer, the wit and common sense he exhibited was the product of his experience as an outsider.

One reason for Franklin's sense of alienation came in his very first rule for making oneself disagreeable, namely, "If possible. . . talk much of your-self, your Education, your Knowledge, your Circumstances, your Successes in Business, . . . your own wise Sayings and Observations."[5] According to historian Alan Tully, the structure of Pennsylvania's politics during the period when Franklin entered the Assembly relied on figures who were independent and virtuous. In many ways, Franklin qualified. His success as a printer provided the "economic independence" that was necessary for "political independence." Even wealth, however, was no guarantee of holding political office since in Pennsylvania "only a small percentage of the wealthiest men became office holders." Franklin's success as a businessman was his sole route to joining the ranks of Pennsylvania's politicians. Many of the most influential members of the Assembly were "independent countrymen" who exhibited a "country way of life" with large plantations and homes. The colony's leaders also tended to be leaders in church life, Anglicans, Presbyterians, and Quakers, who served as officers on parish vestries, church sessions, or administrators in local meetings. Such administrative experience was "another obvious means of judging capability for higher office."[6] Yet one more indication of social prominence was education. Despite the Quaker aversion to higher education, even in Pennsylvania people expected political figures to be well read in political literature and gifted in expression however simple. By these standards, Franklin was an odd fit since his wealth was recent, his way of life was urban, he belonged to no Protestant church, and his formal education was meager.

At the same time, true to his place in America's folklore, Franklin's rise to prominence owed to more than prosperity. He also needed to

acquire the attributes of a gentlemen, hence his first portrait. (See Chapter 8, above.) He had, after all, become sufficiently wealthy to retire from business at the age of forty-two. In addition, he had plenty of administrative experience through running his own business, observing the Assembly's affairs as clerk, organizing various civic associations and cultural institutions, and serving as postmaster. His contributions to local churches, his cooperation with George Whitefield, and his friendliness to local clergy gave him a reputation at least of being friendly to religious people and their institutions. Despite lacking a formal education, Franklin was clearly one of the leading intellects in Pennsylvania as a writer, editor, publisher, and serious reader even before his fame as a scientist. The only real difference between him and some of Pennsylvania's political elites, by this set of attributes, was the divide between town and country life.

Franklin harbored a keen sense, at least until his retirement, that his journeyman status made him different from his betters in Philadelphia society. As late as 1747 in the pamphlet, *Plain Truth: Or, Serious Considerations on the Present State of Philadelphia and the Province of Pennsylvania*, Franklin self-identified as a tradesman, linked to "the middling People, the Farmers, Shopkeepers" whom "those Great and rich Men" ignored by not assuming responsibility for defense of the city.[7] When the men whom he organized for the militia chose Franklin to be colonel, he declined because he felt "unfit" and recommended Thomas Lawrence, "a Man of Influence." By retiring from the print shop in 1748, Gordon Wood argues, Franklin could live a life of leisure which was one sure way of raising his social status. The shift came not only with retirement but also during his efforts organize a militia. Franklin came to realize that men still engaged in trades did not have the time or outlook for works of public service. Free from having to work for money, Franklin determined to enter the ranks of "the better Sort of People." He knew he would need to do more than have money. Franklin taught himself "enough Latin, French, Italian, Spanish, and German" to read what he needed to know. He also moved into a larger home in a quieter part of the city (Sassafras [Race] and Second Streets) and purchased several slaves to support him in his new surroundings. Franklin may have betrayed his formerly egalitarian outlook when he created a family coat of arms and used it as a seal for his correspondence. The gentleman Franklin came

complete with a portrait that he commissioned from Robert Feke. As Wood observes, although Franklin's attire in the painting is not as formal as other portraits from the era of Pennsylvania's elites, the subject still "stands in an aristocratic pose, stiff and mannered and wearing a dark green velvet coat and tightly curled brown wig." His right arm, extended down with a hand poised to gesture a command, revealed "the frilled ruffle of his silk sleeve."[8] Whether the portrait was aspirational or a statement of status, Franklin's work in the Assembly (and beyond) would soon tell.

Although Franklin's success may have foreshadowed the social mobility that became a feature of the American Dream, his status as a gentlemen could not overcome another important divide—namely, the partisan division between the Quaker and Proprietary political alliances. Franklin was part of a demographic shift that transformed Pennsylvania politics. When he arrived in Philadelphia, the colony had roughly 40,000 settlers, 9,000 in Philadelphia. By the time he became an assemblyman, the colony had mushroomed to a population of 150,000 while Philadelphia had 16,000 residents. He was of English stock and so fit relatively easily into a society dominated by Quakers no matter how different their religion was from Boston's Puritanism. Because of the religious freedom that William Penn instituted, Pennsylvania also attracted Europeans fleeing economic and religious opposition. Sixty percent of the population in 1726 was English or Welsh. The next largest groups were German (twenty-three percent) and Scots-Irish (twelve percent). By 1755 Pennsylvania's demographics had dramatically changed. During the three decades after Franklin took up residence in Philadelphia, roughly 40,000 German-speaking immigrants arrived, followed by almost 30,000 Scots-Irish. Germans became the largest minority group with roughly forty percent of the population. Meanwhile, the English and Welsh taken together had dropped to thirty percent. These additions also changed church life. Presbyterians comprised the largest denomination at almost twenty-five percent of the population—organizing churches and calling ministers would be another matter. The sizeable number of German-speaking Pennsylvanians came from either Lutheran or Reformed backgrounds and together constituted almost forty percent of the colony's Christians. Aside from the Quaker founders of the colony, the religious scene resembled a virtual Yellow

Pages of denominationalism in the United States—Mennonites, Anglicans, Baptists, Dutch Reformed, Swedish Lutherans, Moravians, Socians, Schwenkfelders, Old Dunkers, New Dunkers, Ephrathites, and independents. The religious practices of Pennsylvania's residents meant that churches, along with political parties and economic relations, "constituted the most readily recognizable basis of community structure."[9]

Political parties, however, did not always correspond to the colony's religious diversity. Pennsylvania's ruling cohort primarily broke down into two groups. One had its roots in the colony's Quaker founding, coreligionists who generally intermarried, participated in their own organizations, and dominated political offices in the city and colony. The other group was much harder to identify by any single demographic marker. It was, according to Tully, a "loose confederacy of individuals and families" who held positions in the Provincial Council and Philadelphia Corporation. These officials tended to support and identify with Pennsylvania's chief executive over against the legislature (heavily Quaker). Most members of this ill-defined set of political interests tended to be Anglican and Presbyterian and regarded themselves as "true representatives of English culture." Quakers did not measure up because they had no background in a religious establishment such as the Church of England or Church of Scotland. The religious divide in Pennsylvania was by no means rigid if only because those outside the Quaker party included members of the Masonic lodge and Philadelphia's Dancing Assembly. At the same time, the nature of colonial social life drew leading Presbyterians, Anglicans, and Quakers into cooperative enterprises, and even into mixed marriages. Instead of parties, a better way of describing the situation is "oppositional clusters."[10] What clarified opposition was access to power. The Pennsylvania Assembly was the most powerful political institution in the colony and bodies such as the Provincial Council were mainly advisory in nature. If Pennsylvanians without ties to the Quakers wanted a voice in colonial politics, their most likely option was the Proprietary party which still held the colony's charter and had powers equivalent to an executive branch of government.

According to the colony's demographics, Franklin should have found a more congenial outlet with the Proprietary side of Pennsylvania's politics. He was, obviously, not Quaker—sometimes self-identified as

Presbyterian—was a defender of English traditions, and was, as clerk of the Assembly, a first-hand observer of the body's ineffectiveness. And yet, he landed in office at a time when he could not identify with either side (nor is it the case that the parties demanded partisan loyalty). Franklin was already wary of Quaker leadership thanks to the very practical matter of self-defense. As pacifists, who also sympathized with native Americans, Quakers were not inclined to raise the militia that Franklin and others knew Pennsylvania needed. That is why he in 1747 he took the lead in forming a Militia Association, complete with close to 10,000 armed men and funds to purchase cannons and build batteries. At the same time, the colony's proprietors, the Penn family, regarded Franklin's voluntary militia with alarm. For Thomas Penn, Franklin's militia was almost the equivalent of "Treason." If the people take initiative "independent of this Government, why should they not Act against it," Penn wondered. He called Franklin a "dangerous Man." "I should be very Glad [if] he inhabited any other country," Penn added, "as I believe him of a very uneasy Spirit."[11] The proprietor also knew that Franklin was "a sort of Tribune of the People" and needed to be treated judiciously. Penn's perception of Franklin was indicative of a lifelong hostility between them. In the balance of colonial affairs, however, Franklin did not have an obvious choice in the rivalry between Quakers and Proprietors.

Good reasons abounded for Franklin's challenge to find a comfortable space in Pennsylvania politics. One was British ambivalence about non-British peoples either within the colony or on its margins. The Germans were a specific group that frustrated Franklin's endeavors. Despite business dealings that enabled him to add a German newspaper to his list of clients when starting out in Philadelphia, Franklin had failed to enlist a sizeable portion of Pennsylvania Germans for his voluntary militia. The Lutherans and Reformed shared much more of Franklin's understanding of the relationships between church and state—especially the legitimate use of force by the state as well as Christians serving as either magistrates or soldiers. But the colony's religious freedom also opened the interior—the counties to the west of Philadelphia—to a host of German pietistic Protestants who tended toward anti-authoritarianism and shared the Quakers' pacifism. In his 1751 pamphlet, *Observations Concerning the Increase of Mankind*, not published until 1754, Franklin wrote chiefly

to object to imperial policy about business improvements in the colonies. He also took a few swipes at Pennsylvania's Germans. "Why should Pennsylvania," he lamented, "founded by the English, become a colony of *Aliens*, who will shortly be so numerous as to Germanize us instead of our Anglifying them and will never adopt our Language or Customs?"[12] In a letter written about the same time, Franklin supported a proposal for encouraging future German settlements in other colonies because at election time "now they come in droves, and carry all before them, except in one or two Counties."[13]

The Quaker-German coalition was in fact responsible for Franklin's courting the Proprietary party. Some of this maneuvering also included cooperating with William Smith, the Anglican priest who had gummed up Franklin's works for an academy in the city. Smith had approached Thomas Penn to establish schools for Germans that would basically teach them English in hopes of assimilating them in a British colony. Some of this endeavor included playing Germans off Germans, especially Lutheran (like Henry Melchior Muehlenberg) and Reformed (like Michael Schlatter) pastors against the pietistic and pacifist German sects. Franklin was privy to these plans and served on a general board of trustees along with other leading members of the Proprietary party to administer the schools and funding. When Christopher Sauer, a printer and leader in German Anabaptist circles, sensed the motives behind the schools and established a newspaper to counter Smith's plan, Franklin supported a rival German-language newspaper. Both the newspaper and the school proposal "wrecked upon the rock of German solidarity."[14] Even so, the problems posed by German immigrants prompted Franklin initially to side at times with the party opposed to the Quakers.

Pennsylvania's dealings with Native Americans were another example of differences between Quakers and the Proprietary party. Both the Penns and the Assembly desired westward expansion. Such territorial growth required negotiation in some form with Indians. The Penns generally desired to see the western lands settled and to receive payment, even if it meant seizing Native American land. The Quakers also favored expansion, but preferred to barter for acquisitions. As Franklin served in the Assembly, he realized that the Proprietors received practically all the financial benefit from the western settlements—payment for property—but that the burden of paying

Indian expenses fell entirely to the Assembly. His own scheme for addressing the situation was one that endeared him neither to the Quakers nor the Proprietors. Franklin conceived of an imperial project for Indian affairs that united the colonies behind a governor, appointed by the Crown, who would manage relations with Native Americans. The aim was two-fold—to win the friendship of the Indians and form a united front against the French who also laid claim to Native American lands. These plans took Franklin to Carlisle in 1753 with leaders from the Quaker and Proprietary parties to negotiate with Native Americans and then in 1754 to Albany to devise an inter-colonial treaty with the Indians. Both plans failed. In fact, the Albany Congress coincided with attempts by British authorities to regulate colonial affairs and the colonists' jealous reaction to preserve their legislatures' independence. For Franklin, being present at these negotiations raised his visibility. He became acquainted with leaders in other colonies with whom he would interact in the tumult of American independence. Thanks to his scientific fame and now to his political usefulness, Franklin was becoming "one of the best-known persons in colonial America."[15]

The former printer may have gained greater political standing, but the fundamental divide between Proprietors and Quakers remained. While Franklin was away in Albany, the start of hostilities that would result in the French and Indian War (1756–1763) had taken their toll on the British military and Pennsylvania's politics. When George Washington surrendered Fort Necessary to the French in 1754, the Pennsylvania Assembly adopted a measure to pay for defense. In opposition was Governor Robert Morris who was under strict orders from Thomas Penn that the governor needed to concur with any spending. During the delicate maneuvering between legislature and executive, the Anglican priest, William Smith, now head of the Academy, further alienated the Proprietors from the Assembly in a pamphlet that heaped scorn on the Quakers and their German electoral base—an "extremely ignorant" people who "think a Farm the greatest Blessing in Life."[16] Meanwhile, Penn persuaded Major General Edward Braddock to commandeer an expeditionary force in the colonies to provide the needed defense.

The commander's arrival further escalated political conflict over financing the military. Who would pay: the Proprietors or the

Assembly? After failing to receive adequate resources, Braddock complained to the Assembly, which in turn sent a commission, including Franklin, to meet with the General in Virginia. The retired printer explained colonial politics—that governors, royal or proprietary, could not dictate to assemblies—and that Pennsylvania would send support. Braddock was indignant when only a small percentage of the provisions arrived, but Franklin reassured him that if he traveled to Pennsylvania he would find what he needed—food, horses, and wagons. In Wrights's Ferry (Pennsylvania), with help from chief justice, William Allen, a Presbyterian, Franklin orchestrated voluntary donations from German farmers that supported Braddock's force. The Assembly's willingness to back the military, along with Braddock's demands, was a turning point in Pennsylvania's politics. Now that Quakers looked serious about colonial defense, other Protestants—Presbyterians, Lutherans, Reformed, Moravians—and Franklin "accepted Quaker leadership to defy prerogative rule as imposed by a Proprietary lord." At the same time, Quakers looked to Franklin "as their champion."[17]

General Braddock's forces lost in skirmishes with Indians during the summer of 1755 and by the fall the natives were raiding Pennsylvania's frontier (leading to 317 deaths and 103 prisoners). The sense of alarm only escalated political partisanship. William Smith wrote a plea to the Crown that attacked the Assembly and sought to disqualify Quakers from holding office. The pacifism of radical English Protestants was not nearly as pressing as the need to defend colonists. The Assembly raised funds to pay for arming the colonists in the West but the colony also needed an organized militia. After debating whether to use British rule for military discipline and proper commissioning of officers, Governor Morris finally formed a militia and Franklin, after receiving a majority of votes, became the colonel, with the official blessing of a commission from the governor. Franklin was almost at the peak of his political power when he led a parade of his mustered troops through the heart of Philadelphia to challenge an anti-militia Association that Smith was gathering at the Academy. As Francis Jennings writes of this "strange and fascinating picture": a "bespectacled and bald, middle-aged, fat philosopher astride a probably rather stately horse and leading a wobbly column of untrained, ununiformed, enthusiastic, nonacademic youth to besiege the College

he had founded and of which he was still president."[18] His work as commander took him to the Lehigh Gap (north of Allentown on the Lehigh River), where he led the construction of stockades. According to Walter Isaacson, one of Franklin's cleverest accomplishments with his troops was to encourage soldiers to attend worship services. "Never were prayers more generally and punctually attended," Franklin later recalled, when the chaplain dispensed the daily allotment of rum after worship.[19]

After seven weeks on the frontier, Franklin returned to Philadelphia where disputes between the Proprietors and Quaker party took a different turn. His duties as postmaster took him to Virginia. During that trip Pennsylvania received a new governor, William Denny. The appointment by the Penn family raised hopes for better relations between the governor and the Assembly—Denny solicited Franklin's support—but leaders loyal to the Proprietors began to turn up the heat against the Quakers. Franklin felt this especially in his responsibilities as president of the academy where the Proprietors' secretary, Richard Peters, along with the provost, William Smith, plotted to remove Franklin from leadership at the school. Meanwhile, Denny proved to be just as much an obstacle to the Assembly's efforts to raise funds as his predecessor. Denny refused to approve taxes on proprietary lands. That opposition prompted the Assembly to send Franklin to London as its representative. His mission was to persuade the Penns to assist the Assembly in financing the colony. If that failed, Franklin was authorized to take Pennsylvania's case to the British authorities.

London, 1757–1762

Franklin's return to London lasted longer than the colonial diplomat expected. He had planned to be in the capital city for five months but that turned into five years. The extended stay was not simply the result of hard and constant negotiations with the Penns. Franklin "fell so in love with Britain," Wood observes, that "he eventually found it difficult to contemplate going back to America." He arrived with his son, William, and two slaves. Franklin found quarters with a middle-aged widow, Margaret Stevenson, whose daughter, Polly, became another of Ben's flirtatious dalliances. (See Chapter 5, above.) Unlike when he visited in 1725 and mingled on the periphery of London's

café intellectuals, this time Franklin was a renowned man of science and had immediate access to his British peers. As the largest city in the world, London aroused Franklin's affection for urban life. He saw how far deficient Philadelphia was, or, in Wood's words, "how limited and parochial life was in the distant colonies."[20] The five-year trip included travels around England as well as visit to Scotland where Franklin met David Hume and Lord Kames (Henry Home). Franklin received an honorary doctorate from the University of St. Andrews for "ingenious inventions and successful experiments." The university's citation also praised Franklin's "rectitude of . . . morals and sweetness of . . . life and conversation."[21]

Despite renewing old friendships and making new ones, Franklin still had the work of Pennsylvania to do. Here he could not escape the provincialism of the colony's partisan politics. Franklin met with Thomas and Richard Penn, the chief proprietors, only one month after arriving. The talks started cordially. The Penns then asked Franklin for a written statement of the Assembly's chief concern, which the Philadelphian produced in a couple of days. The "Heads of Complaint" was pithy and pointed. The three-point statement called attention to the Proprietors' interference with the Assembly's ability to raise funds for defense of the colony by "Instructions that injoin the [governor] to refuse his Assent to any Bill for Raising Money." Franklin conceded that the Proprietors' powers as determined in Pennsylvania's royal charter were "reasonable and necessary." But their distance from the scene imposed artificial restraints on the colony and reduced the people "to the Necessity of either losing the Country to the Enemy, or giving up the Liberties of the People." Aside from the question of which body, the Assembly or the governor, had the power to raise taxes, the Complaint also faulted the Proprietors for exempting their own lands from taxes, a policy that was "unjust and cruel."[22] Because Franklin did not address the Penns as the "True and Absolute Proprietaries," they felt snubbed and informed him to direct all future communications to their lawyer.[23]

That instruction did not prevent more meetings between Franklin and Penn, about four months after the initial encounter. Here, Franklin broadened his argument to liken the Assembly to Britain's Parliament which had the power of the purse. He also insisted that this was William Penn's own understanding of the Assembly's authority in the

1701 "Charter of Privileges" he granted to Pennsylvanians. Penn replied that if his father had specified such privileges, he was wrong because the royal charter to him did not permit such power. Franklin countered that many had settled in the colony under deceptive premises, even "cheated and betrayed." Penn was not sympathetic. If colonists came under false pretenses, "it was their own fault." Franklin's fury was evident in a letter about the incident sent to the Speaker of Pennsylvania's Assembly, Isaac Norris. Thomas Penn carried on "with a kind of triumphing, laughing insolence, such as a low jockey might do when a purchaser complained that he had cheated him in a horse." Franklin confessed that he had never experienced a "more cordial and thorough contempt" for Penn as he had "ever before felt for any man living."[24]

The upside of the meeting was that Franklin had four more years in England to cool off, but the standoff between the Assembly and the Proprietors was set. For Penn, the encounter with Franklin made future negotiations pointless. He referred to Franklin as a "malicious villain" and vowed not to "have any conversation with him on any pretense." This was not a promising start to Franklin's diplomatic career. Penn eventually responded to Franklin's "Complaint," but only through his attorney, Ferdinand Paris, and sent the reply directly to the colony's Assembly. Penn refused to budge on the right to make laws in Pennsylvania. This power belonged to the Proprietors and was inviolable. But Penn opened the possibility of the Assembly taxing the Proprietors' lands." He was willing to consider some funding for the colony based on what part of the Proprietors' estate was "in its nature taxable."[25] Paris also informed Franklin in person that all negotiations between the Assembly's representative and the Proprietors was at "a final end."

Franklin offered to the Speaker of the Assembly, Norris, to resign his post. Isaacson regards this as a half-hearted gesture. And for the purposes of his trip to England, it turned out to be. Instead of resigning and returning to Philadelphia, Franklin persisted on his mission and doubled-down his efforts against the Penns. He appealed to London authorities on several matters against the Penns. It was a way to go around the colony's chain of command that foreshadowed the colonies' efforts before the War for Independence. Franklin also explored ways to turn Pennsylvania from a proprietary into a royal

colony. He was an inveterate royalist and believed the colony's prospects were better under the king's rule. Edmund Morgan, another biographer, argues that Franklin's royalism reflected "political blindness."[26] So obsessed had Franklin become with the Penns' prerogatives that he did not recognize his desire for a royal colony was a waste of time.

Franklin's opposition to the Proprietors did clarify his political allegiance. He finally identified entirely with the Quaker Party. Alan Tully, even argues that Franklin's political strategies before 1765 mirrored Quakerism's "singular" political culture. Tully explains that Franklin embodied the Quakers' understanding of toleration, economic and monetary policy, and even their commitment to peace and avoidance of war (which included respect for treaties with Native Americans). Of course, the Quakers had to adjust their pacifist ideals when settlers in the west needed military protection. In 1747 the Quakers were unwilling to make such accommodation to war's exigencies. By 1756, however, the Assembly had supported Franklin's plan to create a militia. Beyond the realities of defense, Tully sees in Franklin the major themes of Quaker politics:

> guarding Pennsylvania's unique constitution; defending and extending the Assembly's powers and privileges; reinforcing the conflation of "the people" and the Assembly; dismissing the governors as agents of private interests; . . . that popular institutions were, by default, the government; advocating toleration in its multiple manifestations, such as respect for affirmations, peace testimonies, or a non-coercive militia; calling up visions of "Vassalage," vivid memories of lordly European tyranny. . .[27]

Whether such an interpretation makes sense of Franklin's politics during the debates over American independence or of other strands of English dissenting Protestantism (such as Puritanism and Presbyterianism) is a question that Tully does not address. When he locates Franklin's "Republican disposition" in the radicalism that the English Civil War unleashed, Tully implies a political spectrum of English Protestantism that included Puritans and Quakers, though at different points. What makes even more sense of a political alliance among Puritans, Quakers, and Presbyterians is Tully's recognition that the Friends in Pennsylvania were less orthodox, more Americanized, than

the Quakers Franklin encountered during his five-year stay in London, some of whom took issue with Pennsylvania's militia.

Either way, Franklin the skeptic, the deist, the undogmatic thinker did not refuse political alliances based on his lack of church membership. Some historians even attribute his emergence as a leader in colonial affairs to his ability to appropriate and work with the believers that predominated within the British colonies.

The Impasse of Protestant Politics

Whether or not the Assembly's politics approximated Quaker beliefs closely, Franklin's own place in the trans-Atlantic world was never far from the faith in which his parents reared him. During his trip to England, Franklin showed signs that he had not outgrown his Puritan past. For instance, at one dinner party in Scotland hosted by the physician, Sir Alexander Dick, Franklin regaled guests with a parable based on the Old Testament Abraham narratives. His intent was to show the folly of Abraham refusing to care for an old man, after providing for him for several days, once the patriarch learned that the visitor did not believe in Abraham's God. Franklin attributed to God in the parable this line, "Have I borne with him these hundred ninety and eight year, and nourished him, and clothed him, notwithstanding his rebellion against me" and now Abraham cannot "bear with [a sinner] one night?"[28] The disparity between harmonious human relations and religious zeal was hardly a new thought for Franklin. He could not accept the hypocrisy of orthodox partisans that he had observed as a child. During his stay in England, he also visited the town of Ecton where his ancestors had lived. He discovered two hundred years' worth of family records documenting births, marriages, and deaths. Franklin wrote to Deborah with excitement after concluding that he had inherited many of the traits of his uncle Thomas, who was a tinkerer and social organizer. He had developed a subscription service to pay for adding chimes to the church steeple. Thomas had also instituted an easy method for saving the village meadows from "being drowned" which was still in place. And like Franklin, the uncle was a font of "advice and opinion" to all "sorts of people" on "all occasions."[29] When it came to practical know-how,

the nephew had no trouble identifying with the practicality of his Puritan ancestors.

In fact, though not a professing Quaker, or any kind of Protestant for that matter, Franklin shared the hopes and fears of his fellow Protestants in colonial America. One obvious concern was the apparently arbitrary rule of the colony's Proprietors through their governors. Historians have long debated the nature of Franklin's political philosophy. Several have noted that the man was as hard to pin down on politics as he was on any contentious matter thanks to his pragmatism and caution. Even so, a sizeable contingent of scholars recognize Franklin's political instincts as basically Whig—that is, supporting the rights of representative legislators (parliament) as a check on the arbitrary rule of an executive (monarch). In seventeenth-century England the Whig party's battle against the Stuart monarchy had great affinity with the social interests of many Protestants—especially Puritans and Presbyterians. Within the context of Pennsylvania politics, Franklin's Whig inclinations were readily apparent in his preference for the Quaker-dominated Assembly over the (at times) despotic rule of the Penn family. For Isaacson, this impulse reflected Franklin's "inbred aversion to powerful establishments and idle elites."[30] Of course, what throws off attempts to classify Franklin as simply a Whig political philosopher was his desire to make Pennsylvania a royal colony. According to Wood, Franklin was a partisan royalist who also loved England and enthused over the benefits of being part of the British Empire.

Either way, the chief aim of Franklin's political involvement during the 1750s and his trip to London was to give the Pennsylvania Assembly the power it needed to raise taxes and to develop a militia to provide adequate security on the frontier. The edge of civilization was not far from the settled neighborhoods of Philadelphia as residents discovered in December of 1763, a mere ten months after Franklin's return to America. Despite the end of the French and Indian War, hostilities between Native Americans and settlers persisted and backwoodsman in Paxton (just east of Harrisburg) conducted executions of natives in two separate incursions (these Indians had converted to Christianity and were peaceful). The aggressors, known as the Paxton Boys, planned to march to Philadelphia where the city harbored another 140 more peaceful Indians. The demands

of Scotch-Irish Paxtons reignited the religious partisanship of Pennsylvania's politics. Presbyterians in Philadelphia supported their kinsmen on the frontier and added sympathetic Lutherans to their number. In opposition were Philadelphia's Quakers who were mainly pacifist and wanted to maintain good relations with natives for commercial and humanitarian reasons. An outlying factor was the motivation of the colony's new governor, John Penn, a nephew of the Proprietor, Thomas Penn. The historian, Francis Jennings, opines that the governor may have instigated the Paxtons' assault to divide support for Pennsylvania's Assembly.

Into this charged situation that seemed to pit both the governor and Assembly (united for once) against Protestants in the West and their coreligionists in the city, Franklin wrote a lengthy pamphlet to calm the situation and call on the Europeans' better angels. Unlike his argument for a militia almost fifteen years earlier, *Plain Truth*, Franklin's *A Narrative of the Late Massacres* (1764) called for cool heads and Christian love to save the lives of native Americans and avoid civil war among the settlers. In both cases, Franklin showed a willingness to identify as a Christian and rally fellow colonists to his side. The heart of his pamphlet was that Christians should be as good as they claim to be. At the same time, Franklin, in a manner unusual for him, directly targeted the injustice of racism. "If an Indian injures me, does it follow that I may revenge that Injury on all Indians?" The diversity of native Americans was simply as well known as the variety of European settlers. "In Europe, if the French, who are White-People," he asked, "should injure the Dutch, are they to revenge it on the English, because they too are White People?"[31]

Still, the greater enormity was the one between Christian profession and savage brutality: "it seems the Paxtons think" that because they have "the Word of God" they can disregard prohibitions against murder by invoking "the Command given Joshua to destroy the Heathen." This was simply a "Horrid Perversion of Scripture." Just as egregious was Christians murdering Christians:

> One Hundred and Forty peaceable Indians yet remain in this Government. They have, by Christian Missionaries, been brought over to a Liking, at least, of our Religion; some of them lately left their Nation which is now at War with us, because they did not chuse to join with

> them in their Depredations; and to shew their Confidence in us, and to give us an equal Confidence in them, they have brought and put into our Hands their Wives and Children.

The frontier people called themselves "Christian" but the native population would have been safer with "Heathens, Turks, Saracens, Moors, Negroes, and Indians."[32]

A Narrative of the Late Massacres did not singlehandedly end the unrest, nor did it secure justice for the loss of innocent life, but it may have convinced the governor to negotiate with the Paxtons instead of ordering an attack to stop their march on Philadelphia. Franklin was part of the Pennsylvania's delegation to meet with the insurgents. That meeting in early February 1764 calmed the situation. But it also allowed the older battle between the governor and Assembly to resurface when the governor seized on the political advantage the controversy opened. Instead of holding the Paxtons accountable for the natives' deaths, Penn met with the frontiersmen privately and agreed not to press charges. Franklin was incredulous. The concession brought "him and his government into sudden contempt." In fact, all hopes for "a Proprietary government are at an end."[33] Penn was equally displeased with Franklin and called him a "villain" who spread "the poison of . . . inveterate malice and ill nature."

For Franklin this was the last straw. From now on his aim was to replace the Proprietors with a royal government. In March of 1764, Franklin managed to steer through the Assembly twenty-six resolutions that called for the end of the Penns' ownership of the colony and the transfer of Pennsylvania to a royal charter. Petitions also circulated among the citizens where Franklin began to lose his feel for the populace; his petition received 3,500 signatures and his opponents found 15,000 people who agreed. Franklin produced a pamphlet to change minds. In *Cool Thoughts on the Present Situation*, he laid out his case for a royal charter that showed his principal attachment to increasing the power of the legislature. To be sure, that change in the government might involve the establishment of an Anglican bishop in the colonies and the creation of a standing army, though Franklin thought these developments could also arise under a proprietary constitution. The real issue was the best way to keep selfish human nature in check. The cause of Pennsylvania's controversy, he

wrote, included both "the Depravity" of "human Minds" and the colony's constitution. A proprietary government inherently established procedures in land and rent transactions that gave the governor arbitrary power and that provoked resentment in citizens. The solution, then, was to change the executive power from the proprietors' governor to the Crown. Instead of "self-interested Proprietaries, a gracious King! His Majesty who has no Views but for the Good of the People will thenceforth appoint the Governor, who, unshackled by Proprietary Instructions, will be at Liberty to join with the Assembly in enacting wholesome Laws."[34]

Franklin's support remained with the Quakers, but Pennsylvania's religious diversity tested the limits of effective colonial government. When in *Cool Thoughts* Franklin wrote that "Religion has happily nothing to do with our present differences," he had a point. At the same time, he had to admit that "great pains is taken to lug [religion] into the squabble." As the future years of American independence would reveal, the major concern for colonial governments was the old Whig one of an arbitrary government—whether Parliament or the Crown—failing to recognize the rights of British colonists. That was at one level a simply a political calculation, but it also relied on the sorts of assumptions that English Protestants had developed during the outworking of the Reformation's political structures. Franklin's alliance with the Quakers reflected his own experiences in Pennsylvania just as his case for a royal charter was not an expression of political theory but an attempt however desperate to shore up the body best equipped to govern affairs at home. Still, the Protestant identities and alliances that informed colonial struggles were realities that Franklin could not avoid and that he negotiated remarkably successfully for a man without a church home.

Notes

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3. Carl Bridenbaugh and Jessica Bridenbaugh, *Rebels and Gentlemen: Philadelphia in the Age of Franklin* (Philadelphia: Reynal & Hitchcock, 1942), 17–19.

4. Benjamin Franklin, "Rules for Making Oneself a Disagreeable Companion," in J. A. Leo Lemay, ed., *Franklin: Essays, Articles, Bagatelles, and Letters, Poor Richard's Almanack, Autobiography* (New York: Library of America, 1987), 346, 347.
5. Franklin, "Rules," 347.
6. Alan Tully, *William Penn's Legacy: Politics and Social Structure in Provincial Pennsylvania, 1726–1755* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977), 82, 83.
7. "Plain Truth, 17 November 1747," Founders Online, National Archives, accessed August 12, 2019, https://founders.archi ves.gov/documents/Franklin/01-03-02-0091.
8. Wood, *Americanization*, 56, 57–58.
9. Tully, *Penn's Legacy*, 60; Tully also supplies useful material on Pennsylvania's Protestant diversity.
10. Tully, *Penn's Legacy*, 80, 82.
11. Thomas Penn to Richard Peters, Ma rch 9, 1748, quoted in Wood, *Americanization*, 69.
12. "Observations Concerning the Increase of Mankind, Peopling of Countries, &c.," in Lemay, ed., *Franklin: Essays*, 373.
13. Franklin to Peter Collinson, May 9, 1753, quoted in Francis Jennings, *Benjamin Franklin, Politician: The Mask and the Man* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1996), 75.
14. Jennings, *Benjamin Franklin*, 79.
15. J. A. Leo Lemay, *The Life of Benjamin Franklin, Volume 3: Soldier, Scientist, and Politician, 1748–1757* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006), 388.
16. Smith, *A Brief State of the Province of Pennsylvania* (1754), quoted in Jennings, *Benjamin Franklin*, 99.
17. Jennings, *Benjamin Franklin*, 105, 109.
18. Jennings, *Benjamin Franklin*, 136.
19. Franklin, *Autobiography*.
20. Wood, *Americanization*, 84, 85.
21. "The University of St. Andrews: Degree of Doctor of Laws," St. Andrews, February 12, 1759, quoted in Walter Isaacson, *Benjamin Franklin: An American Life* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2004), 198.
22. "From Benjamin Franklin to the Proprietors: Heads of Complaint, 20 August 1757," Founders Online, National Archives, accessed August 12, 2019, https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Franklin/01-07-02-0111.

23. Isaacson, *Franklin*, 185.
24. Quotation from the exchange between Franklin and Penn come from Isaacson, *Franklin*, 184, 185.
25. Isaacson, *Franklin*, 186, 192.
26. Edmund S. Morgan, *Benjamin Franklin* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), 130.
27. Alan Tully, "Benjamin Franklin and Pennsylvania Politics," in David Waldstreicher, ed., *A Companion to Benjamin Franklin* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), 124.
28. Benjamin Franklin, "A Parable against Persecution, Chap. XXVIII," in Lemay, ed. , *Franklin: Essays*, 421.
29. Franklin to Deborah Franklin, September 7, 1758, quoted in Isaacson, *Franklin*, 190.
30. Isaacson, *Franklin*, 180.
31. Benjamin Franklin, "A Narrative of the Late Massacres, [30 January? 1764]," Founders Online, National Archive s, accessed August 12, 2019, https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Franklin/01-11-02-0012.
32. Franklin, "A Narrative."
33. Franklin to John Fothergill, March 12, 1764, quoted in Isaacson, *Franklin*, 213.
34. Isaacson, *Franklin*.

10
An Empire Fit for God's Kingdom

Franklin's ideas about a royal charter for Pennsylvania have vexed historians, but they perplexed fellow colonists even more. Although he was instrumental in the colony's legislators' approval of resolutions to end the Penns' control of Pennsylvania, in the 1764 cycle of elections for the Assembly Franklin's notions about the value of a royal charter received their comeuppance. The campaign by his foes to prevent his reelection was fierce and nasty. His opponents brought up Franklin's bastard son, William, and speculated that his mother was a "kitchen wench" named Barbara. To turn German voters against Franklin, his enemies resurrected his remarks about the inferiority and "swarthiness" of German settlers. Franklin's political antagonists even dredged up the older gentlemen's insatiable interest in, and accompanying flirtations with, younger women. One broadside cast his dalliances in verse:

> Franklin, though plagued with fumbling age,
> Needs nothing to excite him,
> But is too ready to engage,
> When younger arms invite him.[1]

Since Franklin's petition against the Proprietors in the spring had only received one-fifth the signatures that the opposing petition did, mudslinging likely had little do with the election's outcome. Either way, in the October vote, Franklin finished second to last among the fourteen candidates running for eight seats in the Assembly. Gordon Wood aptly writes that "Franklin was stunned by his defeat." The famous scientist and politically well-connected Philadelphian had "completely misjudged" fellow Pennsylvanians.[2] Despite his pursuit of moral perfection, pride always bedeviled him, which he conceded in his autobiography:

> there is, perhaps, no one of our natural passions so hard to subdue as *pride*. Disguise it, struggle with it, beat it down, stifle it, mortify it as much as one pleases, it is still alive, and will every now and then peep out and show itself; . . . even if I could conceive that I had completely overcome it, I should probably be proud of my humility.[3]

Although he lost his spot in the Assembly, Franklin's political allies still controlled the legislature. What remained of the Quaker Party voted by a majority of 19-11 to send Franklin back to London as a representative to protest the Proprietors' policies. Opposition to the proposal came fast and hard. John Dickinson, who would later write *Letters from a Farmer in Pennsylvania*, called Franklin "extremely disagreeable to a very great number" of Pennsylvania's "serious and reputable inhabitants." Chief Justice William Allen opposed the plan because Franklin was "the most unpopular and odious name in the province." Those dismissals could not change the vote. He sailed for England again in November of 1764 and 300 of Philadelphia's residents were on hand to celebrate his mission and sing "God Save the King."[4]

Franklin's plans were unclear. To some friends he said he would be gone only a few months. To others he let on that he might never return—"I am not to take leave (perhaps a last leave) of the country I love." As for the animosity from political rivals, he wrote, "I wish every kind of prosperity to my friends, and I forgive my enemies.[5] Still, he warned his daughter, Sally, that because he had many enemies who would magnify her "slightest indiscretions" to "wound and afflict" him, she needed to be "extremely circumspect in all [her] behavior that no advantage may be given to their malevolence."[6] The political mission was evenly divided between making Pennsylvania a royal colony and applying pressure on the Proprietors to make the desired reforms.

That uncertainty goes a long way to explain why a potentially short trip again turned into a decade long stay in England. This put Franklin at the front lines of British debates about the colonies at precisely the moment when colonists overwhelmingly resented British imperial policy. Through it all, Franklin was caught in the middle between patriots who resented every misstep by the British government and imperialists who increasingly viewed the colonies as a mere extension of Britain's global commercial and civilizational endeavor.

For the latter, the colonists' resistance was confirmation of the Americans' junior partnership in the Empire. Franklin's dilemma was caught between a recognition of the colonists' inherent worth—he had, after all, clawed his way up through the ranks of Philadelphia's society to the rank of a British gentleman—and his esteem for London and the glories of the British Empire. Several missteps and learning curves came painfully to Franklin between his efforts to secure a royal charter and his eventual diplomacy on behalf of a new nation. Through it all, Franklin remained loyal to the politics of Pennsylvania's Assembly even when his esteem for the Crown suggested a betrayal of popular sovereignty.

Whether he knew it or not, Franklin's diplomacy, first for Pennsylvania and then as an agent of the United States, ran in the same direction as colonial Protestants who themselves were seeking independence from mother churches in Europe. Establishing an Anglican church in North America that was not part of the Church of England, but an independent American denomination, may have been the most delicate of ecclesiastical diplomacy during the nations' founding. This was no less true for German Protestants in Pennsylvania, the Lutherans and Reformed, who were some of Franklin's most unreliable political allies. They too had difficult negotiations with European churches to establish autonomous branches of their respective Christian communions. Franklin had little time to monitor or contribute to those denominational proceedings. But he did help the Germans in a small way. After his service to the United States as one of its most gifted diplomats ended and as he neared the end of his life, his financial gift to a Lancaster college, an institution founded by German Protestants, was testimony to the ways that his national duties paralleled ecclesiastical changes in the new nation. Just as important was Franklin's commitment to harmony and the common good as the preferred course over against sectarianism. That pose ran parallel to Protestant churches in the new nation who were forging religious ties to overcome sectarian barriers and find common cause in national and international missions. In fact, Franklin's earlier regard for George Whitefield's non-denominational Protestantism became implicitly a model for Protestant ministry in the United States and Protestant foreign missions.

Reputation vs. Diplomacy

Franklin's wealth, fame on the international stage, and status should have made him more sympathetic to the Penn family than he was. By the time he arrived in London in 1765, he was at some remove from the commoners of Pennsylvania. Franklin had, of course, been operating in Philadelphia as a gentleman with access to power in ways he had not enjoyed for the first twenty years of his career. He had also lived in London for five years, identified with the imperial capital and many of its elites, enjoyed plaudits for his accomplishments, and possessed some status as an agent of one of the Empire's most successful provinces. Franklin's conception of his own standing was arguably closer to figures like the Penn family's Proprietors than it was to most of Pennsylvania's ordinary citizens. Yet, as a self-made man who also enjoyed the spotlight, Franklin could think more like a democrat than aristocrat. Indeed, when news of his arrival in London reached Philadelphia, people back home celebrated in the streets and drank to the success of the "tribune of the people."[7] The double-mindedness of Franklin's diplomatic persona caught up with him quickly as he sought to carry forward Pennsylvania's Assembly's appeal over the heads of the Penns to the Crown.

The political development that revealed Franklin's deafness to fellow colonists was the Stamp Act of 1765. This was the first tax passed by Parliament on the colonies' internal commerce (as opposed to duties enacted on trade through ports) and its design was to pay for the French and Indian War. It required that vendors place a tax stamp on every newspaper, book, almanac, legal document, and deck of cards. If Franklin had still been laboring in the print shop he would have known what his printing partner, David Hall, wrote to his colleague: "The spirit of the people is so violently against everyone they think has the least concern with the Stamp law."[8] Franklin, however, was several years removed from daily operations and also enjoying London as a figure of prominence. Reactions in the colonies to the tax was vehement and extensive. In most American port towns, colonists organized for protest and resistance, often under the banner of the Sons of Liberty. Participants came directly from the middling ranks of urban colonial society—shopkeepers, printers, master mechanics, small merchants. These were Franklin's peers even if he was on a different page.

Patrick Henry in Virginia introduced resolves into the House of Burgesses that denounced parliamentary taxation. Meanwhile, John Adams joined fellow colonists in Massachusetts in their contempt for governor Thomas Hutchinson, even as Franklin was commiserating with him about the Boston's mobs' threats on him. Hutchinson informed Franklin that the Stamp Act's opponents were using the Philadelphian's motto, "Join or Die," for their cause. When he had originally proposed the phrase at the Albany Conference, the words had meant colonial solidarity within the Empire.[9]

On the matter of taxes, Franklin's instincts reflected his immunity from the grind and worries of shopkeeping. When British officials earlier started to enforce zealously the collection of duties on molasses in the 1764 Sugar Act, Franklin shrugged that this was a reasonable response to needs of maintaining the Empire. Since the duties extended only to luxuries, rather than necessities, they were a small price to pay. Franklin did warn British friends that taxes on the colonies could hurt Britain since "the more you take from us, the less we can lay out with you." With the Stamp Tax, he was equally nonchalant. He wrote to Charles Thomson, who became Secretary of the Continental Congress and headed Philadelphia's Sons of Liberty, "Frugality and Industry will go a great way toward indemnifying us." Franklin could not resist a maxim worthy of Poor Richard—"Idleness and Pride Tax with a heavier Hand than Kings and Parliaments"—except that such wisdom was now out of touch with Richard's circumstances.[10] Indeed, because people back home blamed Franklin for compromising with the Stamp Tax, rumors circulated that rioters intended to destroy his Philadelphia home. In-laws came to Deborah's defense. The house and Franklin family remained safe. But Benjamin Rush, another prominent figure in American independence, could not resist hurling a versified epithet at Franklin:

> *O Franklin, Franklin,*
> thou curse to Pennsylvania and America,
> may the most accumulated vengeance burst speedily on thy guilty head![11]

Part of Franklin's problem was a faith in a relationship between the United Kingdom and its North American colonies that was rapidly unraveling. Events were transpiring to prevent him from holding

together his hyphenated identity as colonist and admirer of the Empire. British wars with France, for which Franklin and fellow colonists were exceedingly grateful, fed a sense of English nationalism that left Americans on the outside; the same was true for the Scots and Irish. Gordon Wood even claims that the Seven Years War, "in which the British Empire became a world empire, increased this sense of English distinctiveness." At the very same time that Franklin reveled in the idea of integrating the North American colonies into the Empire, the English increasingly regarded Americans as "another set of people to be ruled"—even "foreigners," according to the Earl of Halifax.[12] The English saw Americans as inferior also in the sense that the colonists symbolized crude or uncivilized people who shared a society with Africans and native populations. The colonies attracted riffraff and convicts.

Franklin responded to such prejudice with anonymous essays in the London newspapers. "Invectives against the Americans" employed his talents for wit and logic. He reminded English readers that calling the colonists a "*mixed rabble of Scotch, Irish and foreign vagabonds, descendants of convicts, ungrateful rebels*, &c." was no way to persuade them to pay the Stamp Tax. Meanwhile, he corrected the impression of colonists as rabble with an appeal to his Puritan ancestors. The first settlers of New England "were English gentlemen of fortune, who, being Puritans, left this country with their families and followers, in times of persecution" for the sake of civil and religious freedom. They retained, "to this day," as much "virtue, humanity, civility, and, let me add, *loyalty to their Prince*," as any people in the world did. Americans, Franklin added, "have not the least desire of independence." Instead, "they submit, in general, to all the laws we make for them."[13] In another essay, Franklin took a page from Jonathan Swift, under the pseudonym of *Pacifus Secundus*, and proposed vacating all the colonial charters and sending an English military force to occupy the country. To the objection that such a policy might ruin the colonies, kill one half the population, and drive the rest to the frontier and so deprive Britain of customs for English manufacturing, Franklin reminded readers of the economic logic of supply and demand. With less need for English products, those same goods would be cheaper at home. But that would mean "Multitudes of our Poor may starve for want of Employment" and their reliance on "The Rich" to "maintain them."[14]

Franklin continued to write for the London papers, generally under a pseudonym and his themes continued to be the hurdles that tariffs and taxes posed to commerce, the problem of having no representation in deliberations about legislation and policies, and the general virtues of the American people. In some cases, it became increasingly clear that by having to conduct business through British ports, Americans were losing money, paying higher prices, and engaged in other lines of business just to participate in the Empire's business. In a 1767 essay, "Right, Wrong, and Reasonable," he mocked the inherent inefficiency and fairness of policies that obliged Americans "to bring your coarse sugars to England to be refined, and carry them back again when refined, that so you may pay two freights and two insurances." Or what about the folly of paying duty on imports of Madeira and then, "when you send them to England, by way of remittance, pay the full duty here, without any drawback of what you have already paid?"[15] A year later, in "American Discontents," Franklin echoed the common colonial complaint of no taxation without representation: "the Colonists universally were of the opinion, that no money could be levied from English subjects, but by their own consent, given by themselves or their chosen Representatives." In the same article, his complaint followed arguments on behalf of Pennsylvania's Assembly. The colonies' governors were, he wrote, "generally strangers to the Provinces they are sent to govern; have no estate, natural connection, or relation there, to give them an affection for the country."[16]

When it came to the character of the colonists, Franklin insisted they were not rebellious or of a lower sort. He observed, again in "American Discontents," that Scotland had had its rebellions and England its plots against the Crown. But Americans were a "truly loyal people" who were also "firmly attached to [their] King by principle and by affection." Americans drew the line, however, at a form of allegiance "that is to extend . . . to a surrender of all our properties," whenever the House of Commons "shall think fit to grant them away without our consent, and to a patient suffering the loss of our privileges, as Englishmen."[17] In an essay that played off the issue of representation in Parliament and how the London press was also misrepresenting Americans, Franklin defended the religious honor of colonists. To say that American Protestants could not abide the Church of England's bishops or that the country swarmed with

"thwarting hereticks" and "malevolent sectaries," or to charge that infidelity and Popery both gained ground in the colonies was to regard the colonists as "fit only to be snubb'd, curb'd, shackled and plundered."[18]

Franklin's confidence in his ability to read the situation turned into cockiness when he made recommendations about the colonies' administration. In an interview with the Earl of Dartmouth in late 1765 about the Stamp Tax, Franklin opined that the revenue increase would not offset the difficulties of enforcement or the ill will the tax had cultivated. He proposed, as he explained in an account of the exchange to his son, William, the construction of a committee, constituted of "three or four wise and good Men, Personages of some Rank and Dignity," and sending it to North America to assess the situation. This would allow the British to grant "Expectations of Redress where they found the People really aggriev'd" and the opportunity to "convince and reclaim them by Reason, where they found them in the Wrong."[19]

The problem with this notion was the use of a royal commission to inquire into the colonies. Ever since the Glorious Revolution of 1688–89, English notions of liberty were bound up with Parliament's power to harness the Crown and turn it from an absolute to a constitutional monarchy. The 1689 Bill of Rights that accompanied that bloodless coup was also the iconic protection of the people's personal and property rights against the tyranny of the Crown. As Gordon Wood writes, Franklin's notion that a royal commission could better secure the liberties of colonists than Parliament was utopian. His royalism was also running directly into the gale winds of Parliament's increasing authority in managing the colonies, such as raising taxes to pay for a military presence. "For Americans to oppose Parliament was unconscionable," even "Toryish and alien to the Whig understanding of politics."[20]

As he considered how to explain himself both to his constituents in America and his British interlocutors, Franklin received a golden opportunity. In 1766 the House of Commons requested the American diplomat to testify about the effects of the Stamp Act on the colonists and American-British relations. Although some question the degree to which opponents of the tax within Parliament created a stage for objectors to articulate objections to the legislators' ham-fisted schemes

for raising revenue, the session also gave Franklin a chance to answer doubts about his judgment. He explained, for instance, why an external tax was tolerable but an internal one (like the Stamp Act) was not. The former showed up as part of the price of sale and if "people do not like [a commodity] at that price, they refuse it." But an internal tax "was forced from the people without their consent." He also defended Americans as loyal partners of the Empire. Their contribution to the Seven Years' War was not simply a matter of self-defense, but a case of standing with the Empire in its battle for British interests. The war began as one for defense of British territories and "of a trade purely British." Americans, accordingly, "made no scruple of contributing their utmost towards carrying it on." Franklin also underscored the colonies' identification with Parliament over the Crown. Americans knew that the king could not act unilaterally but that Parliament needed to consent to raise taxes of implement policies. What Americans wanted was their own representatives in Parliament to insure "that common consent" secured by England's constitution.[21] The testimony eventually found a wide circulation in newspapers on both sides of the Atlantic and even found its way into German publications (in translation). Franklin had not only provided an American perspective to Parliament: more importantly, he had also proved his own loyalty to the colonies.

At the same time, Franklin maintained an attachment to the Crown that was odd for someone with a history of distrust for executives. It was, in fact, a form of international relations that would eventually take shape in Protestant ecumenical organizations of the twentieth century. In 1766, when Parliament repealed the Stamp Act, dissenting Lords issued statements that opposed appeasing the demanding colonists. In his comments on these criticisms, Franklin took the side of George III over Parliament. The Lords were guilty of inserting themselves into prerogatives reserved to the king. He was still committed to remaking Pennsylvania into a royal colony and his esteem for the Crown showed. Meanwhile, to fears in Parliament that the colonies sought independence "from any obedience to the power of the British Legislature," Franklin added, "but not to the Power of the Crown." As Wood argues, Franklin's royalism was unusual among the American founders, at least in the 1760s, and precocious within the developments of the Empire's history. The Philadelphian seemed to hold a

"commonwealth" theory of the Empire, one in which independent dominions remained loosely united through allegiance to the Crown.[22] This was precisely what transpired for the Empire's members as late as 1931 with the Statute of Westminster. It was also the way that Protestant communions, during the early rounds of the ecumenical movement, established bonds while retaining sovereignty within their own communions. Attachment to the Crown or to a common creed became a way for dominions and denominations to exhibit solidarity and independence at the same time. It was a form of federalism, which was precisely what American Protestants eventually tried to establish in 1908 when they formed the Federal Council of Churches. Unlike Roman Catholic internationalism which relied upon the pope's sovereignty, Anglican and other Protestant denominations found ways to recognize the authority of national churches that also coordinated aspects of institutional life within a single institution.

The plot to place Pennsylvania under royal government thickened after Parliament seemed to follow Franklin's advice on the difference between internal and external taxes. The Townshend Acts in effect replaced the Stamp Act as Britain's revenue source. But the laws that imposed duties on colonial imports of paper, glass, lead, and tea, though acceptable to Franklin in theory, proved as outrageous to colonists as the Stamp Act. Riotous conditions in Boston led in 1770 to a confrontation between residents and British soldiers that took six lives (five colonists and one Red Coat). When that news reached Franklin, his affection for America grew and correspondence with Massachusetts officials led to the addition of that colony to his diplomacy portfolio. Now he was agent for Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Georgia, and Massachusetts. Yet, not everyone in America was confident in Franklin. Sam Adams argued against Massachusetts' decision since Franklin's loyalties and grasp of colonial politics seemed confused.

Americans may have had more grounds for their doubts than they realized. Franklin still believed he had enough standing among British officials and a good understanding of British affairs to end the growing rift. His meeting with Lord Hillsborough in January of 1771 was indicative of that confidence and spoke volumes about Franklin's naivete. Hillsborough had become Secretary of State for American

affairs and was opposed to increased immigration of British people to North America and to the growing sense of American independence. Franklin was unprepared for what transpired.

When he went to see the Lord and received an audience before others who were already waiting, Franklin thought he was experiencing the sort of welcome fitting for someone of his renown. At the same time, he had already expressed doubts publicly about the competency of British officials. He also represented a colony, Massachusetts, that was a thorn in the side of the British government. When he mentioned his ties to Massachusetts, Hillsborough responded with "something between a Smile and a Sneer."[23] The official also put Franklin and the colonies in their place by declaring that Massachusetts had no right to appoint a representative such as Franklin without the consent of the governor. The American saw in Hillsborough's countenance "*a mix'd look of Anger and Contempt.*" Franklin replied with a logic that seemed indubitable to anyone in the colonies and that foreshadowed the famous slogan, no taxation without representation: "every Body of Men, who cannot appear in Person where Business relating to them may be transacted, should have a Right to appear by an Agent." Despite the disagreeable exchange, Franklin left with his confidence intact. He believed Hillsborough was acting on his own and had no support from other British officials. He soon learned otherwise.[24]

Soon after his meeting with Hillsborough, the British government changed its personnel and appointed Lord Dartmouth as the replacement. Since Franklin enjoyed a friendly relationship with Dartmouth, he sensed he may have had a hand in Hillsborough's ouster. Franklin also thought he could now have more influence. This optimism may explain his extraordinary decision to send correspondence of Massachusetts' governor, Thomas Hutchinson, to his opponents in America. The papers had come to Franklin in his role as agent and they revealed Hutchinson's willingness to curtail "English liberties" among Americans to solidify the colonies' place in the Empire. Although Hutchinson had been his ally at the Albany Congress (1754), Franklin saw an opening. The Hutchinson letter could prove that the real source of opposition between Britain and America was a class of unreasonable governors. Against his wishes to keep the letters in circulation privately among a few key Massachusetts' officials, the

letters went public and did exactly the opposite of what Franklin hoped. Instead of calming the colonists and restoring confidence in London with Hutchinson as a scapegoat, the people of Massachusetts interpreted the letters as further evidence of the wide breach between America and the mother country.

Meanwhile, British officials turned on Franklin once he admitted to his complicity in the Hutchinson affair (thanks to a duel between John Temple, believed to be the perpetrator, and Thomas Whately). He became a target of derision in the press and the government identified him as the symbol of American impudence. On January 29, 1774, approximately a week after news of the Boston Tea Party had reached London, the Privy Council brought Franklin before the body to berate him. This legendary dressing down by Solicitor General, Alexander Wedderburn, which Franklin referred to as "Bull-baiting," blamed the Philadelphian for all the troubles in Massachusetts. Franklin had "forfeited all the respect of societies and of men."[25] The one baited by the Privy Council could hardly miss that his work as a diplomat was a complete failure. Even on a personal level, instead of making Hutchinson the object of ridicule, he was now the humiliated one on both sides of the ocean. Franklin even lost his post as postmaster general of North America thanks to the British government's disapproval of his actions.

Although friends urged him to return to America, Franklin remained in London still with hopes of saving the Empire. Reappointment by the king to a royal office was no longer a consideration. Such "Posts and Places [were] precarious Dependencies," he wrote to his son, William.[26] Perhaps with a change of the guard via elections in Parliament, the British government would retreat from its hostile relationship to the colonies. In his last essays before returning to America, however, his wit lacked the subtlety that usually characterized his efforts to find humor in circumstances. When, for instance, Franklin proposed castration as a method for "Keeping the Colonies Dependent," he left little room for understanding what he thought of Parliament's policies toward America. The advantages of this scheme ranged from eliminating all rebellious subjects in North America to the creation of a ready crop of castrati which would save money for "Managers of the Opera."[27] Another article proposed a ridiculous scheme for "Keeping the Colonies Dependent." The key here was

checking the growth of America's population. To do this, Franklin suggested that immigrants from Britain and Ireland to America be limited to a seven-year residency. At the same time, all settlers should pay an immigration tax of fifty Pounds which would apply to all family members and servants. If any immigrants bore children during their stay, they should be taxed fifteen Pounds for boys and ten Pounds for girls. These were a few of the ways Franklin thought that Parliament could prevent the colonies from forming a "separate and independent Government."[28]

In 1775, in one of his last pieces for London readers, Franklin compiled a list of colonists' demands for good relations with Britain. They were all economic—"repair the Damage done to Boston; repeal your unconstitutional Acts; renounce your pretensions to Tax us; refund the duties you have extorted. . ."[29] Although the economic and political dimensions of the conflict loomed large, Franklin also produced an imaginary dialogue among European powers that reflected the cultural factors, which, in turn, played up the Protestant sensibilities of England and America. When Britain asked Spain for help against disobedient Americans, Spain reminded the English that Britain has supported "my Subjects in the Low Countries" with weapons and an Army and a fleet when they rebelled against the Spanish Crown. The same response came from France which reminded Britain of its assistance to "my Rebel Hugenots" at Rochelle. Holland's reply included gratitude for Britain's support against Spain but also reminded Britain of Dutch support for Parliament at the end of the Stuart monarchy and so considered the account "*Ballanc'd*." During the dialogue, America listened and finally asked Britain if it planned to wage war against the colonists and "butcher them in cold Blood." Britain, in turn, denounced America as a "wicked-Whig-Presbyterian-Serpent!"[30] Franklin's larger point—Europe's sympathy with America, imagined or not—could not be missed but his choice of epithet to capture Britain's policies again indicated that tried to make sense of it through a religious frame.

Despite his humiliation in the Cockpit and recognition of the divide between Americans the English, Franklin still hoped to save the colonies for the Empire. In early 1775, he met with Lord Chatham (William Pitt) to discuss the terms of a plan for reconciliation. With his vanity still alive and well, Franklin took pride that "so great a Man, on

so important Business" had consulted him. When Chatham submitted the proposal to the House of Lords, Lord Sandwich (John Montagu) rose in opposition, denounced it, and attributed the ideas to "one of the bitterest and most mischievous Enemies this Country has ever known." For added drama, Sandwich pointed at Franklin, who was in the gallery. The effect on Franklin was profound. The idea that these figures claimed "Sovereignty over three Millions of virtuous sensible People in America" now appeared to be the "greatest of Absurdities." Ever the political junky, however, Franklin returned to Parliament in subsequent weeks. The news did not improve. He heard the Lords refer to Americans "as the lowest of Mankind and almost of a different Species from the English of Britain."[31]

Within six weeks, in the middle of March 1775, Franklin was on board a ship sailing back to America. According to Wood, Franklin now "felt his Americanness as never before."[32]

Independence Within a Federation of Nations

Franklin never underwent a religious conversion, but his embrace of the patriot cause may have been as dramatic as any of the born-again experiences that attended George Whitefield's preaching. Thanks to the roller coaster ride of Franklin's tenure in London, some colonists suspected that he was still partial to the Empire. Proving the genuineness of his political allegiance in 1775 might require the same sort of behavior that Franklin himself had observed in Whitefield's converts: "few Acts of Zeal," he wrote, "will be more taken Notice of than such as are done against the Party he has left."[33] This observation explains why Franklin wrote a letter to his English friend, William Strahan, that he never sent. He complained to the member of Parliament that "You have begun to burn our Towns, and murder our People. . . . You and I were long Friends: You are now my enemy."[34] In point of fact, Franklin continued to send warm letters of friendship to Strahan but needed his American friends to see his zeal for independence.

The test of Franklin's conversion to the patriots came with his son, William. As rocky as their relationship had been, father and son were close. William had helped Ben in his electrical experiments and was the only assistant present for the famous lightning incident. William had accompanied Ben to London in 1757 and visited ancestral sites in

the English country. Through Ben's connections, William secured an appointment as the royal governor of New Jersey. Yet, once Ben returned to America, father and son parted ways. They had two shouting matches during the summer of 1775 over the Empire and from that time forward, Ben cut off his son. During the battles of 1776, when patriots took William as prisoner, Ben did nothing and turned a deaf ear to pleading from his daughter-in-law. When William violated his parole by making contact with British officers, George Washington put him in solitary confinement. Again, Ben did nothing.[35] William remained a loyalist and Franklin a patriot, thereby proving that even political conversions, like their religious cousins, break family ties.

By the summer of 1776, events made clear that ties between Britain and America had also changed irreparably. While Franklin split time between Pennsylvania's Assembly and the Continental Congress, an overture came from British commanders in the colonies, General William Howe and Admiral Lord Richard Howe, to Congress for a peace settlement. Franklin was part of a committee appointed by Congress that included John Adams and Edward Rutledge. The British officials met in an unofficial capacity at Staten Island, which at the time British soldiers occupied. They proposed a return to a relationship between Britain and America that had existed prior to 1763. Franklin adamantly refused. "Forces had been sent out, and Towns destroyed," he asserted.[36] To return to a position within the British Empire was impossible.

With chances for peace with Britain behind, the only way forward was to declare independence and secure an ally to back America in its war. France emerged as the prime candidate. After some initial communications through back channels, Congress appointed Franklin with Silas Deane from Connecticut and Arthur Lee from Virginia as America's delegation to obtain funds, arms, and alliance with France's king, Louis XVI. This was a dangerous maneuver for the French (or any European monarchy) since it could establish a precedent for the overthrow of royal governments. At the same time, Franklin was uniquely equipped to execute this mission since he was still, thanks to his scientific reputation, a celebrity in Europe and seemingly the embodiment of the New World. A century before Americans would turn Franklin into a symbol of national identity and character, the French, especially critics of the *ancien regime*, were using the

Philadelphian as an icon of democracy, popular sovereignty, and simple virtue. This "radical chic," as Gordon Wood called it, contrasted the luxury and corruption of French society and institutions to the colonist's simplicity in manners, religious freedom and toleration, and common sense.[37] Some even rendered Franklin an example of Quakerism. He cultivated the image by dressing simply, even donning his famous fur cap. "Think how this must appear among the Powder'd Heads of Paris," Franklin wrote.[38] Meanwhile, the French translated *The Way to Wealth*, making it Franklin's best-selling work in France.

Despite such celebrity, the challenges of diplomacy were extensive. Louis XVI was understandably reluctant to support republicans across the Atlantic against another monarch. French officials were still smarting from war with England and wanted to avoid another conflict. Meanwhile, America's diplomatic delegation had no immediate contact with Congress owing to the slowness of communicating across an ocean. Even if American representatives had ready access to Franklin and his colleagues, relating news or intentions could be compromised thanks to spies from England in Paris—not to mention agents from other European countries. At the same time, France presented an odd alliance for Americans since the colonists held religious prejudices against the French. Many colonists assumed the rights of Englishmen were bound up with Protestant and Whig understandings of political authority and liberties. Turning to a Roman Catholic country for help was implausible. Aside from these hurdles, Franklin was showing signs of old age. He suffered from gout, kidney stones, swollen joints, and a chronic skin disease. He needed a cane to walk and many French were surprised to see him look as old as he was. Then there were his diplomatic colleagues, Lee and Deane who had their own ideas about the mission and sometimes exhibited older suspicions about Franklin's equivocation. Despite these obstacles, by 1778 Franklin was able to forge a commercial agreement and a military alliance with France. That did not prevent doubts from continuing to surface about Franklin. When John Adams arrived that year to replace Deane, he became annoyed with Franklin's flirting with women and sloth. And because William Franklin was a loyalist whose son, Temple, worked for Ben, questions of Franklin's own loyalty continued to haunt his diplomacy.

Despite all the ways that Franklin's mission to Paris could go wrong, it turned into his greatest achievement. His warm relations with the Count of Vergennes, Charles Gravier, was crucial to maintaining French support, not simply with the alliance but especially with financing the war. Physical distance from America gave the delegation room to negotiate even when they went against Congress' wishes, such as the decision on November 30, 1782 to establish a separate peace with Britain which offered generous terms of territory far larger than the colonists had proposed. (One reason was that the newly elected Prime Minister, Lord Shelburne—William Petty, was convinced that an independent America would provide a lucrative trading partner with Britain.) It fell to Franklin to explain and apologize to Vergennes for the treaty with Britain which he did by flattering Louis XVI and giving rosy estimates of Americans' esteem for the French. As Wood admits, Franklin got away with "diplomatic shenanigans" because the French basically adored the American, which in turn gave him a long leash with the Continental Congress. Wood adds that Franklin's personal ties to France were what "really counted in the Franco-American relationship." That meant that what George Washington was to the American Revolution in America, Franklin was to the American Revolution in Europe.[39]

Fraternal Relations

Despite a new nation, relations between Britain and United States after the Treaty of Paris were almost exactly what Franklin had hoped for America. Culturally, the two countries still enjoyed a common set of writers and intellectual traditions that created literary and philosophical heritage with considerable overlap. Politically, Americans did not have royal families or landed aristocracies but the importance of constitutional structures that checked arbitrary rule and guaranteed liberties gave both countries a common set of expectations about government's character. Economically, both countries benefited directly from the new arrangement of an independent United States. Commerce between the two nations picked up after the war even beyond pre-war levels: according to one estimate the value of British exports to America in 1798 were more than double what they had been fifteen years earlier. Franklin's dream of a British American

confederation of nations may not have existed on paper but the subsequent history of both countries, not to mention the United States' foreign policy, suggests he obtained almost everything he had desired as a diplomat.

Warm fraternal relations also extended to America's and England's churches. Ecclesiastical establishment in England prevented the sort of entrepreneurial religious life that was the norm in the United States (though established churches remained at the state level), but British Protestantism was the dominant Christian flavor in the new nation. Franklin recommended America's religious culture to would-be immigrants at the very end of his 1784 essay, "Those who would Remove to America." The morality and decency of the American people was largely a function of "the serious Religion under various Denominations" practiced by Americans. Atheism was "unknown," infidelity "rare," such that "Persons may live to a great Age" without "having their Piety shock'd."[40] American independence did not mean less Protestantism, simply a new configuration of its institutions.

Whether he knew it or not, Franklin had facilitated the denominational pattern of church life that sprouted and blossomed in America's seeming indifference to religion. That development not only produced Protestant communions that were independent of their European "mother churches," but also included cooperation in a common mission that made Anglo-American denominations the dominant influence on the new nation's religious life.

The case of Franklin's own German Pennsylvanians is one of the most telling in the development of American ecclesiastical independence. One branch of German–American Protestantism grew out of the Reformed churches in the Palatinate and Switzerland and the planting of these churches owed primarily to the arrival of German speaking settlers. One of the earliest immigrants of distinction was John Philip Boehm, a teacher and the son of a pastor, who arrived in 1720 and soon became a preacher for the local congregations. Because Boehm was not ordained, congregants usually traveled from the countryside in nearby Berkes and Montgomery Counties to have children baptized by Presbyterian pastors in Philadelphia. Also, because Boehm lacked credentials, he faced challenges from other pastors sent by Reformed churches in Europe. To settle these disputes, Pennsylvania's German Reformed appealed to Dutch

Reformed pastors in New York (previously New Amsterdam). But these ministers had no authority of their own. Consequently, they sent the case to the Classis of Amsterdam, the Dutch body that oversaw church life in the New World among Dutch Reformed churches. By the 1740s the German Reformed had settled these earlier disputes and found a way to ordain Boehm legitimately. But between 1745 and 1790 the German Reformed who sometimes voted for, and sometimes opposed Franklin in colonial politics, were in a holding pattern. They had no standing of their own and for official matters—ordination, rulings—depended on established churches in German speaking territories in Europe. Meanwhile, they lacked clergy who could minister in German. To remedy the situation, in 1793 the German Reformed pastors in Pennsylvania—twenty-two for 178 congregations—established a separate denomination, independent from the Dutch church in Amsterdam.[41]

National independence for America had not necessarily made forming a denomination possible but the logic of autonomy was responsible for churches in North America establishing their own structures. Franklin contributed directly to this development by donating funds to a college in Lancaster co-sponsored by German Reformed and Lutherans. Their need for clergy was one of the factors that prompted the formation of a school that provided the sort of intellectual training necessary for learned Protestant communions. The German Reformed were too small to initiate the college on their own and so solicited support from Lutherans to create one of the first bi-lingual institutions in America. Though offering instruction in German, the institution was dedicated to "our present republican system of government" and "improvements in the arts and sciences which alone render nations respectable, great and happy."[42] Franklin's contribution of 200 pounds was the largest of all the initial gifts and it prompted Benjamin Rush, one of the most active figures on the college's original board, to propose the institution be named after Philadelphia's greatest and most famous persons. Franklin College clearly showed a different relationship between Franklin and Pennsylvania's German Protestants from the one that had resulted thirty-five years earlier in his losing a seat in the Pennsylvania Assembly.

Franklin's appeal had grown, of course, since the formation of a new nation that threw Lutherans and Reformed Protestants on to their own resources. Such autonomy in turn cultivated cooperation in

educational endeavors. It also was responsible for these Protestants' embrace of the nation's republican government as an outworking of the evangelization of the world. That mix of national endeavor and church mission came through in one of the German songs sung at the college's opening, translated as follows:

> Come Thou and visit, O Savior of Mankind,
> Franklinia, which this day thy blessing awaits,
> May she deserve to be known as the daughter
> Of the sage who renews the union of States.
> Hear us, O Lord, while we sing as we pray.
> Come Thou and dwell with FRANKLINIA,
> Accept her to-day![43]

The effects of political union and national independence was an elixir for most Protestants, especially those with ties to British churches. In 1801 the Presbyterian and Congregationalist denominations, who had been the most vocal in support of the war for independence from the pulpit, formed a union for planting churches in the Northwest Territory. In some ways this was a fulfillment of Franklin's proposal to Whitefield for the creation of a colony in Ohio that would combine the best of each man's virtue and piety. Presbyterians and Congregationalists put aside religious differences over church government and theology to provide a religious presence that reminded settlers of their eternal destinies and educated them in the duties of civilization and patriotism.

Soon to emerge from these patterns of cooperation within an independent republic was the first batch of American foreign missionaries. In 1810, led by Congregationalists, with help from Presbyterians and German Reformed, the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions began to channel resources and recruit personnel for evangelizing and civilizing non-Christian peoples. The history of American foreign missionaries indicates how indebted Protestants in the United States were to Franklin's diplomatic genius. By supporting American independence from Britain while also maintaining cordial economic ties, Protestant missionaries from the United States invariably conducted their overseas work in places—India, China, the Middle East, and South Africa—underwritten and more or less shepherded by the British Empire.[44]

Franklin himself was neither responsible for the synergy between Protestantism and nationalism nor for the interdependence of British and American foreign missionaries. But his instincts and expectations for extending Anglo-American civilization in North American and cooperation between the United States and Britain overseas overlapped with a wide swath of American Protestants' ambitions. Indeed, his own initial plan for a confederation of American states was in effect a blueprint for the sort of cooperative institutions and networks that Protestants in the United States would later found under the banner of Christianizing America and spreading Christian civilization around the world. The first two of Franklin's *Proposed Articles of Confederation* (1775) included provision for a "firm League of Friendship" and a guarantee of each state's laws, customs, rights "and peculiar Jurisdictions within its own Limits."[45] Of course, Franklin had politics in mind. But soon after independence, Protestants applied Franklin's lessons to interdenominational cooperation. The trick was to maintain the distinct identity of each denomination while uniting in a common Christian enterprise. The unity of the American states for which Franklin had labored became the ideal for the nation's independent Protestant denominations.

Notes

1. Broadside quotes in Walter Isaacson, *Benjamin Franklin: An American Life* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2004), 216.
2. Gordon S. Wood, *The Americanization of Benjamin Franklin* (New York: Penguin Press, 2004), 110.
3. Benjamin Franklin, *The Autobiography*, in J. A. Leo Lemay, ed., *Franklin: Essays, Articles, Bagatelles, and Letters, Poor Richard's Almanack, and Autobiography* (New York: Library of America, 1987), 1393.
4. "John Dickinson and Others: Protest against the Appointment of Benjamin Franklin as Agent, 26 October 1764," quoted in Isaacson, *Franklin*, 217, 218.
5. Benjamin Franklin, "Remarks o n a Late Protest against the Appointment of Mr. Franklin, An Agent for the Province of Pennsylvania," November 5, 1764, quoted in Isaacson, *Franklin*, 217, 218.
6. Franklin to Sarah Franklin, November 8, 1764, quoted in Isaacson, *Franklin*, 218.

7. Isaacson, *Franklin*, 222.
8. David Hall to Franklin, September 6, 1765, quoted in Wood, *Americanization*, 108.
9. Huchinson to Franklin, August 15, 1765, quoted in Wood, *Americanization*, 110.
10. Franklin's phrases in Charles Thomson's letter to Franklin, September 2 4, 1765, quoted in Wood, *Americanization*, 108.
11. Rush to Evenezeer Hazard, November 5, 1765, quoted in Wood, *Americanization*, 111.
12. Wood, *Americanization*, 113.
13. Benjamin Franklin, "Invectives Against the Americans," in J. A. Leo Lemay, ed., *Franklin: Essays, Articles, Bagatelles, and Letters, Poor Richard's Almanack, Autobiography* (New York: Library of America, 1987), 563, 564.
14. Benjamin Franklin, "On the Prospects of War in America," in Lemay, ed., *Franklin: Essays*, 566–67.
15. Benjamin Franklin, "Right, Wrong, and Reasonable," in J. A. Leo Lemay, ed. *Benjamin Franklin: Silence Dogood, The Busy-Body, and Early Writings* (New York: Library of America, 1987), 592, 593.
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17. Franklin, "Causes", 609.
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26. Franklin to William Franklin: Journal of Negotiations in London, March 22, 1775 , quoted in Wood, *Americanization*, 148.

27. Benjamin Franklin, "Keepi ng the Colonies Dependent," in Lemay, ed., *Franklin: Early Writings*, 712.
28. Benjamin Franklin, "An Act for the More Effectual Keeping of the Colonies Dependent," in Lemay, ed., *Franklin: Early Writings*, 715, 714.
29. Benjamin Franklin, "What Would Satisf y the Americans?," in Lemay, ed., *Franklin: Early Writings*, 741.
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31. Franklin to William Franklin: Journal of Negotiations," quoted in Wood, *Americanization*, 149, 150.
32. Wood, *Americanization*, 151.
33. Benjamin Franklin, "Proposals to be Asked the Junto, 1732," quoted in Wood, *Americanization*, 157.
34. Franklin to Wil liam Strahan, October 3, 1775, quoted in Wood, *Americanization*, 157.
35. See Wood, *Americanization*, 162.
36. "Lord Howe's Conference with the Committee of Congress, September 11, 1776, quoted in Wood, *Americanization*, 168.
37. Wood, *Americanization*, 174.
38. Franklin to Emma Thompson, February 8, 1777, quoted in Wood, *Americanization*, 180.
39. Wood, *Americanization*, 200.
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41. See D. G. Hart, *Calvinism: A History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013), 117–19, 128–34.
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43. Joseph Henry Dubbs, *History of Franklin and Marshall College* (Lancaster, PA: Alumni Association, 1903), 45.
44. See, William R. Hutchison, *Errand to the World: American Protestant Thought and Foreign Missions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), ch. 2.
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11
Autobiography

After signing the Treaty of Paris (September 3, 1783) and waiting for the Continental Congress to ratify its terms (January 14, 1784), Franklin decided to return to his homeland, although it was not an easy decision. He was almost eighty years old, trans-Atlantic voyages were long and sometimes grueling, and he adored France—the feeling was reciprocal. Franklin referred to France as the "civilest Nation upon Earth."[1]

In May of 1785, once his nation's Congress relieved Franklin of diplomatic duties, he returned to Philadelphia for the last stage of his remarkable life. He arrived in Philadelphia on September 14, 1785 to a crowd that went "far beyond" his expectations. Doubts about his patriotism had lingered even as Thomas Jefferson referred to Franklin as "the ornament of our country"—even—"of the world."[2] Over the next few years, despite ailments that increasingly reduced his pace, Franklin continued to work in politics. Within weeks of his return, Franklin went back to the Pennsylvania Assembly, the body that almost two decades earlier had been the stage for his political talents. The commonwealth was still divided along ethno-religious lines with farmers, Scotch-Irish Presbyterians, and German-Protestants supporting the Constitutional Party and Anglicans, merchants, and professionals supporting the Republicans. Both sides nominated Franklin for the Assembly's executive council, a body of twelve that had finally taken the place of the proprietors' governor. The council in turn made Franklin their presiding officer. At seventy-nine, the man who had arrived in Philadelphia sixty years earlier virtually penniless was now the highest ranking official in Pennsylvania. Why did Franklin continue to serve in such capacities—he won re-election as president in 1786 and 1787? His answer was an insatiable need to "vindicate his virtue" and "boost his morale."[3]

His membership in the Pennsylvania Assembly positioned him well for deliberations about revisions to the Articles of Confederation. Once word came about reforming America's government, Franklin (in good Presbyterian fashion) formed a committee, the Society for Political Enquiries, to meet informally at the American Philosophical Society (Figure 11.1). When plans for a Constitutional Convention emerged, America's leaders expected Franklin to participate and as the eldest member to be the one to nominate George Washington as president. This would avoid any awkward competition between Franklin and Washington. That contest would likely have been unfortunate for Franklin since he was not a gifted speaker and looked like "a short, fat, trunched old man, in a plain Quaker dress, bald pate, and short

Figure 11.1 Bust of Franklin by Jean Antoine Houdon (1778) completed while the American was in Paris and that shows some of the features that charmed the French.

white locks," who was nowhere near as vigorous as the Virginia aristocrat and army general twenty-six years his junior.[4] William Pierce, a representative at the Convention from Georgia regarded Franklin as the "greatest philosopher of the age." But Pierce added that Ben was "no Speaker" and did not seem "to let politics engage his attention." He was, on the other hand, a gifted raconteur. He told "a story in a style more engaging than anything I ever heard."[5]

His return to Philadelphia and his re-emergence as a political leader were the context for Franklin's final reflections about life, the dilemmas of human existence, and the challenges of social cohesion and political stability. Those thoughts prompted others about virtue and God's designs in human affairs. He even recovered some of the old tools of Puritan introspection by writing up his journey in the book for which Franklin is best remembered, his *Autobiography*. The completion of that work was no less circuitous than the final text from America's Constitutional Convention, which may explain Franklin's resort to God as the safety net for the new nation.

Becoming That Ben Franklin

If Franklin hid behind masks and pseudonyms, perhaps a function of his lowly origins and desire for respect, his most famous and widely read work, *Autobiography*, only makes more difficult the effort to locate the real Franklin. When the novelist John Updike described the book as an "elastically insouciant work, full of cheerful contradictions and humorous twists," he may have engaged in wishful thinking merely by describing the book as a "work."[6] Of course, every memoir or autobiography says as much about the author's life at the time of writing as it does about the past. But Franklin's *Autobiography* was more like a simple summer cottage that went through renovations to become a mansion, only to be turned into a museum that later morphed into a theme park, thanks to its stages of creation, publication history, and audience reception. The book itself came in four separate installments that began in 1771 while Franklin was still hoping to keep the American colonies within the British Empire. He wrote the last three sections after he had returned to Philadelphia during the last six years of his life. During those later stages, Franklin's purpose changed. His original plan was to give advice to his son, William. By the 1780s,

however, Ben and William were on opposite sides of American independence. So the father regrouped.

Writing the *Autobiography* turned out to be straightforward compared to its publication, which involved a convoluted set of circumstances that began with a French language edition and proceeded to various American versions. In each case, the publication of Franklin's life story provided editors with a chance to conceive of the author in highly adaptable ways that depended on reading tastes and national assumptions. Between 1794 and 1828, the work appeared in twenty-two separate editions. Along the way, editors began to package the *Autobiography* with Poor Richard's *Way to Wealth*. These texts became the chief way that Americans knew and remembered Franklin. They also created the Horatio Alger genre of the self-made man. For example, Thomas Mellon, the creator of one of America's great banking fortunes, started out life on a farm outside Pittsburgh. But after reading Franklin in the 1820s, he understood that a "poor and friendless" boy could "by industry, thrift and frugality [become] learned and wise, and elevated to wealth and fame."[7]

When Franklin started the *Autobiography* he was not feeling all that successful or wise. He began in 1771, soon after his encounter with Lord Hillsborough, the British Secretary of State responsible for overseeing the American colonies who wanted to put the colonists in their place and refused to accept Franklin as an agent for Massachusetts. It also emerged at a time when he was giving advice to his son-in-law, Richard Bache, who had arrived in London and sought his father-in-law's help in securing a government position. Franklin's somewhat stern advice to Bache set the tone for the *Autobiography*'s first section: hard work, frugality, and industry, not servile dependence in a bureaucracy, were key to success in the world. His friend, Jonathan Shipley, Bishop of St. Asaph, a friend also to Alexander Hamilton and a Whig who opposed King George's policies toward the colonies, provided encouragement for Franklin to write. It began in a "mood of frustration, nostalgia, and defiance."[8]

However recent negotiations with British officials may have colored Franklin's outlook, the impression Part One gives (completed in two weeks) is the well-known story of grit and hard work from childhood until 1730 when he opened a printing firm. Historians and literary critics may judge it a "sophisticated literary performance,"[9] but it also

reads straightforwardly as the experience of a man who had no security, had to make his own way, stand up for himself against superiors, and was genuinely looking for a trade that provided stability in a society very much in flux.

As much as Franklin revealed himself to be a hard worker, he was not bashful about attributing his success to God. Part One has the familiar stories such as his 1723 arrival in Philadelphia as a seventeen-year-old with his pockets stuffed with all his clothes and no place to stay, the meal of "three great Puffy Rolls" acquired for three pennies, and the subsequent nap among the Quakers at their meeting.[10] So too Franklin included his trip to London and 1726 return Philadelphia as a protégé of the shopkeeper, Thomas Denham. That decision, Franklin believed, involved taking "Leave of Printing, as I thought for ever." That one of the colonies' most successful and celebrated printers almost left the trade was an indication of how uncertain his fortunes were.[11]

Franklin also began Part One in a remarkably pious way for someone who by 1771 had become comfortable outside organized Protestantism. He wrote that he emerged from "Poverty and Obscurity" thanks to efforts whose success depended on "the Blessing of God." Franklin added, with seeming emphasis, that he owed the "Happiness of my past Life to [God's] kind Providence." He was not embarrassed either to trace his family's roots to English Protestant Non-conformity (Puritanism) even while describing his father's character in ways that made the family's piety seem normal. To be sure, the family's bookishness, thanks in part to Protestant forms of devotion, also fueled an intellectual curiosity that led to the extravagance of abstinence from meat and alcohol.[12] The same can be said for Franklin's deterministic version of predestination in *Dissertation on Liberty and Necessity*. That piety also fed a moral and intellectual seriousness that prompted Franklin in 1727 to form the Junto. He admitted that he had begun to doubt "several Points" of his parents' faith. He also recognized that his early philosophical speculations were "not useful," and that virtue was the best way to live. Indeed, "the kind hand of Providence, or some guardian Angel" preserved him from the worst consequences of his early religious and philosophical immaturity.[13]

Franklin did not return to his life until 1784. The interruption was understandable considering the course of events in London and Philadelphia in the intervening thirteen years. This time the venue was Paris in the district of Passy. Here he wrote while he waited, with successful negotiations between the United States and Britain complete, for further instruction from the Continental Congress. Franklin had almost no material with which to work. In 1776, before leaving for France, he had entrusted all of his papers to Joseph Galloway, one of his then closest friends. When Galloway sided with Britain, he fled the country and Franklin's documents, including Part One, became the property of Galloway's wife, Grace. Only when she died did Franklin's papers come to Abel James, executor of Mrs. Galloway's estate.

When James began to read Franklin's papers, he discovered the *Autobiography*'s first part, and then wrote to the diplomat to encourage completion. James' letter is now part of Franklin's book, just one more of its literary oddities. Another letter to Franklin came from Benjamin Vaughan. Although he had never read a page of the manuscript, Vaughan too insisted that Franklin finish. Vaughan's letter is also part of the published book. Both James and Vaughan agreed that young readers would learn much from Franklin's example and wisdom. "I know of no other Character living nor many of them put together, who has so much in his Power as Thyself to promote a greater Spirit of Industry and early Attention to Business," James wrote.[14] Vaughan too praised Franklin for his frugality, diligence, temperance, and above all his modesty, the example of which would be invaluable to "parents and young people."[15] Despite the encouragement, Franklin began the second part meekly: "Not having any Copy here of what is already written."[16] If Franklin had been the book's editor, he may have declined to publish it.

Part Two is the shortest section and contains the methodical and, in hindsight trivial, plan Franklin concocted to achieve moral perfection. His list of thirteen virtues, complete with a chart in which to mark with dots his personal improvement, was in ways mechanical. It lacked imagination or the ability to consider foibles that went deeper in human psychology than tabulation on a grid. At same time, Franklin was heeding his friends' call for a program of virtue that could instruct and inspire the youth of America. Not to be missed was Franklin's

concession that "such extreme nicety" as he "exacted" of himself might qualify as "a kind of Foppery in Morals, which if it were known would make me ridiculous." He also admitted that he was a failure in overcoming pride. Franklin thought his scheme relied on religion, without the tenets of "any particular Sect."[17] This may explain why he included in Part Two his frustration with Jedediah Andrews, the Presbyterian minister in Philadelphia whose preaching he tried to endure. The problem, as Franklin wrote, was that Andrews tried to make his congregants "good Presbyterians" rather than "good Citizens."[18] For the non-observant Presbyterian, Christianity always served the public good before a specific communion's demands. Even if organized Christianity came across poorly in Part Two, Franklin's own pursuit of moral perfection also ended with a whimper: "Disguise it, struggle with it, beat it down, stifle it, mortify it as much as one pleases, [Pride] is still alive, and will every now and then peep out and show itself."[19]

By the time, in 1788, that Franklin returned to the *Autobiography*, his original motivation for a book of uplift for America's youth had descended to recollections of a career in public service. Again, a lack of papers forced the octogenarian to recount his affairs from memory. In the winter of 1789 and 1790, he began Part Three by admitting that he did not "have the help expected from my Papers, many of them being lost in the War."[20] Even though Franklin had been out of the country for much of the War for Independence, he was not immune to its hardships. Parts Three and Four actually run together and most contemporary editions insert "Part Four" in brackets to indicate the place where Franklin resumed this last and longest part of his life. Had he lived beyond April 17, 1790, he may have tried to complete his narrative. As it stands, this section of the *Autobiography* only brings his life to 1762 when he returned to Philadelphia after failed negotiations with the Penns. The last parts contain many of the familiar stories about organizing the Library Company, improving city streets, and starting the fire department and hospital. It also includes Franklin's efforts to organize a militia and unite the colonies in a common defense program. Part Three is the section where he put material about George Whitefield's outdoor preaching, fund raising, and ability to draw large crowds. Seldom remembered from this section is Franklin's observation about Whitefield's failure. Had he

not written and published material that "gave great Advantage to his Enemies," Whitefield "would have left behind him a much more numerous and important Sect."[21]

The manuscript concluded with many details about infighting among the Penns, their governor, William Denny, and the Pennsylvania Assembly over taxes and credit. Franklin made a point of mentioning when Denny disobeyed the Proprietors. The Penns's threat to sue the governor for "Breach of Instructions" prompted Franklin to conclude the book with a sentence that was both anticlimactic and a cliff hanger, all in one:

> [Denny] however having done it at the Instance of the General and for his Majesty's Service, and having some powerful Interest at Court, despis'd the Threats, and they were never put into Execution.[22]

This is how one of Franklin's most read books ends. At the very same time that Franklin was writing about his political career for future generations, he was trying to convince the United States' Congress to pay him for his services while in France. He had been back in America three years by now. His messenger, Temple (for whom Franklin also requested a diplomatic post), learned after meeting with legislators that the body still needed France to confirm Franklin's work. This response upset Franklin but indicated that officials were still suspicious about his loyalty, and absence during the war. After all, he had nothing to compare with Washington's cunning and bravery or Jefferson's Declaration of Independence. In a cover letter to Charles Thomson, then the president of Congress, which accompanied "Sketches of the Services of B. Franklin to the United States of America," Franklin conceded that republics are "*apt to be ungrateful*" and acknowledged that "malevolent insinuations" may have affected members of Congress who were otherwise "equitable, candid, and honorable." He hoped these thoughts might pass "into oblivion."[23]

In the text of "Sketches" itself, Franklin tallied up statistics to prove the value of his service between 1763 and 1783—such as writing twenty-four papers that refuted Parliament's authority to tax the colonies. Aside from all the work he did perform—even as he surely enjoyed life in London and Paris—Franklin played up the hardships he had endured. For instance, when he was briefly back in American

in 1776 and traveled to Canada to procure provisions for the army, Franklin recalled that he and his fellow delegates had lodged in the woods "in so inclement a season." He also reminded Congress of the suffering he experienced in 1785, once back in the United States, while processing bills of exchange from Congress for interest payments. To examine all of these documents for the nation's great debt was "most fatiguing and confining" since no matter how large the sum, each bill required the same level of inspection. His "constant attendance" to this process prevented him from his usual exercise which in turn "brought on a malady that is likely to affect him while he lives."[24] Franklin must have been humiliated to have to go to such lengths to receive payment, even as his attention to physical pain showed his increasing fragility. Even more humbling, however, was Congress' refusal to pay. Unlike the French who fell for Franklin's person and charms, Congress did not even read the "Sketches." It went without saying that the body also declined Franklin's request for a post for his grandson, Temple.

Whether these circumstances were entirely responsible for Franklin's religious experience at the end of his life is debatable, but the last section of the *Autobiography* was notable for a reaffirmation of belief, at least in divine providence. Part Three begins with a section from an early paper (1731) that he had written about human history. He observed that the most important dynamic in human relations was partisanship. "The great Affairs of the World"—wars, revolutions—he wrote, "are carried on and effected by Parties." In other words, few persons in public life "act with a View to the Good of Mankind." In 1731, this logic led Franklin to institute a "united Party for Virtue" to be "govern'd by suitable good and wise Rules." This endeavor would inevitably "[please] God, and [meet] with success."[25] Franklin's reasons for repeating these maxims at the end of his life owed partly to a paucity of personal papers. This was one of the few to which he had access. Still, in the context of American affairs and his struggles with Congress, Franklin may well have had good reason to recall his program for virtue and belief in providence. He added that his desire to improve led to putting down "from time to time on Pieces of Paper such Thoughts" that related to this Party of virtuous men. One of those early reflections was his six-point creed—that God made all things, that he governed the world by providence, that he should be

worshiped, that he should be served by doing good, that the soul is immortal, and that in the great hereafter humans will receive rewards and punishments for their deeds. Although this creed propelled him to a life of good works and public service, its prominence in Part Three suggests Franklin needed to fall back on higher ideals precisely at a time when Congress doubted his contribution.

This reading of the *Autobiography* fits the tendency of scholars to find in the text the keys that unlock the man. One artful way to interpret Franklin's construction of his life is to link it to the Puritan spiritual discipline of journaling, or keeping a diary of ones' religious journey.[26] Another is to regard the book as Franklin's definitive account of his life, a record of how he wanted to be remembered. Harvard historian, Jill Lepore, for instance, dramatizes Franklin's failure to include his sister, Jane Mecom. Although Jane never saw a copy—she died in 1794, the first year that the *Autobiography* was published—Lepore faults Ben for leaving his closest relative out. If she had read the book, Lepore imagines, Jane would have learned about a man rising from obscurity, a story "about a rise from rags to riches." Meanwhile, Jane "would have pored over every letter, every word. And she would have discovered: he never mentioned her."[27] That may well have been a major oversight if Franklin had left a comprehensive account of his life. But the *Autobiography* is so much less than that. At best, it was a manual of self-help with bits of Franklin's life as samples. What readers and editors did with it says much more about them than it does about Franklin or the people in his life.

The Oldest and Frailest Founding Father

Only a year or so before resuming the *Autobiography*'s last sections, Franklin made one of his final public speeches on the floor of the Constitutional Convention. His larger performance in the Philadelphia Convention of 1787 was undistinguished. Gordon Wood explains that Franklin's "age and health" hampered his place in debates about the new Constitution. In fact, "[m]uch of the time he seemed bewildered by the rapidity of the exchanges and the contentiousness of the debates."[28]

His observations about the affairs of men as a twenty-five-year-old man seemed still to be true. This was particularly apparent in debates

about executives in a republican government and the status of the Senate. Franklin had proposed that members of the executive branch serve without pay. His reading in the ancients (and moderns) had convinced him that humans acted often from a love of money and power. "Place before the Eyes of such Men a Post of *Honour*, that shall at the same time be a place of *Profit*, and they will move Heaven and Earth to obtain it." Franklin's observation of English politics, which trafficked in "enormous Salaries, Emoluments, and Patronage," only confirmed his reading of the ancients. This defect was not simply the result of a flawed structures. It was an outworking of human nature. Owing to a desire for grandeur, people possessed "a natural Inclination . . . [for] a kingly Government."[29] Serving without pay, in contrast, befitted a republican political order that required virtue and self-sacrifice. To be sure, such republican expectations were inherently aristocratic and limited the executive branch to wealthy men. That was better than the dangers implicit in paying the executive branch. Franklin even appealed to his own experience in Pennsylvania's Quaker Party. Quaker leaders, at least in religious contexts, performed their functions without compensation. To pay officials was a descent into a "papal" establishment and away from the apostolic model of ministry. As Wood observes, this was also a self-serving point. It highlighted Franklin's experience and conception of himself: a man who had retired from business "to dedicate his leisured life to philosophy and public service."[30]

Franklin's aristocratic outlook, however, was not based on inheritance (from blood or land) but meritocracy. In the context of the eighteenth century, his democratic outlook opposed rule by a class of self-perpetuating elites. This was the same logic behind his opposition to revisions in the Pennsylvania constitution of 1776 that added an executive and an upper chamber in a bicameral legislature. An executive, he believed, would tilt too much toward monarchy. Meanwhile, a senate that represented property interests was a recipe for revisiting the conflict between the proprietors (the wealthy) and the Assembly (the people).

Frustration with the direction of the new country and fears of an emerging partisan antagonism may have been the background for Franklin's extraordinary proposal on June 28, 1787, during the Constitutional Convention. He called upon the delegates to open their

sessions with prayer. The text for this four-paragraph speech comes from James Madison's *Records of the Federal Convention*. It caught many listeners by surprise since Franklin was not known for piety. It was not a conventional Protestant appeal for imploring God's favor but more an example of the god of the gaps. The delegates, Franklin complained, had looked everywhere for guidance and still had not reached consensus. They had examined "ancient history for models of government" as well as "different forms of those Republics which having been formed with the seeds of their own dissolution." Also inspected were "viewed Modern States all round Europe" but all failed to produce models for a constitution "suitable to our circumstances." The limits of such investigation had yielded "melancholy proof of the imperfection of the Human Understanding." In this setting, Franklin could not believe that his fellow Americans had not "thought of humbly applying to the Father of lights to illuminate our understandings." This was especially odd since throughout the War for Independence, patriots had regularly implored God for assistance: "In the beginning of the contest with G. Britain, when we were sensible of danger we had daily prayer in this room for the Divine Protection. – Our prayers, Sir, were heard, and they were graciously answered."[31]

Franklin concluded with a reaffirmation of divine providence, almost the exact one he had professed at the beginning of his career:

> And if a sparrow cannot fall to the ground without his notice, is it probable that an empire can rise without his aid? We have been assured, Sir, in the sacred writings that "except the Lord build they labor in vain that build it." I firmly believe this; and I also believe that without his concurring aid we shall succeed in this political building no better than the Builders of Babel: We shall be divided by our little partial local interests; our projects will be confounded, and we ourselves shall be become a reproach and a bye word down to future age. And what is worse, mankind may hereafter from this unfortunate instance, despair of establishing Governments by Human Wisdom, and leave it to chance, war, and conquest.[32]

This was not an appeal to the God of the Bible in the manner of Protestants who sometimes drew parallels between ancient Israel and modern governments. Nor was this an explicitly Christian or Trinitarian understanding of God, despite Franklin's quotation from

Christ's recorded words in the New Testament. Nevertheless, it was an explicit recognition of human helplessness and dependence on divine protection and blessing. The petition failed and reports later circulated that Alexander Hamilton responded to Franklin by saying America did not need "the aid of any foreign power."[33] But even a year after this incident when Franklin was describing the Convention to a French correspondent, he implicitly acknowledged that only God could supply the United States with order and stability. The delegates were "so different, their prejudices so strong and various, and their particular interests independent of the general, seeming so opposite."[34]

Franklin was generally lukewarm about the Constitution and kept a low profile as the document went to the states for ratification. At one level, he had come to oppose slavery and was not happy about the Constitution's compromise with it. He had abandoned the institution in 1781 when his last household slave, George, died. At the same time, Franklin chose not to support anti-slavery measures proposed for the new federal government. He did in 1787 join Pennsylvania's Society for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery and eventually became its president, during which time the body declared that slavery was "an atrocious debasement of human nature."[35] When Franklin added his name to the Society's 1790 petition to Congress that faulted American slavery for violating Christianity, he received criticism from South Carolina senator, Pierce Butler. Franklin was in danger of upsetting the federal compact, Butler argued. Franklin responded with one of his last satires, a speech from an Algerian Muslim who took issue with Christian abolitionists on the economic grounds that prohibiting slavery would destroy an essential component of trade. The point, perhaps not lost on slavery's proponents, was that Christian slave holders were in a position comparable to the adherents of Islam, a religion that Americans associated with despotism.

Slavery aside, Franklin could use the Bible to support the Constitution, though not in the most straightforward of ways. In one of his last editorials from April of 1788, despite reservations about the Senate, he drew upon his apparently vast knowledge of Scripture to draw parallels between the United States' situation and Moses' reception of the Decalogue at Mt. Sinai. Franklin observed that God had "personally deliver'd to that chosen Servant, in the Presence of the

whole Nation, a Constitution, and Code of Laws for their Observance." This "Constitution," though revealed by God himself, and under God's rule, included a "Ministry of the new Government" composed of Moses, Aaron, and his sons. Franklin added that anyone "would have thought that this Appointment of Men, who had distinguish'd themselves in procuring the Liberty of their Nation, and had hazarded their Lives in openly opposing the Will of a powerful Monarch, who . . . might have been an Appointment acceptable to a grateful People." Such a Constitution, "fram'd for them by the Deity himself," might have elicited a "universal welcome Reception." But the people, jealous for their own liberty, not a fault of them inherently, opposed the new government not from a commitment to the common good but out of "private interest." The lesson for Franklin was convoluted. Opposition to the Constitution did not prove, as in the case of Israel, that the new laws were "divinely inspired." It did, however, point to ongoing need for divine providence. "I can hardly conceive a Transaction of such momentous Importance to the Welfare of Millions now existing, and to exist in the Posterity of a great Nation," he concluded, "should be suffered to pass without being in some degree influenc'd, guided and governed by that omnipotent, omnipresent and beneficent Ruler, in whom all inferior Spirits live and move and have their Being."[36]

No Deathbed Conversion

Franklin had one last chance to make a profession of faith similar to his parents' or sister Jane's. The opportunity came not in a church context but by way of correspondence with Yale College's president, Ezra Stiles, a man with whom Franklin had a shared past. They had corresponded about science on a number of occasions and each had helped the other receive academic awards. Stiles, though not president of Yale until 1778, had a hand (as a college alum and prominent Congregationalist minister) in the College's 1753 award of a Masters Degree to Franklin. Twelve years later Franklin returned the favor by recommending Stiles to Edinburgh University for an honorary doctorate in theology. Stiles was the sort of Puritan that Franklin might have become had he remained in Boston and at Old South Church. The Yale president's interest in the natural world and his high

estimate of Christian morality as the real genius of the Bible made Stiles, in the words of Yale University historian, Edmund P. Morgan, a "deistic Christian."[37] Despite these ties, Stiles sensed a duty to inquire about the state of Franklin's soul. The Philadelphian's physical decline was obvious to many. Upon his return to America from France, Franklin battled gout and painful kidney stones. In January 1788, he fell down steps in his garden. His grandson, Benny, assisted him around the house and about town, and even functioned as his secretary since Franklin could no longer hold a pen.

Stiles' request for a disclosure of his friend's religious outlook was, importantly, more direct than any of the exchanges that Franklin had had with his beloved sister, Jane Mecom. She was his youngest sister, six years his junior, and remained in the fold of New England Protestantism. His letters to her were the most between Franklin and any other correspondent. They have attracted careful attention from Jill Lepore, and Carl Van Doren, the Pulitzer-Prize winning biographer of Franklin. Ben and Jane had sometimes debated Christianity. In 1743, in particular, Jane feared her brother had lost his faith. Ben, in reply, rejected the idea that anyone could merit salvation by good works; everyone needed grace. But he also insisted, as he did his entire life, that virtue was necessary to real faith. Franklin even recommended a section of Jonathan Edwards' book on revivals to prove that good works were the fruit of faith[38] That ended the exchange. Forty years later, Jane seemed to have stopped worrying. On August 16, 1787, she wrote from Boston that "our Grat [sic] Benefactor delights to Bless those that trust in Him, which I am sure you do." Part of Jane's confidence owed to Ben's admission that even if his fortunes turned he would continue to submit to God's will.[39] A year later, as Ben's health indicated his end was near, Jane reassured him that even despite his infirmities, "the consciousness of the Rectitude of the motives of all yr Actions Boath [sic] for Priviat and Public Benifitt will Soport your Hope for a more Blessed State to all Eternity where my Dear Brother we shall meet."[40] Had Jane come around to Ben's view of good works and salvation? Was she simply being polite? Whatever the answer, Mecom's letters show none of the earlier doubts about Franklin's soul.

That was not the case for Stiles who asked Franklin not merely about religion but about Jesus. He needed to ask because despite

Franklin's reception of "all the honors of the Republic of Letters," he was about to go to "a world, where all sublunary glories will be lost in the glories of immortality." This was all the more reason for asking, "my venerable friend," about "JESUS of Nazareth."[41] Franklin's response reflected his habitual do-goodism and hypersensitivity to public opinion. He repeated most of what he had written as a twenty-five-year-old starting out. Franklin wrote that he believed in one God, "the creator of the Universe," that God governed the world by his providence, that people should worship God, that the acceptable way of serving the deity was by "doing good to his other children," and that the immortality of human souls guaranteed "Justice in another Life respecting . . . Conduct in this." On Jesus, Franklin was cagey. Like Thomas Jefferson, he thought Jesus' ethical system was "the best the World ever saw or is likely to see." But Franklin had doubts about Jesus' divinity, "tho' it is a question I do not dogmatize upon, having never studied it." Franklin could see the utility of Christ's deity if it made his "Doctrines more respected and better observed." Even so, Franklin did not think God treated unbelievers "in his Government of this World" with any "peculiar Marks of his Displeasure."[42]

This confession of faith was as candid as anyone might have expected since Franklin requested that Stiles not communicate his letter's contents to others. Indeed, he began the letter by replying to Stile's request for a portrait to hang in the college's library with one of Elihu Yale. This was fitting if only because the school had been the first to acknowledge Franklin's scientific discoveries with an honorary degree. At the same time, he did not believe any of the portraits in his own possession were "worthy of the Place and Company [Stiles proposed]." He suggested that Stiles commission Yale's own "excellent" painter to produce a portrait that Franklin himself would subsidize. He must not delay, Franklin added, "or I may slip thro' his fingers, for I am now in my eighty-fifth year, and very infirm." In the postscript to this letter, Franklin indicated he was concerned about more than a portrait. He did not want to damage his reputation with "All Sects here" since he had given to them for construction of new places of worship. "I have never opposed any of their Doctrines," but his views about Jesus might alter his good relations. If Stiles could maintain Franklin's confidence, he could "hope to go out of the World in Peace with them all."[43]

Accounts of his deathbed scene indicate Franklin's confidence about going to the next world at peace with God. According to Polly Hewson (daughter of Margaret Stevenson, Franklin's landlady in London), who had moved to America and came to attend to Franklin at his death, the patient had asked for a painting of Judgment Day to be moved from the attic to his bedroom. The image of the ultimate expression of divine wrath and mercy did not disturb Franklin. In fact, he had written to Stiles that having experienced God's goodness and favor "thro' a long life, I have no doubt of its Continuance in the next."[44] Franklin did not pretend to have merited such favor. But his sense of the larger scheme of virtue and vice, grace, and sin, left him with few dilemmas about parallels between earth and heaven (and hell).

His apparent placidity about death was as remarkable as his extraordinary life. Franklin was the consummate handyman. His beliefs about providence and divine order reflected confidence in his understanding of nature, human nature, social relations, and human beings' relation to their maker. For none of these endeavors did Franklin need Scripture or the supernatural. He could build on the Protestant understanding of nature and grace, which had freed science, economics, politics, and ordinary work from the medieval church's bondage of sin and grace. At the same time, within a demystified nature and society, Franklin saw little need for Christian teaching about Christ, the atonement, the resurrection, heaven, and hell. The Christian religion was for him chiefly a moral system that produced decent persons and held civilized society together. To conclude that Franklin's idea of Christianity was boring is too strong if only because his curiosity about the workings of the world was bottomless. Franklin's life was hardly average or routine. Even so, the dilemmas of sin, suffering, the problem of evil, and eternal justice did not provoke wonder in Franklin the way that ordinary human existence did. When Franklin died on April 17, 1790 he likely had every expectation that his experience in the afterlife would match his time on planet earth.

Notes

1. Franklin to Elizabeth Partridge, October 11, 1779, quoted in Gordon S. Wood, *The Americanization of Benjamin Franklin* (New York: Penguin Press, 2004), 207.

2. Jefferson to Ferdinand Grand, April 23, 1790, quoted in Wood, *Americanization*, 212.
3. Franklin to Jane Mecom, November 4, 1787, quoted in Wood, *Americanization*, 215.
4. William Parker Cutler and Julia Perkins Cutler, Life, Journals and Correspondence of Rev. Manasseh Cutler, Ll. D., quoted in Wood, Americanization, 216.
5. William Pierce in *Records of the Federal Convention of 1787*, quoted in Wood, *Americanization*, 216.
6. John Updike, "Many Bens," *New Yorker*, February 22, 1988, quoted in Walter Isaacson, *Benjamin Franklin: An American Life* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2004), 256.
7. Thomas Mellon quoted in Nian-Sheng Huang, *Benjamin Franklin in American Thought and Culture, 1790–1990* (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1994), 46.
8. Wood, *Americanization*, 138.
9. Stephen Carl Arch, "Benjamin Franklin's *Autobiography* Then and Now," in Carla Mulford, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Benjamin Franklin* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 169.
10. Benjamin Franklin, *Autobiography*, in J. A. Leo Lemay, ed., *Franklin: Essays, Articles, Bagatelles, and Letters, Poor Richard's Almanack, and Autobiography* (New York: Library of America, 1987), 1329.
11. Franklin, *Autobiography*, 1352.
12. Franklin, *Autobiography*, 1307, 1308, 1311–12.
13. Franklin, *Autobiography*, 1360.
14. Franklin, *Autobiography*, 1373.
15. Franklin, *Autobiography*, 1377.
16. Franklin, *Autobiography*, 1379.
17. Franklin, *Autobiography*, 1390, 1391.
18. Franklin, *Autobiography*, 1383.
19. Franklin, *Autobiography*, 1393, 1394.
20. Franklin, *Autobiography*, 1395.
21. Franklin, *Autobiography*, 1409–10.
22. Franklin, *Autobiography*, 1469.
23. Franklin to Charles Thomson, November 11, 1788, *The Works of Benjamin Franklin* at https://oll.libertyfund.org/titles/franklin-the-works-of-benjamin-franklin-vol-xii-letters-and-misc-writings-1788-1790-supplement-indexes accessed August 13, 2019.

24. Benjamin Franklin, "Sketches of the Services of B. Franklin to the United States of America," *The Works of Benjamin Franklin* at https://oll.libertyfund.org/titles/franklin-the-works-of-benjamin-franklin-vol-xii-letters-and-misc-writings-1788-1790-supplement-indexes#lf1438-12_head_016 accessed August 13, 2019.
25. Franklin, *Autobiography*, 1395.
26. See, for instance, William Pencak, "Benjamin Franklin's Autobiography, Cotton Mather, and a Puritan God," *Pennsylvania History* 53.1 (January 1986) 1–25.
27. Jill Lepore, *Book of Ages: The Life and Opinions of Jane Franklin* (New York: Vintage Books, 2014), 236.
28. Wood, *Americanization*, 220.
29. Franklin, "Speech in the Convention on the Subject of Salaries," June 1787, quoted in Wood, *Americanization*, 217.
30. Wood, *Americanization*, 217.
31. Benjamin Franklin, "Motion for Prayers in the Convention," in Lemay, ed., *Franklin: Essays*, 1138.
32. Franklin, "Motion," 1139.
33. Wood, *Americanization*, 220.
34. Franklin to Pierre-Samuel du Pont de Nemours, June 9, 1788, quoted in Wood, *Americanization*, 221.
35. Benjamin Franklin, "An Address to the Public," November 9, 1789, quoted in Thomas S. Kidd, *Benjamin Franklin: The Religious Life of a Founding Father* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2017), 231.
36. Benjamin Franklin, "A Comparison of the Conduct of the Ancient Jews and of the Anti-Federalists in the United States of America," in Lemay, ed., *Franklin: Essays*, 1146, 1148–49.
37. Edmund Morgan, *The Gentle Puritan: A Life of Ezra Stiles, 1727–1795* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1962), 159.
38. See Kidd, *Benjamin Franklin*, 143–44.
39. Carl Van Doren, ed., *Letters of Benjamin Franklin and Jane Mecom* (1950; Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1950), 296.
40. Jane Mecom to Franklin, November 11, 1788, in Van Doren, ed., *Letters*, 316.
41. Stiles to Franklin, January 28, 1790, quoted in Kidd, *Benjamin Franknlin*, 234.
42. Franklin to Stiles, March 9, 1790, in Lemay, ed., *Franklin: Essays*, 1179–80.
43. Franklin to Stiles, March 9, 1790, 1179.
44. Franklin to Stiles, March 9, 1790, 1180.

Conclusion: The American Creed

None of Philadelphia's churches held a funeral service for Franklin. What transpired was more fitting his moralistic providentialism than a conventional service might have been. His death occurred on a Saturday. The following Monday a procession led Franklin's corpse through the streets of Philadelphia to the family plot in Christ Church's cemetery. His remains joined those of Francis (1736) and Deborah (1774). Sarah ("Sally") lived until 1808 and was buried with her brother and parents. The city's clergy (Protestants, Roman Catholics, and Jews) led the procession, with leading citizens of the city carrying the coffin. Following the body were representatives from government, lawyers, the city's printers and apprentices, and then figures from local educational and scientific organizations. Some estimate the crowd was just short of a Whitefieldian twenty thousand. Ships in the ports along the Delaware River, even British ones, hung their flags at half-mast. Members of the Pennsylvania Assembly agreed to wear black armbands for a month. William White, the first presiding bishop of the Episcopal Church in the United States and priest at Christ Church when Franklin died, would have been a good choice for a grave-side burial service. No historical account indicates whether a pastor or priest read Scripture, offered prayers, or read forms during Franklin's interment.

Observances surrounding a person's death often reveal either the deceased's wishes or the family's understanding of a relative's faith (or lack of it). Alfred Owen Aldridge, one of the first scholars to look for coherence in Franklin's beliefs, concluded that for most of his life the printer-turned-diplomat was a nominal Anglican. Franklin rejected "the entire body of Anglican divinity" but "kept strict Lents, probably took communion," and advised his family to follow the church's liturgical practices.[1] Aldridge included one facet of Franklin's religious

curiosity, a revised edition of the Book of Common Prayer, that foreshadowed Thomas Jefferson's abbreviation of the New Testament.

In the 1770s, Franklin had collaborated with Sir Francis Dashwood, Baron Le Despencer, the postmaster general of England, whose private life was anything but conventional, to make the Church of England's services more efficient. Time was always was money. Franklin noted that morning and evening services were so long and repetitious that "the continued attention suitable to so serious a duty becomes impracticable, the mind wanders, and the fervency of devotion is slackened."[2] He also knew many pious persons whose age or infirmities prevented them from remaining in cold churches (at least in the winter) for long services. Franklin imagined as well that many workers and tradesmen might attend services on days other than Sunday if "prayers were reduced to a much narrower compass." One revision that Franklin made was to slash the Apostles' Creed to five lines: God the father the creator, the Lordship of Christ, the Holy Spirit, forgiveness of sins, and eternal life. Franklin was also responsible for abbreviating the Psalter. He eliminated repetitions that called upon God for protection, historical parts with obscure names, overly personal expressions that could not possibly speak for someone other than the author, and imprecations that called for God's judgment on Israel's enemies. When published, the *Abridgement of the Book of Common Prayer* (1773) sold few copies. Franklin claimed that "the bulk became waste paper."[3]

Such an appreciation for liturgy reveals the degree to which Franklin's religious observance was truly nominal, the sort of devotion that George Whitefield and other revivalists had tried to scare out of colonists by way of warnings about eternal damnation. Reminders of God's wrath seemed to roll off Franklin's back even as he went along with the conventions of Protestant society. He took the oath required of all officers appointed by the Crown when he first started to serve in public life. Those vows required affirmation of the Trinity according to the Athanasian Creed.[4] Later, when sorting out the place of religion in Pennsylvania and the United States, Franklin argued against religious tests because they were less a measure of genuine faith than they were a means for churches to gain access to the state's patronage. William Duane, a good friend of grandson, Benjamin Franklin Bache, who married Bache's widow, reported that even in

family affairs Franklin acquiesced to Christian "usages of some one or other sect" without "accepting the dogmas of the prevailing systems."[5] As much as Franklin went along with the outward observances of the prevailing Protestant denominations—Anglican, Quaker, Presbyterian—that conformity did not creep into the proceedings surrounding his death and burial. Other than being interred in a church cemetery, standard practice for most colonists who could afford it, Franklin left the living world without Christian fanfare.

Arrangements for a memorial service fell to the American Philosophical Society. Almost a year after his burial, officers sponsored a ceremony to honor its celebrated founder. The delay was curious on several levels. France's National Assembly immediately after Franklin's death declared three days of mourning for "the Nestor of America" and one of the "fathers of universal humanity."[6] Such praise was an embarrassment to some members of the U.S. Congress. James Madison led the House of Representatives in wearing badges of mourning for a month. The Senate was not so sorrowful. When Senator Charles Carroll, a Roman Catholic from Maryland, proposed a tribute to honor Franklin, several Senators opposed the motion, some for personal reasons (John Adams harbored jealousy of Franklin's fame), others out of fear for showing indirect support for the revolution in France. When in 1791 the ceremony finally took place, partly to compensate for the national government's mixed reaction, the Society chose Rev. William Smith, the Anglican priest who at times had been Franklin's nemesis, to give the eulogy. Even Smith's biographer conceded that the priest was an odd choice. Smith "had dealt some heavy blows at Franklin; no man heavier ones." The affair gave Smith the chance to "make even more reparation for unintentional injustice."[7]

The memorial was the closest the nation came to giving Franklin a proper send off and perhaps Smith's status as a priest added gravity. That it took place in a German Lutheran Church may have helped, though the congregation's main value was the size of its meeting place. The Society needed a space large enough to accommodate the President of the United States, members of Congress, the Pennsylvania Assembly, friends of the family, and local residents. It was no minor affair since George and Martha Washington, and John and Abigail Adams were present, along with Thomas Jefferson and Alexander

Hamilton. The United States was a baby nation and its fortunes were uncertain, but if Franklin's sister, Jane Mecom, had been present she would have surely marveled that her very own brother had risen to such stature to garner the respects from the nation's most powerful officials. Smith tried to rise to the occasion by rendering dramatic a death that had occurred a year earlier:

> HEARD you not that solemn interrogatory? Who is He that now recedes from his labours among you? What Citizen, super-eminent in council, do you now deplore? What Luminary, what splendid Sun of Science, from the hallowed walks of Philosophy, now withdraws his beams ? What Father of his country, what Hero, what Statesman, what Law-giver, is now extinguished, from your Political Hemisphere and invites the mournful Obsequies? Is it He—your FRANKLIN!—It cannot be !—Long since, full of years, and full of honors, hath He submitted to the inexorable Call, and proceeded on his fated journey. [8]

Aldridge judged Smith's speech to be "a half-hearted, colorless piece . . . an artificial, uninspired, rhetorical exercise."[9] Smith may have employed such bravado for the sake of the dignitaries present. He may also have been trying to make up for having once referred to Franklin as a "virulent" man, who possessed a "foul" mouth and a "crafty" and "wicked" soul.[10]

Out of the eulogy's forty pages in print, Smith took ten of them to explain the nature of the genre going back to the Greeks, Romans, and Egyptians. By the time he arrived at his subject, he broke down Franklin's life along three familiar lines—citizenship as a Pennsylvanian, as an American, and as an earthling. For Smith, Franklin's fingerprints were on the former colony's and now commonwealth's many public institutions. His work as American had generated the nation's "Empire and Renown." Finally, Franklin's scientific discoveries had contributed to the "Happiness of the whole Human Race."[11] If the deceased had been conventionally Anglican, listeners would not have discovered it from Smith. Even when he mentioned Franklin's humble roots and birth, Smith sailed past Josiah's and Abiah's Puritan background, took a quick look at the Philadelphia print shop, and headed straight to the deceased's civic improvements. Smith spent little time on colonial politics and devoted the most time to Franklin's accomplishments as a scientist. Through it all, Franklin

looked beyond scientific utility and political liberty to the dawning of an era when humanity would achieve its greatest civilization. Franklin knew, Smith asserted, that the study of nature needed more than natural or human laws. "[H]uman knowledge, however improved and exalted, stood in need of illumination from on high." Smith added that "the divine Creator has not left mankind without such illumination, and evidence of himself, both internal and external, as may be necessary to their present and future happiness."[12] Apparently, belief in such a deity was sufficient to have confidence that Franklin was in a good place where all those gathered would see him in the next life:

> Yes, thou dear departed Friend and Fellow-Citizen ! Thou, too, art gone before us—thy Chair, thy celestial Car, was first ready! We must soon follow, and we know where to find Thee ! May we seek to follow thee by lives of Virtue and Benevolence like thine—then shall we surely find thee—and part with thee no more, forever ![13]

Franklin was not the only one in revolutionary Philadelphia who had few fears about Judgment Day.

Franklin's Religious Legacy

Smith's stilted sendoff of his colleague and sometime rival did little to inspire his audience or later Americans to esteem Franklin as a model of piety. The deceased was himself responsible for his limited appeal to future generations. Throughout much of American history, Franklin's reputation has veered between elite criticism and popular appeal. Among the founders themselves, John Adams' disdain for Franklin's indiscretions with women and deceptive diplomacy loomed over wider assessments of the man and his American character. The founder's seeming obsession with methods, systems, time, and money was another reason that writers from Herman Melville, Edgar Allen Poe, and Nathaniel Hawthorne down to Mark Twain, D. H. Lawrence, and F. Scott Fitzgerald subjected Franklin to ridicule.

In the wider public, however, Franklin enjoyed a following for his example as a self-made man. Some printers adopted his name for

their trade organizations. Franklin's images appeared on medals, tokens, and postage stamps as a reminder of patriotic respectability. Later, when Horatio Alger's novels appeared and the likes of Andrew Carnegie became millionaires, Franklin was a ready illustration of the American path to success. Franklin's name appeared on steamboats—one of the first on the Ohio River was christened *Ben Franklin*—and identified places such as counties, municipalities and streets; even a proposed State of Franklin, carved out of western North Carolina, lasted for a few years before returning to the original state's boundaries.[14] Franklin would also survive as an American icon in best-selling self-help books, like Stephen Covey's *Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*, and in children's literature such as Rosalyn Schazner's *How Ben Franklin Stole the Lightning*.[15]

This is not to say that Franklin has lacked admirers. Among the Founders he stands out as the one most accessible, the one with the common touch, the Founder who embodied the nation's emerging democratic and pragmatic character. In 1898, when Sydney George Fisher came out with *The True Benjamin Franklin*, he wrote with the aim of humanizing a figure who had been so divinized by the aura of the Founding that he had lost his "fascinating" human qualities.[16] Forty years later, Carl Van Doren's literary biography, *Benjamin Franklin*, was designed to rescue the man from Founding's significance and restore him to his "grand dimensions," measured not by national greatness but by human accomplishment.[17] Perhaps the effort to restore Franklin's human qualities explains why Gordon Wood tried to restore some of the mystery around the Founder. Although Franklin was "the most folksy of the Founders," by the time Wood wrote Franklin had become too human.[18] What Wood set out to restore a sense of surprise in understanding Franklin's remarkable life.

Although Protestants have had little trouble polishing the religious reputation of figures such as George Washington and Abraham Lincoln even when the evidence of genuine devotion is at best ambiguous, Franklin has proved a harder sell despite the amount of attention he gave to Christianity. Parson (Mason Locke) Weems, the Anglican priest who supplemented his income as a bookseller and biographer, tried to do for Franklin what he had for George Washington, Weems' best remembered subject. The priest quoted from a 1784 letter in which Franklin ruled out atheism in favor of providence and

concluded, "Now, can any honest man after this, entertain a doubt that Dr. Franklin was indeed, *in practice very much a christian.*"[19] Another nineteenth-century historian (and president of Harvard College) attracted to both Franklin and Washington was the Unitarian, Jared Sparks. He too regarded Franklin, despite objections to faith, as someone who revered religion and "Christian institutions."[20] On the other side were historians who leaned more toward Franklin's parents' faith than to their son's spirituality. The Presbyterian minister, Robert Baird, who wrote the first survey of American religious history, damned Franklin with faint praise. He "cannot be said with certainty to have been an infidel."[21] By the end of the century, the Congregationalist pastor, Leonard Woolsey Bacon, dismissed Franklin's "catch-penny morality" for debasing the United States. Franklin belonged in the same company with the deist, Thomas Jefferson, and the "ribald" Thomas Paine.[22]

Those assessments set the course for twentieth-century evaluations. Van Doren's Pulitzer-Prize winning biography interpreted Franklin as "thoroughly secular" but not "anti-clerical."[23] In the field of religious history, Yale University's Sydney Ahlstrom, in his prize-winning religious history of the American people (1972), judged Franklin, though a "moral athlete," to be a "completely secularized son of the Puritans."[24] Twenty years later, Mark A. Noll, the dean of evangelical historians, concluded that Franklin was "less traditional" in his religious life, someone who appreciated Jesus more as an example of humility than as the second person of the Trinity.[25] Even Michael Novak, a Roman Catholic defender of the Christian influences on the American Founding had to admit that Franklin was indifferent to doctrine and liturgy.[26]

The only real debate over Franklin's faith has come from an unlikely dustup between two Ivy League historians. In her book about the Tea Party movement, *The Whites of Their Eyes* (2010), Harvard historian, Jill Lepore, included a section on evangelical pastors who mythologized the Founder's faith. She complained about those who berated secular historians for thinking that Franklin had more in common with contemporary scholars than with the ordinary believers of his day. Here the concern was not with Franklin's own religious views but whether his understanding of Christianity's place in the American Founding was the norm 225 years later. For

Lepore, Franklin's ideas about religion were no more relevant than Isaac Newton's astronomical reflections were for NASA scientists. Using the past as a norm for the present was not history, civil religion, or even constitutionalism. It was "fundamentalism."[27] In a review of Lepore's book, Gordon Wood, defended ordinary Americans' memories and veneration of the Founding even when it trafficked more in myth than critical history. Wood concluded that Lepore was guilty of the professional historians' chief sin, namely, demythologizing the past. He admitted that mythologizing the past is dangerous. But critical history alone could not sustain interest in the past. Keeping history alive required a "living memory" that was "as important to our society as the history written by academics."[28]

As important as the exchange between Lepore and Wood was for pondering the present in relation to the past, it did little to situate Franklin within American religion. A responsible way to answer questions about Franklin's faith is to apply the standards of Christian churches. By one measure, because Franklin attended church semi-regularly, did not receive communion (judgments vary), belonged to somewhat anti-Christian groups like the Masons, and frequently used biblical language and imagery in his writing, he was a deistical or proto-Unitarian Christian.[29] The limits of rendering Franklin this way—though accurate—is to identify him by a category that confines his significance to a side of American Christianity as small as Unitarianism.

One way to illustrate this deficiency is to note one historian's encounter with memories of Franklin at the church where he rented a pew for Deborah and himself. On Easter Sunday 2019, James Bratt, an astute historian who taught for many years at Calvin University, attended a service at Christ Church and began to notice names on the walls and pews. He understood that many of those listed were Christian and many others were "well, like Ben Franklin." Bratt had accepted the received wisdom that Franklin's Christian identity was hollow. He went on to remark on the priest's homily in which the remarkable African-American singer and native of Philadelphia, Marian Anderson, functions as an illustration of the Christian faith. As Bratt remembered it, the priest lauded Anderson for living out "something hoped for," the way that Christians themselves hope for the resurrection.[30]

What is notable about this juxtaposition of Philadelphia's celebrities is that Franklin actually compares favorably with Anderson.[31] Anderson, like Franklin, grew up in the church, wrote an autobiography, and in it confessed that she "cherished" her religion even though she did not go to church often. "I hope and believe that I am on good speaking terms with [God]," she added.[32] Franklin could not have said it better. Yet, the way historians remember Franklin is markedly different from the way they reflect on Anderson—if Bratt is any indication. Many have no trouble recognizing that the names on Christ Church's walls were "well, like Marian Anderson," not the best representatives of historic Christianity. Yet, Franklin likely submitted self-consciously to the supreme being of the universe and sought to live a life worthy of reward in the afterlife as well as Anderson had.

The point is not to place Franklin at a position near Anderson on a scale of Christianity. It is rather to recognize the dead end of such evaluations. This is even more obvious at least a century after academics and church officials have accepted "liberal" Protestantism as a legitimate continuation of western Christianity. Had Franklin lived during the post-Civil War era rather than the revolutionary period, he could have easily qualified for membership in any number of white Protestant denominations.

One significant knock against Franklin's liberal Christianity (in the 2020s compared to the 1890s) is his seemingly crude infatuation with economic prosperity and all too easy blather about bourgeois virtues. To suggest how well Franklin would have fit in late nineteenth-century mainline Protestantism, someone does not need to leave his adopted hometown of Philadelphia. In the city between 1875 and 1920 two prominent Protestants, one Presbyterian, the other Baptist, became fixtures in the business, church, political, and cultural worlds. The Baptist was Russell H. Conwell, founder of Temple University, who gained notoriety (at least) for preaching a self-help sermon, "Acres of Diamonds," an estimated 5,000 times. He was cordial with the Presbyterian, John Wanamaker, a merchant who established the basic features of the department store in the United States while being active, as administrator and philanthropist, in such wholesome Protestant enterprises as Sunday school, the YMCA, and the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. (The comparison with Franklin benefits from

Wanamaker's appointment in 1889 as Postmaster General under Benjamin Harrison, a post he held until 1893.)

These Victorian-era Philadelphians may not have looked to Franklin directly for inspiration, but their own brand of Protestant piety came straight out of the Founder's understanding of work, virtue, success, and fear of God. In her biography of Wanamaker, Nicole C. Kirk begins with an evening in May, 1914 when the department store owner and Conwell were going to ceremonies to open a new Philadelphia hospital. Its name, Good Samaritan, surely would have pleased Franklin. So would have Conwell's remarks—another rendition of "Acres of Diamonds." In it, he echoed the Franklinian themes of doing well by doing good. The pursuit of wealth was godly, even a form of preaching the gospel. "Money is power, and you ought to be reasonably ambitious to have it . . . . because you can do more good with it than you could without it."[33] It was indeed a "profound" mistake to identify poverty with piety. Kirk argues that Wanamaker embodied Conwell's gospel for he was part of a generation of Protestants who used commerce and its proceeds to improve the city and its inhabitants. For Wanamaker, his store and employees were an "extension of his religious work" at church and in Sunday school. The sort of goods he sold and the standards by which he managed staff became an expression of morality, faith, and good taste. Nicole Kirk concludes, "Wanamaker's blending of religion and business" transformed Protestant Christianity and situated it firmly in the emerging middle class.[34] Of course, historians of previous eras might well add that the synergies between business and Protestantism—especially revivalist religion—were already apparent in Franklin's day in the case of George Whitefield and also characterized the awakenings of the nineteenth century associated with Charles G. Finney.[35]

Fifty years later, after the failures of capitalism and the appeal of Marxism, identifying Christianity with success and prosperity looked a lot less wholesome. It could explain why a historian during a worship service at Christ's Church thought an African-American singer with loose connections to the church was a better index of Christianity than Franklin. To defend his "Way of Wealth" as compatible with Christianity at a time when Leftists and some Christians judge capitalism as a direct threat to virtue, community, and faith is to enter a series of arguments that never dawned on Conwell, Wanamaker, or their

closest colleagues. Indeed, some of the harshest critics of modernity, especially its liberal economic and political structures, have come from Roman Catholic academics. Brad S. Gregory, for instance, has argued that the Protestant Reformation set into motion, albeit unintentionally, a series of social and intellectual transformations in which personal choice and acquisitive materialism have stripped the West of its Christian heritage.[36] Likewise, the political theorist, Patrick J. Deneen, has argued that political liberalism, including its economic operations, have failed to cultivate the virtues (that Franklin lauded) necessary for a healthy and stable society.[37] Neither of these scholars, both of whom teach at Notre Dame, defend a medieval order. But their arguments echo theological and philosophical objections that have often surfaced repeatedly since the sixteenth century in Roman Catholic polemics against Protestantism and modern society.

Franklin may bear responsibility for some of the disturbing aspects of modern liberal societies, but for the better part of three centuries his synthesis of Protestant and Enlightened outlooks produced a remarkable number of personal and public goods. As political theorist Michael Walzer has argued, the loss of wholeness or integration in society and culture that some critics of modernity lament, is one of modernity's great achievements. The separation of civil society and government creates economic competition and free enterprise. The abolition of dynastic government separates family and politics. Likewise, the creating distinct spheres for public and private life nurtures possibilities for new forms of intimacy and domestic arrangements. In the home, family members have the freedom to pursue "a very wide range of interests and activities. . . . reading books, talking politics, keeping a journal, teaching what we know to our children, cultivating (or, for that matter, neglecting) our gardens."[38] Walzer does not mention Franklin, but with the exception of gardening, he could have had the Philadelphian in mind—from work in the print shop, Junto meetings, life with Deborah, and even writing the *Autobiography*.

Another political theorist, Peter Meilaender developed Walzer's point to correct the notion that modernity is primarily a narrative of "decay, fragmentation, and alienation." The modern world offered "increasing richness and diversity, of freedom and pluralism." Thanks to the doctrine of vocation, Protestants were especially able to appreciate modernity not as "fragmentation and loss," but as

"differentiation and enrichment."[39] Franklin not only reveled in the possibilities that early modern society afforded him, but created institutions and produced arguments on behalf of the order that arose with Protestantism as part of the social fabric. To condemn late modernity on the basis of contemporary inequalities and injustice is to miss the genius of early modernity and achievement of figures such as Franklin.

Defending the better parts of modernity and Franklin's contribution to them is still distant from assessing his religious outlook. Franklin possesses an impressive set of accomplishments. Also, he was no saint. Furthermore, his philosophical and religious reflections, although voluminous, were not profound. One exception is a Christian doctrine in which Franklin compares favorably to Abraham Lincoln, another prominent American figure with loose ties to traditional Christianity but whose reflections on God historians often regard as deeply Christian. Like Franklin, Lincoln grew up among humble Protestants (Baptist) of decidedly Calvinistic convictions only to reject the church in his youth and opt instead the political ideals of the Enlightenment. Like Franklin, Lincoln opposed slavery though perhaps not to the same degree as either Quakers in Philadelphia or abolitionists later in New England. Like Franklin's dive into predestinarianism, Lincoln took a decidedly deterministic turn in his rejection of his parents' faith—he said he always rejected free choice. Like Franklin as well, Lincoln's ideas about God almost always came back to the doctrine of providence, the outlook from which the president's reflections about the meaning of the Civil War far surpassed those of the nation's theologians and pastors. According to Mark A. Noll, "None probed so profoundly the ways of God. . . . None penetrated as deeply into the nature of providence" as Lincoln's Second Inaugural.[40]

That evaluation of the sixteenth president is different in its criteria for judgment, but goes along with the estimates of nineteenth-century Protestants such as Dr. James Smith, the Presbyterian pastor in Springfield, Illinois, where the Lincolns attended services, who claimed Lincoln was "convinced of the truth of the Christian religion."[41] Aside from Lincoln's own faith, like Franklin he shared the politics and culture of Protestants with British backgrounds. Lincoln inhabited the world of the Whig Party which, according to Allen

Guelzo, the leading scholar on the sixteenth president, had harmonized "evangelical conversion and the energies of the market." Likewise, his understanding of the American system (a national market and centralized government) was responsible not only for a cultural congruence between low-church Protestants and Whigs, but also for a "Protestant political consensus within America's secularized republican society."[42]

Though in different centuries, Franklin and Lincoln were similarly situated within the overlapping spheres of markets, political structures, national ideals, and Christian endeavor. Both drew upon Protestant convictions learned at home and absorbed in their surrounding society to function as well-respected members in a culture dominated by English-speaking Protestantism. If historians may plausibly claim Lincoln as one of the profoundest Christian thinkers of his era, certainly there is room for Ben Franklin's membership in the club. Franklin's faith was obviously not up to George Whitefield's standards, nor did his remarks about God's designs in the ways of the natural world or British government possess the poignancy of Lincoln's reflections about war, death, and national purpose. Franklin was nevertheless on the spectrum of an Anglo-American Protestant heritage that ran from the Puritans down to the twentieth-century mainline Protestantism. If that range of Christians outside Rome's jurisdiction could include Thomas Cartwright, Richard Hooker, Oliver Cromwell, John Winthrop, John Milton, William Penn, John Locke, Ezra Stiles, William of Orange, George Fox, John Owen, Edmund Burke, Theodore Roosevelt, Woodrow Wilson, John Bunyan, and Jonathan Edwards, how do you exclude Benjamin Franklin?

Notes

1. Alfred Owen Aldridge, *Benjamin Franklin and Nature's Gods* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1967), 270.
2. "Franklin's Contributions to an Abridgment of the Book of Common Prayer," quoted in Aldridge, *Benjamin Franklin*, 171.
3. Aldridge, *Benjamin Franklin*, 172.
4. This is the judgment of Aldridge in Aldridge, *Benjamin Franklin*, 190.
5. William Duane quoted i n Aldridge, *Benjamin Franklin*, 193.

6. French Assembly quoted in Gordon S. Wood, *The Americanization of Benjamin Franklin* (New York: Penguin Press, 2004), 231.
7. H. W. Smith, *The Life and Correspondence of Rev. William Smith* (Philadelphia: Ferguson Bros., 1880), vol. 2, 345.
8. William Smith, "Being an Eugolium on Benjamin Franklin," in William Smith and John Adams, *The Works of William Smith, D. D. Late Provost of the College and Academy of Philadelphia* (Philadelphia: Hugh Maxwell & William Fry, 1803), 1, 44.
9. Alfred Owen Aldridge, *Franklin and His French Contemporaries* (1957), quoted in Wood, *Americanization*, 233.
10. William Smith quoted in Wood, *Americanization*, 233.
11. Smith, "Being an Eugolium," 53.
12. Smith, "Bei ng an Eugolium," 80.
13. Smith, "Being an Eugolium," 82.
14. Andrew M. Schocket, "Benjamin Franklin in Memory and Popular Culture," in David Waldstreicher, ed., *A Companion to Benjamin Franklin* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), 485.
15. Stephen Covey, *Seven Habits of Highly Effective People* (1989); Rosalyn Schazner, *How Ben Franklin Stole the Lightning* (New York: Harper Collins, 2002).
16. Sidney George Fisher, *The True Benjamin Franklin* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1898), 8.
17. Carl Van Doren, *Benjamin Franklin* (New York: Viking Press, 1938), viii.
18. Wood, *Americanization*, 1.
19. Mason L. Weems, *Life of Benjamin Franklin* (Philadelphia: M. Carey, 1822), 253.
20. Jared Sparks, *Life of Benjamin Franklin* (Boston: Tappan and Dennet, 1844), 516, 517.
21. Robert Baird, *Religion in America* (New York: Harper and Bros., 1842), 119.
22. Leonard Woolsey Bacon, A *History of American Christianity* (New York: The Christian Literature Co., 1897), 230.
23. Van Doren, *Benjamin Franklin*, 131.
24. Sydney E. Ahlstrom, *A Religious History of the American People* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1972), 348.
25. Mark A. Noll, *A History of Christianity in the United States and Canada* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), 133.
26. Michael Novak, *On Two Wings: Humble Faith and Common Sense at the American Founding* (San Francisco: Encounter Books, 2001), 174.

27. Jill Lepore, *The Whites of Their Eyes: The Tea Party's Revolution and the Battle over American History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010), 121.
28. Gordon S. Wood, "No Thanks for the Memories," *New York Review of Books*, January 11, 2013.
29. David L. Holmes, *The Faiths of the Founding Fathers* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), ch. 12.
30. James Bratt, "A Progressive Civil Religion," June 13, 2019 at https://blog.reformedjournal.com/2019/06/13/a-progressive-civil-rel igion-2/ accessed August 13, 2019.
31. Bratt, "A Progressive Civil Religion."
32. Marian Anderson, *My Lord, What a Morning: An Autobiography* (1956; Champagne/Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1984), 98.
33. Nicole C. Kirk, *Wanamaker's Temple: The Business of Religion in an Iconic Department Store* (New York: New York University Press, 2018), 15.
34. Kirk, *Wanamaker's Temple*, 12–13.
35. See, for instance, Charles E. Hambrick-Stowe, "'Sanctified Business': Historical Perspectives on Financing Revivals of Religion," in Larry Eskridge and Mark A. Noll, eds., *More Money, More Ministry: Money and Evangelicals in Recent North American History* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2000), 82ff.
36. Brad S. Gregory, *The Unintended Reformation: How a Religious Revolution Secularized Society* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012).
37. Patrick J. Deneen, *Why Liberalism Failed* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2018). Deneen, to be clear, does not mention Franklin but is explicitly critical of the Lockean framework that inspired Franklin and that later influenced the American Founding.
38. Michael Walzer, "Liberalism and the Art of Separation," *Political Theory* 12.3 (Aug. 1984), 317.
39. Peter Meilaender, "Against the Integrated Life," *Cresset* 81.5 (Trinity 2018) 4.
40. Mark A. Noll, *America's God: From Jonathan Edwards to Abraham Lincoln* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 426.
41. William Smith quoted in William J. Wolf, "Abraham Lincoln's Faith," available at http://www.abrahamlincolnsclassroom.org/abraham-lincoln-in-depth/abraham-lincolns-faith/accessioned August 5, 2019.
42. Allen C. Guelzo, *Abraham Lincoln: Redeemer President* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002), 58.

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