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The Religious Roots of the American Revolution and the Right to Keep and Bear Arms

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By David B. Kopel

This article examines the religious background of the American Revolution. The article details how the particular religious beliefs of the American colonists developed so that the American people eventually came to believe that overthrowing King George and Parliament was a sacred obligation. The religious attitudes which impelled the Americans to armed revolution are an essential component of the American ideology of the right to keep and bear arms.

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King George III reportedly denounced the American Revolution as “a Presbyterian rebellion.”¹ Horace Walpole, a distinguished man of letters, told his fellow members of Parliament, “There is no use crying about it. Cousin American has run off with a Presbyterian parson, and that is the end of it.”² Many other British sympathizers in America blamed the Presbyterians for the war.³

In 1775, the great statesman Edmund Burke tried to warn the British Parliament that the Americans could not be subjugated: “the people are Protestants, and of that kind which is the most adverse to all implicit submission of mind and opinion.” While the Catholic and Anglican Churches were supported by the government, and were inclined to support the state, the American sects were based on “dissenting interests.” They had “sprung up in direct opposition to the ordinary powers of the world, and could justify that opposition only on a strong claim of natural liberty. Their very existence depended on the powerful and unremitted assertion of that claim. All Protestantism, even the most cold and passive, is a sort of dissent. But the religion most prevalent in our northern colonies is a refinement of the principle of resistance: it is the dissidence of dissent, and the protestantism of the Protestant religion.”⁴

Historian John Patrick Diggins writes that American historians have concentrated on political ideas while underplaying “the religious convictions that often undergird them, especially the Calvinist convictions that Locke himself held: resistance to tyranny....”⁵

The American Revolutionaries had many grievances which had little to do with religion—such as taxation without representation, searches and seizures without probable cause, the confiscation of firearms, and so on. Nevertheless, it was American religion, especially New England religion, which provided Americans with an intellectual frame for understanding their disputes with England. It was religion which told the colonists that the English government was not merely adopting unwise policy; rather, the King and Parliament were trampling the God-given rights of the Americans, and were in effect warring against God. It was religion which convinced the American that they had a sacred duty to start a revolution. The black-robed American clergymen were described as the “black regiment” for their crucial role in building popular support for war against England.

Ministers and the Militia

The first white settlers of New England were the Puritans who fled to North America to escape persecution in Britain.⁶ The Puritans were quite confident that, no matter how severe their persecution, the kingdom of God was at hand. Although the initial migrants to New England had believed that they would return to England fairly soon, the defeat of Oliver Cromwell destroyed any hope of establishing a Puritan state in Britain. Accordingly, the New England Puritans set out to build their “shining city on a hill” in the wilderness of North America. Their stern belief in their holy mission made them unafraid of whatever fighting was necessary to accomplish their goals.⁷

Their laws about children and guns were strict: every family was required to own a gun, to carry it in public places (especially when going to church) and to train children in firearms proficiency.⁸

On the first Thanksgiving Day, in 1621, the colonists and the Indians joined together for target practice; the colonist Edward Winslow wrote back to England that “amongst other recreations we exercised our arms, many of the Indians coming amongst us.”⁹

In New England, Congregationalist ministers were usually the preachers of special sermons on Election Day (when a sermon was preached to the legislature and governor) and Artillery Day (when new militia artillery officers were elected). On these days, the preachers departed from narrowly religious themes, and often spoke of the duty of Christian men to fight for liberty against tyranny.¹⁰

Militia muster days were another occasion on which ministers exhorted men to fight in defense of their liberty, and to volunteer for expeditions beyond their state's borders.¹¹ At all special military occasions, ministers presented prayers.¹² A minister who wanted to address an important public issue could also announce a special weekday sermon.

Important sermons had a much broader audience than just the people who were in attendance when the minister spoke. Sermons were often reprinted, and distributed to other states. By 1776, the New England Congregationalist ministers were preaching at a record pace of over two thousand sermons per week. The number of Congregationalist pamphlets from New England exceeded the number of secular pamphlets from all the other colonies combined by more than four to one.¹³

The meeting houses for church services were fortified buildings where the community could gather if attacked, and where arms and powder were often stored. (The community supplied militia arms to families which could not afford their own.) As historian Marie Ahearn writes, "Over the year the minister, the meeting house, and the militia forged an active and mutually supporting alliance."¹⁴

Ezra Stiles, the Congregationalist President of Yale University, lauded "the wisdom of our ancestors in instituting a militia."¹⁵ Elisha Fish published the sermon *The Art of War Lawful and Necessary for a Christian People*, to encourage young men in their militia exercises. His introduction to the published version spoke of his intent to encourage other writers "to spread this martial Fire through our happy Land."¹⁶ Free men bearing arms to defend their liberty were "the true strength and safety of every commonwealth."¹⁷

Ministers taught that the militia bred good Christian character, whereas standing armies bred degradation and vice. When the Redcoats moved into Boston, the ministry contrasted the wicked, corrupt, degraded, and dependent character of the standing army with the Christian virtue of the free militiaman.

The former fought for pay and for worldly gain; the latter fought for Christian liberty.¹⁸ Ebenezer Chaplin's 1774 militia sermon argued that just as David's band of volunteers had defeated King Saul's army, so an American militia would defeat a British standing army.¹⁹

Ministers cited the Roman historians Tacitus and Sallust to show that when Rome was defended by a militia, Rome was free. When the Roman character degenerated, and a standing army was substituted for the militia, Rome sank into despotism.²⁰

What was true for the military arm of society was true for the entire society: the loss of freedom created a condition of moral degradation, of servile dependence, and of temptation to vice. Christian virtue was nearly impossible to maintain if political liberty were destroyed. The fight for political liberty was a sacred cause because civil liberty was the garden for the proper cultivation of the Christian soul, according to God's natural law.²¹

Ministers quite often brought their own firearms to militia service, and fought in their town's militia.²² While all good citizens were obliged to become proficient in the use of arms, the obligation was especially great on wealthy citizens. After all, poor nations were rarely invaded, but wealth attracted foreign predators. So as for the wealthy:

It is therefore especially *their* duty, as well as interest, to do what they can to put the people into a capacity of defense. When *they* spend their time in idleness, effeminating pleasures, or even in accumulating riches, to the total neglect of the art of war, and every measure to promote it, they act unbecoming good members of society, and set an example highly prejudicial to the community.²³

Self-defense and the Gift of Life

All of the natural rights philosophers—such as Blackstone, Montesquieu, Hobbes, and Locke—who provided the intellectual foundation of the American Revolution saw self-defense as “the primary law of nature,” from which many other legal principles could be deduced.

John Locke argued that a man's life belonged to God. Accordingly, the life was inalienable property; a man could not

destroy his life by suicide, or sell his life by voluntarily choosing to become a slave. To allow one's life to be destroyed because one failed to engage in self-defense was a form of hubris. As a 1747 sermon in Philadelphia put it:

He that suffers his life to be taken from him by one that hath no authority for that purpose, when he might preserve it by defense, incurs the Guilt of self murder since God hath enjoined him to seek the continuance of his life, and Nature itself teaches every creature to defend itself.

Like the Catholic canonists, the New Englanders connected the natural law right of self-defense to the duty to protect one's national liberties:

There is a Principle of Self-Defence and Preservation, implanted in our very Natures, which is necessary to us almost as our Beings, which no positive Law of God ever yet contradicted....When our Liberty is invaded and struck at, 'tis sufficient Reason for our making War on the Defence or Recovery of it.²⁴

Simeon Howard, preaching the Boston artillery company in 1773 likewise asserted the natural law right of self-defense:

Self-preservation is one of the strongest, and a universal principle of the human mind: And this principle allows of every thing necessary to self-defence, opposing force to force, and violence to violence. This is so universally allowed that I need not attempt to prove it.²⁵

According to Howard, failure to practice self-defense was a sin, one reason being that tame submission to tyranny created an environment conducive to sin: "Such submission tends to slavery; and compleat slavery implies every evil that the malice of man and the devils can inflict." Samuel Cooper likewise connected servility with moral degradation, for servility was

“commonly accompanied with the meanest vices, such as adulation, deceit, falsehood, treachery, cruelty, and the basest methods of supporting and procuring the favour of the power upon which it depends.”²⁶

The New Testament said that a man who neglects to provide for his family has implicitly denied the faith and is worse than an infidel. “But,” asked Howard, “in what way can a man be more justly chargeable with this neglect, than by suffering himself to be deprived of his life, liberty or property, when he might lawfully have preserved them?”²⁷

Preaching the Boston election sermon of 1776, Samuel West pointed to another implication of “the law of nature” and its “principle of self-defence.” Self-defense included a duty to one’s community. It was violation of common sense and of natural law for people to think that they “did God service when they unmercifully butchered and destroyed the lives of the servants of God; while others, upon the contrary extreme, believe that they please God while they sit still and quietly behold their friends and brethren killed by their unmerciful enemies without endeavoring to defend or rescue them. The one is a sin of omission, and the other is a sin of commission...” Both sins were “great violations of the law of God.”²⁸

Getting Ready for War

According to Harry S. Stout, a professor of religion at Yale University, “From the repeal of the Stamp Act on, New England’s Congregationalist ministers played a leading role in fomenting sentiments of resistance, and, after 1774, open rebellion.”²⁹

The Boston Massacre, March 5, 1770, radicalized much of the Massachusetts clergy. The following Sunday, Rev. John Lathrop, preaching at the Old North Church (from whose towers would shine on April 18, 1775, the “one if by land, two if by sea” lanterns for Paul Revere and Samuel Dawes), announced God’s condemnation of England. He proclaimed the legitimacy of forcible resistance to the British government, if reform were not speedy.³⁰

Eli Forbes’ 1771 Artillery Day sermon, *The Dignity and Importance of the Military Character Illustrated*, emphasized the importance of being prepared to fight to defend liberty.³¹ Christians were not required to wait until they were attacked by a

tyrant. Preemption was more prudent, explained Simeon Howard in his 1773 sermon the Boston militia's artillery company:

An innocent people threatened with war are not always obliged to receive the first attack. This may frequently prove fatal, or occasion an irreparable danger. When others have sufficient manifested an injurious or hostile intention, and persist in it, notwithstanding all the admonition and remonstrance we can make, we may, in order to avoid the blow they are meditating against us, begin the assault.³²

Nathaniel Whitaker elaborated on preemption. He pointed out that God had ordered Joshua to strike first at Jabin, king of Hazor (*Joshua* 11):

[W]hile all the peace in his kingdom, for aught we find, God commands Israel to raise an army, and invade the tyrant's dominions.

The moral reason for this is obvious. For usurpation or oppression, is offensive war, already levied. Any state which usurps power over another state, or rulers, who by a wanton use of their power, oppress their subjects, do thereby break the peace and commence an offensive war. In such a case opposition is mere self-defense, and is no more criminal, yea, as really our duty to defend ourselves against murderer, or highway robber. Self-preservation is an instinct God implanted in our nature. Therefore we sin against God and nature, when we tamely resign our rights to tyrants, or quietly submit to public oppressors, if it be in our power to defend ourselves.³³

After the British Army occupied Boston, the state legislature reassembled in Watertown. On May 31, 1775, a few weeks after the American victory at Lexington and Concord, Samuel Langdon preached a sermon to the legislature, telling the legislators not to worry about initiating military action: "he that

arms himself to commit a robbery, and demands the traveller's purse by the terror of instant death, is the first aggressor, though the other should take the advantage of discharging his weapon first, and killing the robber."³⁴

Victory Inevitable in the Sacred Cause of Liberty

Liberty was the "daughter of God, and excepting his Son, the first born of heaven."³⁵ Levi Hart declared that "the sacred cause of liberty" was why "the Son of God was manifest in the flesh, that he might destroy the tyranny of sin and satan, assert and maintain the equal government of his Father, redeem the guilty slaves from their more and Egyptian bondage, and cause the oppressed to go free."³⁶

To fight for liberty, therefore, was to fight for God. Biblical references to "liberty" was explained as referring primarily to spiritual liberty, yet also including civil liberty.³⁷ Indeed, the two were one, because tyranny would degrade religion. The favorite of all the liberty texts was "Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage." (*Galatians* 5:1).³⁸

About a month before the battles of Lexington and Concord, Rev. William Emerson preached to the Concord militia that their victory against the larger British army was guaranteed, just as God had protected little Judah from a larger army. He challenged the British: "It will be your unspeakable Damage to meddle with us, for we have an unconquered Leader that carries his people to Victory and Triumph." The coming war would bring many tribulations, he acknowledged, but American victory had been ordained by God since the beginning of time.³⁹

Five weeks later, on April 19, 1775, the Redcoats, having marched out of Boston, quickly routed the Lexington militia, and then marched on to Concord, where the Americans were rumored to possess a cannon. The militia had been roused by Paul Revere and Samuel Dawes, and the first man to muster at the North Bridge in Concord was Reverend William Emerson.

The Concord militia stood its ground. The Redcoats fled after a few minutes fighting, and were harried by Americans all the way back to Boston, suffering 293 casualties.⁴⁰ On July 4, 1837, the Concord Monument was dedicated, and the crowd sang the *Concord Hymn*, written by William Emerson's grandson Ralph Waldo Emerson:

*By the rude bridge that arched the flood,
Their flag to April's breeze unfurled,
Here once the embattled farmers stood,
And fired the shot heard round the world.*

...

*Spirit, that made those heroes dare
To die, and leave their children free,
Bid Time and Nature gently spare
The shaft we raise to them and thee.*

The Revolution would involve much, much more than the interests of the people then inhabiting the thirteen colonies. William Gordon urged Americans “not to fear to bleed freely in the cause,” for their cause was “not of a particular people, but of mankind in general.” And although “the country should be wasted by the sword,” a war would preserve for future generations “the most essential part of the fair patrimony received from our brave and hardy progenitors—the right of possessing and disposing of, at our own option, the honest fruits of our industry.”⁴¹ In March 1775, Oliver Noble preached that “the Cause of AMERICA...is the cause of GOD, never did man struggle in a greater, or more glorious CAUSE.”⁴²

Because America was the last refuge of liberty, America was necessarily essential to God’s plan of redeeming the whole world, and God could not let the cause of liberty fail in America.⁴³ In the fate of the American Revolution hung the fate of freedom not only in America, but around the world, for millions of people yet unborn.⁴⁴ “Whatever is most dear and valuable in this world, to millions now living, and will be so to all the millions of posterity after them, till this world shall be no more, is at stake. The prize contended for is the LIBERTY OF AMERICA,” declared Enoch Huntington.⁴⁵

During the tax crisis of 1767-68, the great Pennsylvania lawyer John Dickinson exhorted American resistance in a series of twelve public letters. The stakes were vastly greater than the immediate financial interests of the colonists: “you may surely, without presumption, believe that Almighty God Himself will look down upon your righteous contest with gracious approbation...You are assigned by Divine Providence in the appointed order of things, the protection of unborn ages, whose fate depends on your virtue.”⁴⁶

Dickinson and the other Patriots were not just offering rhetoric for a tax dispute. Their language, which built on a century and a half of American history, was creating an American civil religion. It was an ecumenical religion, which ignored the issues on which a Baptist might disagree with a Congregationalist, or a Jew might disagree with a Presbyterian. The heart of religion was that liberty is a sacred gift from God; and that the United States of America has been chosen by God to guard the sacred lamp of liberty.

On the first anniversary of the Battle of Lexington, Jonas Clark preached, "From this day will be dated the liberty of the world."⁴⁷

Repentance, then Liberty

The Americans knew that liberty was God's cause. But in order to defeat the tyrant, they had to purify themselves morally. Only if the Americans were repentant, sincere Christians would they have the moral right to resist their evil governors. If the Americans remained sinful, then the Americans would have to accept their evil governors as God's just punishment.⁴⁸

By the time that fighting began at Lexington, the theme of repentance before victory had been well-established for a century. The first generations of settlers in New England had enjoyed mostly-peaceful relations with the Indians. But the swelling white population caused tensions with the Indians. In 1675, chief Metacom (a/k/a King Philip) led the Wampanoag, Nipmucks, and Narragansetts in a series of devastating attacks on towns from Connecticut to New Hampshire. The New Englanders and their Christian Indian allies were defeated again and again, until (according to the New England version of events), they sufficiently repented their sins, and from that point onward, God granted them favor, and they won King Philip's War, one of the most terrible wars ever fought on American soil.⁴⁹

In a 1745 war, the New England militia captured the French fortress at Louisburg, Canada. In the French and Indian War of 1756-63, the Americans and the British won what they considered to be a holy war against papist tyranny. As in King Philip's War, the Americans who fought the French were informed by their ministers that only if they sincerely repented

their sins would God grant them victory. And apparently, God did after they did.

So before the Americans warred for independence, they had to first fast, pray, and repent. The American clergy and the American governments announced what Perry Miller called the “double injunction of humiliation and exertion.”⁵⁰ For example, the Connecticut assembly simultaneously declared a statewide day of fasting and humiliation, and passed a resolution to stockpile ammunition.⁵¹

Miller elaborated:

Circumstances and the nature of the dominant opinion in Europe made it necessary for the official statement [the Declaration of Independence] to be released in primarily “political” terms—the social compact, inalienable rights, the right of revolution. But those terms, in and by themselves, would never have supplied the drive for victory, however mightily they weighted with the literate minority. What carried the ranks of militia and citizens was the universal persuasion that they, by administering to themselves a spiritual purge, acquired the energies God has always, in the manner of the Old Testament, been ready to impart to His repentant children. Their first responsibility was not to shoot redcoats but to cleanse themselves, only thereafter to take aim.⁵²

Concludes Miller: “The basic fact is that the Revolution had been preached to the masses as a religious revival, and had the astonishing fortune to succeed.”⁵³ Summarizes Yale’s Harry Stout, “New England’s revolution would be nothing less than America’s sermon to the world.”⁵⁴

Conclusion

The New England ministers incited their congregations to overthrow King George because they believed, as did the Virginian Thomas Jefferson, that rebellion to tyrants was obedience to God. In the religious roots of the American

Revolution, we see the staunch belief that using arms to resist tyranny is an affirmative religious duty.

The belief about the sacred obligation to fight for freedom is not unique to the United States of America. Rather, the belief is at least as old as the Hebrew wars of independence (among Western religions) and the teachings of Confucius (among Eastern religions). However, it was in New England in the years leading to the American Revolution where the religious theory of the duty to defend the sacred gift of liberty was refined and elaborated in a more sophisticated form than ever before. The theory has never ceased to influence American attitudes about firearms and freedom, and is at the heart of American beliefs about the God-given right to keep and bear arms.

Endnotes

1 Douglas F. Kelly, *The Emergence of Liberty in the Modern World: The Influence of Calvin on Five Governments from the 16th Through 18th Centuries* (Philipsburg, N.J.: P&R Publishing, 1992), p. 131.

2 James G. Leyburn, *Scotch-Irish: A Social History* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: Univ. of North Carolina Pr., 1962), p. 305.

3 According to a Hessian captain in 1778, “Call this war by whatever name you may, only call it not an American rebellion. It is nothing more or less than a Scotch Irish Presbyterian rebellion.” A man representing Lord Dartmouth in New York wrote in 1776, “Presbyterianism is really at the Bottom of the whole conspiracy...” Leyburn, p. 305. In 1774, Pennsylvania Loyalist Joseph Galloway told the British House of Commons that the opponents of British rule were “Congregationalists, Presbyterians, and smugglers.” Edward Frank Humphrey, *Nationalism and Religion in America: 1774-1789* (Boston: Chipman Law Pub. Co., 1924), p. 67.

4 Edmund Burke, “Speech on Moving Resolutions for Conciliation with the Colonies,” March 22, 1775, quoted in Paul A. Rahe, *Republics Ancient and Modern*, Vol. 3. *Inventions of Prudence: Constituting the American Regime* (Chapel Hill: Univ. of N.C. Pr., 1994), p. 8. Part of the quote is from Benjamin Hart, *Faith & Freedom: The Christian Roots of American Liberty* (Dallas, Texas: Lewis & Stanley, 1988), p. 272.

5 John Patrick Diggins, *The Lost Soul of American Politics: Virtue, Self-Interest, and the Foundations of Liberalism*, p. 7

6 Kelly, p. 121.

7 *Ibid.*, p. 125.

8 E.g., Clayton Cramer, *Arming America* (unpublished manuscript),
www.claytoncramer.com/ArmingAmericaLong.pdf

9 Marie L. Ahern, *The Rhetoric of War: Training Day, the Militia, and the Military Sermon* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Pr., 1989), p. 1.

10 Dale S. Kuehne, *Massachusetts Congregationalist Political Thought 1760-1790* (Columbia: Univ. of Missouri Pr. 1996), p. 87; Kelly, p. 132. For example, Simeon Howard, “An Election Sermon” (1773)(Christian’s duty to wage war on tyrants).

11 E.g., Alice M. Baldwin, *The New England Clergy and the American Revolution* (N.Y.: Frederick Ungar, 1958)(1st pub. 1928), pp. 125-26.

12 Ahearn, p. 23. Back in England, ministers had also exhorted the militia. Ahearn, pp. 43-45

13 Harry S. Stout, *The New England Soul: Preaching and Religious Culture in Colonial New England* (N.Y.: Oxford Univ. Pr, 1988), pp. 6-7, 303.

14 Ahearn, p. 23.

15 Ezra Stiles, “The United States elevated to Glory and Honor...May 8, 1783” (New Haven: Thomas & Samuel Green, 1783)(reprint of sermon), quoted in Nathan O. Hatch, *The Sacred Cause of Liberty: Republican Thought and the Millennium in Revolutionary New England* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Pr., 1977), p. 90. Reprinted in full in *The Pulpit of the American Revolution*, pp. 397-520.

16 Kuehne, p. 116.

17 Hatch, p. 65. Also, e.g., Simeon Howard, “A Sermon Preached to the Ancient and Honorable Artillery Company in Boston” (1773), reprinted in *On Faith and Free Government*, ed., Daniel C. Palm (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Pub., 1997), pp. 108-09 (“A people who would stand fast in their liberty, should furnish themselves with weapons proper for their defense and learn how to use them.” Militia service promotes civic virtue, while a standing army breeds aggression and servile allegiance to the king, rather than to the people as a whole.)

18 *Ibid.*, pp. 128-29. See also Samuel Cooke, “A Sermon Preached at Cambridge in the Audience of His Honor Thomas Hutchinson, Esq....May 30, 1770” (Boston: Edes & Gill, 1770), reprinted in *The Pulpit of the American Revolution or, the Political Sermons of the Period of*

17776, ed., John Wingate Thornton (N.Y. Burt Franklin, 1970)(1st pub. 1860), pp. 165-66 (election sermon denouncing standing armies as “dangerous to a free state” and “a very improper safeguard to a constitution which has liberty, British liberty, for its basis.”)

19 Stout, p. 288.

20 Ahearn., pp. 125-26.

21 Glen E. Thurow, “The Christian and Rebellion against Authority,” in *On Faith and Free Government*, pp. 54-55 (discussing Simeon Howard as an exemplar of this thinking).

22 Baldwin, pp. 168-71. One of the most notable military ministers was the Pennsylvania Lutheran minister John Peter Gabriel Muhlenberg. In 1776, Muhlenberg preached his farewell sermon to his congregation in Woodstock, Virginia. He explained that there was a time to pray and a time to fight. “It is now the time to fight” he said, and he took off his black robe, revealing the blue uniform of a Virginia Colonel. Humphrey, pp. 114-15. He entered the Continental Army as a Colonel, and rose to the rank of Brigadier General, commanding some of the American forces at Yorktown. He also served as Vice-President of Pennsylvania during the Revolution, under the Presidency of Benjamin Franklin.

23 Howard, p. 115.

24 James Cogswell, “God, The Pious Soldier’s Strength & Instruction; A Sermon...at Brooklyn in Pomfret, to the Military Company, Under the Command of Capt. Israel Putnam,...April, 1757” (Apr. 13, 1757), quoted in Baldwin, p. 87, n. 10 (ellipses in original title).

25 Howard, p. 103.

26 Samuel Cooper, “A Sermon on the Day of the Commencement of the Constitution,” (Oct. 25, 1780), www.founding.com/library/lbody.cfm?id=486&parent=52.

27 Howard, p. 111.

28 *The Pulpit of the American Revolution*, pp. 312-13. West also declared: “We must beat our ploughshares into swords, and our pruning-hooks into spears, and learn the art of self-defence against our enemies.” West, in *The Pulpit of the American Revolution*, pp. 307-08.

See also Whitaker, pp. 165-66 (Moses as good example for intervening to kill the Egyptian who was beating the Hebrew slave).

“But as freedom is an inheritance entailed on all men, so whosoever invades it, robs mankind of their rights, endeavors to spread misery among God’s creatures, and violates the law of nature, and all who refuse to oppose him, when in their power, are to be considered as confederates and abettors of his conduct, and partakers in his crimes.” *Ibid.*, p. 166.

29 Harry S. Stout, *The New England Soul: Preaching and Religious Culture in Colonial New England* (N.Y.: Oxford Univ. Pr, 1988), p. 283.

30 Kuchne, pp. 114-15; Stout, pp. 272-73, citing John Lathrop, *Innocent Blood Crying to God* (Boston: 1771). Compare Lathrop’s statement:

If the essential parts of any system of civil government are found to be inconsistent with the general good, the end of government requires that such bad systems should be demolished, and new one formed, by which the public weal shall be more effectually secured.

with the Declaration of Independence:

that whenever any form of government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the right of the people to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new government, laying its foundation on such principles, and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their safety and happiness.

31 *Ibid.*, p. 116.

32 Simeon Howard, “A Sermon Preached to the Ancient and Honorable Artillery Company in Boston,” p. 106.

33 Whitaker, p. 160

34 Samuel Langdon, *Government Corrupted by Vice, and Recovered by Righteousness* (May 31, 1775), www.frii.com/~gospow/langdon.html. Another part of Langdon’s sermon expressed the same principle that would appear in the Declaration of Independence: “By the law of nature, any body of people, destitute of order and government, may form themselves into a civil society, according to their best prudence, and so provide for their common safety and advantage.”

35 Hatch, p. 64.

36 Quoted in Hatch, p. xii.

37 Stout, pp. 298-99.

38 Ahearn, p. 112; Thurow, pp. 54-55 (Simeon Howard's 1773 sermon to the Boston artillery company); Stout, p. 299, quoting Judah Champion, *Christian and Civil Liberty and Freedom Considered and Recommended*, preached at Litchfield, Conn., May 1776 (Hartford, Conn.: 1776). Champion's sermon was reprinted by the Connecticut Assembly. Baldwin, p. 124, n. 10.

The text was a favorite of Dr. Joseph Warren, the eminent Boston patriot who chaired the Committee of Correspondence, authored the Suffolk Resolves, led the provisional government of Massachusetts, and died commanding the American forces at Bunker Hill. Stout, p. 299.

Another favorite was "While they promise them liberty, they themselves are servants of corruption" (2 Peter 2:19). Hatch, pp. 61-62.

39 Stout, pp. 289-90; William Emerson, *Sermon on 2 Chronicles 13:12*, preached Mar. 13, 1775.

40 Stout, p. 290; David B. Kopel, *The Samurai, the Mountie, and the Cowboy: Should America Adopt the Gun Controls of Other Democracies?* (Amherst, N.Y.: Prometheus Books, 1992), p. 313.

41 William Gordon, "A Discourse Preached December 15th, 1774, Being the Day Recommended by the Provincial Congress; And Afterwards at the Boston Lecture," (Corn-Hill: Thomas Leverett, 2d ed., 1775), reprinted in John Wingate Thornton, ed., *The Pulpit of the American Revolution* (N.Y.: Burt Franklin, 1st pub. 1860, reprinted 1970), p. 204.

42 Kuehne, p. 117.

43 Samuel West, "On the Right to Rebel against Governors" (1776), in *On Faith and Free Government*, pp. 121-49; Hatch, p. 88.

44 Hatch, pp. 88-89; Kuehne, pp. 116-17 (sermon of Dec. 15, 1774).

45 Stout, pp. 301-302, quoting Enoch Huntington, *The Happy Effects of Union* (Hartford: 1776)(preached at Middletown, Connecticut, April 8, 1776).

46 Hart, p. 251.

47 Baldwin, p. 133.

In 1781, Clark preached an Election Sermon for the first election under the new Massachusetts Constitution. Among Clark's principles for good government was an armed citizenry:

Standing armies are abhorrent to the first principles of freedom, and dangerous to the liberties of a free Commonwealth. The sword, in the hands of the free citizens, is the protection of society, and the safety and defence of a people truly brave, truly free.—May I be permitted to ask, Whether the sword is in the hands of all the inhabitants of this Commonwealth?—Whether all the people have arms?—Or, Whether, having arms, they are taught the art—military, and the use of their arms, so as to be effectively prepared to oppose an invading enemy, upon the shortest notice?

Jonas Clark, *Election Sermon, Preached...1781* (Boston: 1781), quoted in Humphrey, p. 60.

A similar sentiment was expressed in a sermon Rev. Guming at the Congregational Church in Billerica, Mass., in 1783:

Though the land now rests from war and we daily expect to hear that the definite treaty of peace is completely ratified, yet it would be exceedingly unsafe for people to lay down their arms, and neglect all military matters. Our country affords so many objects to excite the ambition of other nations...that we can have no security of a lasting peace, or of enjoying long the blessings of freedom if we should totally withdraw our attention from the arts of war...Standing armies in a time of peace are indeed dangerous to liberty; but a well furnished and well disciplined militia is of great importance to state...The public welfare requires that our militia be kept on such a respectable footing, as shall render us secure at home, and formidable abroad.

Guming, *Election Sermon, Preached....May 28, 1783* (Boston: 1783), quoted in Humphrey, p. 61.

48 Perry Miller, *Nature's Nation* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard-Belknap, 1967), pp. 100-01; Howard, p. 99.

49 Stout, pp. 77-85. In New England, "From then on, Protestant Christian piety was no longer a merely private relation between the individual and God. It became inseparable from patriotism and military valor." The Rev. Samuel Nowell's famous wartime sermon "Abraham in Arms," proclaimed "that God requires men to train and to kill in defense of their lives and liberties. His was a fighting Christianity that was quick to repel evil and stood firm in defense of civil liberty." Thomas G. West, "The Transformation of Protestant Theology," in Thomas S. Engeman & Michael P. Zuckert, eds., *Protestantism and the American Founding* (Notre Dame, Indiana: Univ. of Notre Dame Pr., 2004), p. 201.

50 Miller, p. 99.

51 Hart, p. 259.

52 Miller, p. 97. Parenthetical added. For example, see David Jones, *Defensive War in a Just Cause Sinless* (Philadelphia: 1775), www.frii.com/~gosplow/jones.html.

53 Miller, p. 110.

54 Stout, p. 311.