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Elder John Leland: Evangelical minister and republican rhetorician

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ELDER JOHN LELAND: EVANGELICAL MINISTER AND REPUBLICAN RHETORICIAN

by

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ABSTRACT

Elder John Leland: Evangelical Minister and Republican Rhetorician

by

Rosemary Kugler

Contributing to the movement to separate church and state in revolutionary Virginia, John Leland formed a unique discourse that utilized the similarities inherent in evangelical religion and republican ideology. Building upon the language of his New England brethren, which stressed the inconsistencies of republican rhetoric and religious persecution, Leland merged this language with the evangelical movement in Virginia. Through his actions in Virginia, Leland became an important Baptist leader and political ally. He joined the Baptist associations fighting to disestablish religion in that state and became immersed in the politics affecting the region. This involvement included influencing his congregations at the polls and affecting the elections of prominent constitutional figures such as James Madison and Thomas Jefferson.
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Introduction

Religion and politics often overlap when government attempts to define public morality. Until the revolutionary era in the United States, the external form of worship had always been decided by the state. Colonial Americans assumed that government supported the state religion in the past, in the present, and would continue to do so in the future. Baptist minister John Leland of Massachusetts and Virginia challenged this assumption by arguing that a theocritical relationship injured the church's purity and encouraged mass hypocrisy. Using revolutionary and republican rhetoric, he constructed a form of discourse that decried the merger of religion and politics. At the same time Leland entered the political arena by supporting favored candidates and at one point holding office himself. Although he opposed all forms of state and church interaction, this did not prevent his own participation in the political process in support of republican government. Influenced by enlightenment politicians, Leland believed a democratic republic offered the greatest amount of personal freedom. Once individual autonomy had been achieved, the people would then be prepared for Leland's other personal and political goal--the conversion of the masses to evangelical religion.

John Leland was responsible for leading many converts to the baptismal waters. He was described as a tall and commanding man with a "noble head" and a "sparkling blue eye." Like most early evangelicals, Leland did not possess a refined oratory or a cultivated rhetoric.
Contemporaries, however, never failed to remark on the pathos and power of his speaking. When deeply moved, he employed a gesture of sweeping "his hands, one after the other, with full extended arm, around to his mouth, closing the hand as it reached his face, then stretching it out to its full extent, at the same time opening and spreading it, as if gathering his words, and sowing them in the congregation." People commented that "when Leland begins to hand it out you may know something is coming."¹

Leland lived most of his life in Massachusetts, where the battles between religious dissenters and the New England Standing Order influenced his early life. He witnessed the persecution of the early Baptists, causing him to abhor all state interference in matters of conscience. Leland also learned from the dissenters' use of revolutionary rhetoric, which was then employed to protest the treatment of the Baptists and Quakers in Massachusetts. Leland later used republican rhetoric to oppose all religious establishments while embracing the rhetoric supporting republican government.

A popular preacher and valuable political ally in both Virginia and Massachusetts, Leland merits a special place in the annals of American religious history. Most commentators recalled his influence on politicians, his intransigent stance on church-state separation, and his spread of evangelical and democratic values.² One of Leland's most revealing characteristics, commented one Baptist historian, was his remarkable self-sufficiency. In this respect, the historian said, no doubt with exaggeration, "no man since Paul ever exceeded him." Leland's heightened individuality emphasized his myriad accomplishments.
because they were all self-achieved. A self-educated man, Leland corresponded with some of the most erudite men of his era. Although Leland never studied theology, he learned to read the bible in Greek and published many sermons and tracts concerning the scripture. His conversion experience, like that of most people, was the result of solitary soul searching. J.T. Smith concluded that because Leland's accomplishments were all the fruit of individual effort, they were invested with a special interest.³

Leland's self-sufficiency helps explain his life-long commitment to individual autonomy and conscience. Because he did not rely on others for most of his personal and professional needs, he scorned those who would mandate such reliance. This included all religious establishments and almost any form of state and church interaction. The Baptist faith traditionally supported religious liberty, complementing Leland's absolute position. The bulk of his ideology, however, was formed by the merger of the dual forces of evangelical religion and republican politics. Leland explicitly represented the merger of these ideologies. His influence in Virginia and Massachusetts helped spread these beliefs among the population. The symbiotic relationship between the two ideologies provided the Baptist preacher with a political language that came to fruition in Leland's Virginia tenure.

Revolutionary Virginia profoundly shaped Leland's beliefs about politics and religion. Leland joined an alliance between some of the leading political figures of the period and fellow evangelicals in order to disestablish religion. He became a fierce but thoughtful republican, never willing to compromise Virginia's achievements. One of his more
famous episodes displaying this intransigence involved a meeting with James Madison in 1788. During the elections to the constitutional convention, Madison had to convince Leland that the proposed Constitution would not threaten Virginia’s recent guarantee of religious freedom and would safeguard individual conscience. Through such contacts and activities in the Baptist associations, Leland influenced the outcome of Virginia politics as much as the state influenced him. Leland contributed to the outcome of Virginia politics by itinerating around the state, spreading the word not only of God but of Jefferson and Madison. Through his unusual partnership with such Enlightenment statesmen, Leland helped win religious freedom in Virginia. He represented the blending of evangelical and republican ideas, the contagion of both religious and political liberty.
Endnotes to the Introduction

Massachusetts: Religion and Revolution

John Leland, a son of Massachusetts, matured into a religious rebel who revolted against all forms of individual oppression whether from home or from abroad. Throughout his long life he fought for political, religious, and personal freedom through his writing, speaking, and political activities. His youth spent in Massachusetts helped inspire his actions on behalf of both evangelical religion and republican and democratic government. The religious and political climate in New England converged in Leland's early adulthood, influencing his later battles to disestablish the state church in Virginia. By the age of twenty-two, Leland was determined to combat the evils of church-state connections as a result of witnessing the persecution endured by the early New Lights and the Baptists in Massachusetts.

The Bay Colony was an arduous school for lessons in discrimination and resistance. Although New England never achieved a theocracy, its religious foundations invested political leaders with a mission to defend orthodoxy. As Perry Miller remarked, the founders of the Massachusetts Bay Colony were not a battered remnant of exiled English Separates but "an organized task force of Christians, executing a flank attack on the corruptions of Christendom."¹ They fought vigorously to maintain their religious purity, and when that failed, to maintain religious conformity.

Up to the Revolution authorities were content to suppress dissenting voices, but trouble began when those voices began turning the
establishment's patriotic language against it. Leland observed the
colonists' logical and moral inconsistencies in using revolutionary
rhetoric against British oppression while simultaneously discriminating
against religious dissenters. Authorities countered that "taxation
without representation" referred only to civil matters and excluded
religious dissenters who were taxed to support the Standing Order.
Leland and the Baptists used such rhetorical contradictions to emphasize
the establishment's hypocrisy. The republican rhetoric employed by
revolutionary patriots to protest British tyranny therefore benefitted
Leland and the Baptists because it offered them a language with which to
combat the New England Standing Order.

As a child Leland displayed a thirst for learning satiated by the
Bible, John Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress, and Phillip Doddridge's Rise and
Progress of Religion in the Soul. Leland's birth in 1754 coincided with
the abatement of religious fervor after the Great Awakening. He was
born in Grafton, Massachusetts, forty miles west of Boston. He
described his father as a Presbyterian and his mother a "high-flying
Separate," but he later stated that his father became convinced through
biblical study that believers were the only proper subjects of baptism by
immersion. When the elder Leland told his wife of his evolving view,
she--despite her Separate affiliation--"warned against heresy, [and] his
convictions sunk under weight of wife and minister's alarm." Perhaps
Leland's mother feared the "Anabaptist" label still associated with the
Baptists in the Grafton area. Leland's father returned to his former
church, and Leland's memoirs do not reveal any further religious queries.

Questioning and combatting authority came naturally to Leland
from his childhood. His schoolmasters attested to his independent, probably arrogant nature. "The character which one of my masters gave me, seems to have been the opinion that all of them formed of me. Said he, 'John has more knowledge than good manners.'"4

Leland's individualist nature might be attributed to his time. The later colonial period partially encouraged individualism as a part of the movement toward a modern society. While lip service was given to community and the corporate body in the early eighteenth century, both were being eclipsed by a flourishing market economy. Earlier colonial society, in its attempt to rein in these modern forces, rejected the acceptance of new competitive ideas by emphasizing the "natural" hierarchy and the subordination of the individual to family and community.5 Leland reflected the more modern attitude of self-sufficiency and individualism in his writings. He preferred to search for his own answers, paying little notice to "authority" figures. Upon studying the various state constitutions to prepare for a career in law, Leland expressed his admiration for the framers of these documents but asked: "I found there were not two of them agreed. What, said I, do great men differ? .... Can learned, wise patriots disagree so much in judgement? If so, they cannot all be right, but they may all be wrong, and therefore, Jack Nips for himself."6

Leland pitted his belief in personal autonomy against an intransient Standing Order in late-eighteenth-century Massachusetts. In order to highlight his efforts against establishment authorities in New England and Virginia it is helpful to understand colonial Massachusetts's stance toward the Baptists. The foundation of the
colony in the seventeenth century, as stated previously, had been the combining of church and state into a quasi-theocracy. To maintain this religious purity Massachusetts intended to exclude all detractors. Religious dissent was not tolerated because it undermined the very foundation of the province. The "religious freedom" sought in America was a freedom meant exclusively for Puritans. Nathaniel Ward summarized the prevailing seventeenth-century belief when he stated that "all Familists, Antinomians, Anabaptists, and other Enthusiasts, shall have free liberty to keep away from us, and such as will come to be gone as fast as they can, the sooner the better." The Congregationalists legalized their establishment with the Cambridge Platform of 1648 which required religious taxes for the support of the official church.7 When King William authorized the Toleration Act in 1689, ironically it allowed the Massachusetts Bay Colony to establish the Puritan or Congregational Church as the state religion of the province. The early Puritans realized that they had free rein to organize their faith in the American wilderness.

As soon as this establishment had been settled, Congregationalists were forced to confront the dissenters in their midst. By having to codify religious taxes, they revealed the emerging cracks in the Puritan consensus. Congregational authorities-Anglicans in England reminded them could not continue to ignore nonconformists. Mainstream Anglicans continued to needle the Puritans about tolerating dissenters in their "pure" colony. The English influence eventually came to bear on the colony. From 1692 to 1695 the province grudgingly passed basic laws acknowledging the rights of Baptist and Quaker dissenters to worship as
they pleased. The price dissenters paid, however, was a tax to support a Congregational minister and meetinghouse as well as funds to support their own faith through additional, voluntary contributions. Later dissenters utilized this overseas support as a lever against the Standing Order's ecclesiastical discrimination.

Ironically the Puritans themselves provided New England with its first Baptists. In the aftermath of the Great Awakening in the mid-eighteenth-century, Leland and other dissenters left the established faith because it failed to meet their emotional needs. The Congregationalists could not fulfill every seventeenth-century inhabitant's demand either. The Baptist denomination originated from those seventeenth-century Puritans dissatisfied with the establishment's practice of infant baptism. Compensatory measures such as the Halfway Covenant, enacted in 1662, highlighted the Congregationalists' failure to instill the fervor of the founders in its children. The Halfway Covenant allowed those grandchildren of church members, whose parents had not become full members, the right to baptism. Although those children had not given a public profession of faith, they could partake in communion. Many Puritans questioned the validity of communion celebrated with nonbelievers. They believed that the church should be composed only of believers and that baptism should be restricted to those who could give an account of their faith. Early Puritans had excluded those who could not give a convincing account of their salvation and were not baptized as adults. Hence the Half Way Covenant represented a radical break with Puritan orthodoxy.

The early New England Baptists emerged from this controversy a
divided sect due to differing interpretations of salvation. The minority General Baptists operated within an Arminian framework, preaching the possibility of a general atonement for all. The majority, called Particular Baptists, were rooted in the Calvinist tradition that found expression in the Westminster Confession of Faith. The Particular Baptists believed, as did the early Puritans, that a certain number of people had been predestined by God for salvation. Works could not secure grace. Civil and ecclesiastical authorities, however, incorrectly labeled different kinds of Baptists simply as "Anabaptists." Despite initial antagonism, six Baptists churches organized in Rhode Island, three in the old Plymouth Colony area, and one in Boston by the end of the seventeenth century. The Baptists also flourished outside New England as shown by the growth and stability of the Philadelphia Baptist Association. Formed in 1707, these Particular Baptists also emphasized Calvinistic determinism.¹⁰

The Standing Order responded to the increasing dissent within its province with lament and renewed persecution. Increase Mather remarked in 1721 that "too many [Puritans] are given to change, and leave the order of the gospel, which was the very design of these colonies."¹¹ To combat the dissenters in their midst, civil and ecclesiastical leaders managed an intricate balancing act. When the English-based Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts entered Massachusetts with the intention of winning Congregationalists back to the Anglican fold, New England leaders cried for toleration of all dissenters. But when Quakers and Baptists pleaded for this same toleration within the colony, Congregationalists mimicked their own
oppressive English counterparts. Massachusetts's leaders claimed the authority to decide the allowances for divergent minorities. Their "New England Way" depended on the precarious balance of these contradictory attitudes towards religious toleration. Following either argument to its extreme highlighted their inconsistencies.\textsuperscript{12} If the New England authorities proclaimed toleration too loudly, they would be forced to accept the unwelcome dissenters. On the other hand, if the Standing Order unduly persecuted its religious minorities, it would be forced to answer to the English Council. Authorities found themselves in a similar situation in the revolutionary era when they decried English taxes without representation while forcing their own religious dissenters to pay tithes for a state church not of their choosing.

During the first quarter of the eighteenth century authorities could not withstand some recognition of religious pluralism, and after 1728 Massachusetts finally granted Baptists, Quakers, and Anglicans exemption from religious tithes. Such allowances, however, did not signify New England's acceptance of dissent. Religious minorities had to prove their status as a legitimate denomination by producing "a certificate from such society, of their having joined themselves to them, and that they do belong unto their society." Exemption also depended on the fact that "such persons do usually attend the meetings of their respective societies, assembling upon the Lord's day for the worship of God, and that they live within five miles of the place of such meeting."\textsuperscript{13} Because of the dissenters' minority status, authorities were willing to temper their zealous persecution. By the mid-eighteenth century, however, religious excitement shook the colonies, forcing the religious
establishment to rethink its position.

A new religious consciousness arose in the 1740s and 1750s that created new faiths and transformed old beliefs. The Great Awakening, encouraged and spread by Jonathan Edwards, George Whitefield, and later Gilbert Tennant and James Davenport, shook the foundations of religion in America. The origins of Leland's religious and, in its implications, political thought lay in this ecclesiastical upheaval. Complacent New England Congregationalists were forced to confront an itinerant ministry, exemplified by Whitefield, stirring up congregations with the promise of God's immediate intervention. Whitefield, it was said, could send an audience into paroxysms simply by pronouncing "Mesopotamia," and he met with an enthusiastic response widely copied by other ministers. Whitefield urged his audience to recognize the sinfulness of their lives and experience a spiritual rebirth. In effect, the Great Awakening called for a return to the Puritans' early emphasis on consciousness of conversion, but in a form they did not recognize. Evangelicals set "experience" over "profession," signifying the direct action of the Spirit upon the soul as the basis for salvation.

Personal conversion manifested itself most significantly through religious excitement. Emotionalism accompanied the redemptive message aimed at the heart rather than the head. Thus evangelical meetings became noted for the amount of crying, trembling, and shouting, as well as fits and fainting spells. The urgency of these meetings emerged from the importance of the message. Ministers believed the salvation of multitudes of souls was at stake. Therefore, they focused their message of both love and fear of God on the exclusive
goal of the sinner's conversion. Evangelical preachers sought to promote in the individual a feeling of worthlessness before the sight of God. This was intended to make people realize their absolute dependence on Him for mercy. Then the individuals were supposed to stop resisting God's grace and immediately experience relief under the conviction of sin and a sense of joy at being accepted.  

All New Englanders did not embrace these new revival techniques, and opposing camps formed on either side of the new method. Old Lights denounced the excesses of the evangelicals and formed the core of the Arminian movement, which elevated works as a means of salvation. The opposing faction, deemed New Lights, accepted itinerancy, lay preaching, and emotional manifestations of conviction and conversion, and censured those deemed unconverted. Yet a third party participated in the revivals but sought to restrain the excesses targeted by the Old Lights. The theological turmoil ultimately resulted in the New Lights withdrawing from the Standing Order's churches over the issue of acceptance of unconverted members at the communion table and ecclesiastical control of individual churches. These now Separate Congregationalists also advocated increased lay participation in preaching and church activity, an unpopular trend in the eyes of the more hierarchical Standing Order.  

The evangelical denominations, including what became known as Separate Baptists, inverted the traditional assumptions of society. They emphasized the egalitarian aspects of the New Testament and promoted lay power against that of the minister. Leland highlighted the democratic impulses inherent in these evangelical beliefs. Itinerant
ministers filled a social as well as a religious need. These awakened laypeople, not all officially ordained, contributed to evangelicalism by transforming it into a people's movement. This social levelling emphasized individual responsibility, weakened the autocratic parish system, and bolstered local church autonomy. Individual salvation was the basis for evangelicalism, and its leaders believed such personal justification best served the interests of the community. The evangelicals' radical call for a reorganization of power in society led many historians to link the Great Awakening with the Revolution.19

The Baptist denominations that had existed in New England since the seventeenth century benefitted from the explosion of fervor and renewed interest in conscious conversion. The Great Awakening that splintered New England Congregationalism led to the formation of the Separate Baptists. The early Baptists had always advocated believer's baptism and the autonomy of the individual church. Many Separate Congregationalists came to share these beliefs and embraced the older faith, transforming it into an evangelical sect called the Separate Baptists. In some cases entire Separate congregations converted to the Baptists, mixed-communion churches divided, schisms occurred in older Baptist churches, or individuals converted to Baptist principles; all represented the various development of Separate Baptist churches.20

The evangelical spirit affected young Leland at the age of eighteen. Previously he had not concerned himself with religion. He stated that he attended Presbyterian services because they were "the most fashionable." Due to Leland's apparently weak constitution, his father intended for him to become a minister so he could be inducted into
a parish and receive a good benefice. Instead Leland worried that although his father intended for him to be a minister, God might not: "Those who are sent by men to preach, must look to men for their pay; but those that are sent by God, must depend on him." Initially rejecting the ministry, Leland turned his thoughts toward law and lived a life "full of vanity, exceedingly attached to frolicking and foolish wickedness." This was the typical evangelical description of life before conversion.21

As Leland continued to vex his teachers and prepare for a career in law, the Baptists were evolving into a mature church. During Leland's youth the Separate Congregationalists had split off into various denominations, one of which became the Separate Baptists. Three strands of thought combined in the 1760s to form their denomination. The stable Particular Baptists of the Middle Colonies, centered around the Philadelphia Association, slowly wound its influence northward. The older General Baptists, content with their limited strength, either got swept up in the evangelical movement or else drifted apart. Most succumbed to the Separates' evangelical Calvinist stance. The final combination of the Particulars and the Separates created a religiously vital and politically stable denomination.22

By the 1770s the Baptists were a viable alternative to the staid Standing Order. The Baptists' growth attested to the establishment's failure to meet the needs of all Massachusetts inhabitants, Leland being one of them. In 1772 Leland began a long and unusual conversion process, marked by uncertainty and fear. As childhood antics wearied him, he began to question the significance of his life. "When I was returning from my frolicks or evening diversions, the following words would sound
from the skies, "You are not about the work which you have got to do."

Despite all other remedies, Leland could not calm his uneasiness. "A
conviction took place in my mind, that all below the sun could not
satisfy or tranquilize the mind."23 The typical conversion experience
involved the sinner's self-awareness of guilt and unworthiness, which
Leland obviously possessed. In the typical experience those under
conviction of sin chose to accept Christ as mediator and thereby became
reconciled with God. Christ's mercy made sinners acceptable to Him.
This acceptability by a righteous God "justified" the sinner.24 Leland,
however, never felt his justification was complete. He took solace from
the words "After ye believed, ye were sealed with the Holy Spirit of
promise.... But as I had never passed through stages of distress equal to
some others, nor equal to what I supposed an essential pre-requisite to
conversion, I could not believe for myself."25 His conversion advanced in
stages from euphoria to despair, and yet he never felt the soul-shaking
experience he believed necessary and that he later would strive to induce
in others. Obviously concerned about this, Leland relied on his minister
to ascertain his readiness for the seal of conversion. In June 1774 Noah
Alden of Bellingham came to Northbridge and baptized Leland and seven
others. Instead of a rigorous examination, Leland was merely asked if he
believed in the Calvinistic doctrine. "I replied, I did not know what it
was, but I believed in free grace."26 With that he was baptized, and
afterwards he assisted Alden with the other candidates in the water of
the river.

Leland deemed baptism the most important, if not the only,
sacrament. He did not ascribe mystical powers to baptism but
recognized it as a seal of one's acceptance to God. Therefore his aversion to infant baptism took on a logical tone. One must be aware to accept God's mercy. "The little candidate, who never proposed himself, nor, indeed, had sense enough to know anything that was going on, was taken by force, and, notwithstanding all his struggles and screams, had the name of the Trinity called over him.... Is this Christian liberty?"
Leland's scriptural analysis confirmed his conclusions. "...As I had made some proficiency in Greek, I searched the Greek Testament and lexicon, where I found that baptism came from the word baptizo, and that the word sprinkle, came from the Greek rantis, so that sprinkling could not be baptizing." Although Leland strictly adhered to baptism by immersion, he still considered it merely a sign of one's internal conversion. Sacraments, ordinations, and licenses merely signified worldly sanctions. External symbols could not legitimate what was only God's to bestow.27

Just as baptism was the external sign of one's justification, so a license became the external sanction to spread God's word. Leland admitted preaching for a year before the Bellingham church gave him the legal means to do so.28 Leland itinerated around the state even before he was secure in his justification. Although he sincerely believed in his godly work between 1774 to 1779, he expressed doubts: "I did not possess that strong desire for the conversion of sinners, that many others evidently had. This made me fear that all was not right with me." Nevertheless, he began his meandering preaching tours for which he became well known. In October 1775 he traveled southward for eight months, converting one person in New Jersey, one in Connecticut, and
two in Virginia.\textsuperscript{29}

Leland's and other ministers' itineracy troubled authorities in the 1760s and 1770s. The Separate Baptists responded to this alarm by hastily organizing themselves in order to justify their denomination before New England authorities. The Massachusetts Baptists followed the Middle Colonies' example by organizing an association of churches. Delegates from eleven churches met at Warren in September 1767 to discuss associational membership. Only four churches entered into the organization at its first meeting: Warren, Haverhill, Middleborough Second, and Bellingham (Leland's church). Isaac Backus, the leading Baptist authority in Massachusetts, hesitated to join the association because he feared overbearing authority might squelch the autonomy of individual churches; moreover, he felt that associations might become a wedge for state intervention.\textsuperscript{30} He soon reversed his decision, however, and realized the potential for an association to act as a means of thwarting state control. The Baptists might utilize an organization to strengthen rather than usurp the power of the local congregation.\textsuperscript{31}

Associations enabled local churches to focus their strength on combating increasing discrimination. State authorities, alarmed at the movement of the former Separate Congregationalists into Baptist ranks after the Great Awakening, tightened the exemption laws in 1753. The Standing Order suspected the Baptist credentials of many of these new so-called Baptists. The new law required certificates from fellow dissenting members who were also required to show proof of membership from three other dissenting churches. The law stated:
That no person, for the future, should be esteemed to be an Anabaptist, but those whose names are contained in the lists taken by the assessors, or such as shall produce a certificate, under the hands of the minister and of two principal members of such church, setting forth that they conscientiously believe such person or persons to be of their persuasion .... That no minister nor the members of any Anabaptist church, as aforesaid, shall be esteemed qualified to give such certificates, as aforesaid, other than such as shall have obtained from three other churches, commonly called Anabaptists, in this or the neighboring Provinces, a certificate from each respectively, that they esteem such church to be one of their denomination, and that they conscientiously believe them to be Anabaptists.\textsuperscript{32}

Regardless of these strictures, Separate Baptists continued organizing churches, and authorities responded by attacking the Baptists' pecuniary interests. The authorities suspected dissident Congregationalists were calling themselves "Baptists" simply to claim this exemption from the mandatory tax to support the Standing Order. Town officials devised methods of circumventing the laws, and they amerced the Baptists' goods for nonpayment of religious taxes whenever possible. Confiscating property and imprisoning those who defied the taxes became a commonplace occurrence.\textsuperscript{33} One early Baptist chronicler believed the monetary rewards interested authorities more than religious conformity: "If any one was so heretical as to refuse his money towards building a meeting-house within the parish lines, which might happen to encircle him, or to support a preacher which he never chose, nor wished to hear, then he must look out for writs, constables, sheriffs, courts, priests and lawyers, stripes, prisons, and forfeitures and the whole sanctimonious procession of ecclesiastical tormentors."\textsuperscript{34}

Various towns struggled throughout the 1760s and 1770s with
the problem of reconciling dissenting minorities with the requirement that all must support the Congregational churches. In Ashfield, Massachusetts, for example, the Standing Order revealed its contempt for any kind of reconciliation with dissenters. A group of New Lights were baptized by immersion in 1761 by Noah Alden and, with his assistance, they formed the Ashfield Baptist church. They began building their meetinghouse in this unsettled region but were forced to stop when the town began filling up with Congregationalists and nonresident proprietors. As the Baptists became outnumbered, they were forced to pay taxes to build the Congregationalist meetinghouse and support its minister. Those who defied the taxes had their property confiscated during 1763 and 1764, and some were imprisoned. After the town's incorporation in 1765, the Baptists assumed they were eligible for tax exemption. The proprietors continued to tax the Baptists, however, and the authorities pushed through "the Ashfield law," an amendment to the incorporation act, which levied taxes on all inhabitants for civil or ecclesiastical purposes. John Davis, pastor of the Second Baptist Church of Boston, said in January 1771 that the Ashfield Congregationalists were determined to root the Baptists out of town and that they did not care how they did it. The Baptists petitioned the General Court of the state from 1769 to 1771, but their petitions were ignored.35

These early examples imbued Leland with an abhorrence of state intervention in religious affairs. The Standing Order's actions revealed the weakened faith of a church closely allied with the ruling powers. The vital religion of the evangelicals, on the other hand, seemed to flourish without state support and even amidst discrimination and
disruption. State religion, Leland concluded, relied on force instead of faith:

What a scandal it is to the Christian name to see church discipline executed in a courthouse, before the judges of the police-to see censures given at the whipping post, and excommunications at the gallows; (The Baptists and New Lights have been imprisoned, fined, and whipped, and witches and Quakers have been hung in Massachusetts.) and for smaller breaches, to be admonished by a sheriff's seizing and selling cows, etc., or wiping off the admonition by a pecuniary mulct! Yet such has been, and still is the case, even in New England, that has made her boast of religion and liberty. 36

Because the church was not the direct cause of salvation, Leland went further in questioning its role and even commented that it was the most obvious avenue for state intervention. The church symbolized Christians gathered together in fellowship; it did not signify the means of salvation. Leland baptized "the penitent INTO CHRIST;" the church receives them into fellowship." He questioned "whether the advantage of what is called church order more than compensates for the disadvantages." Leland witnessed the disadvantages of such order in the religious discrimination directed toward the Baptists in Massachusetts. This early disdain for proper church dogma foreshadowed his later disregard of religious labels and creeds. Even at his baptism Leland revealed his disregard for the fine distinctions of the Calvinistic doctrine. He made no attempt to reconcile predestination and free will in his belief system, and if he did he felt no desire to promote it. "Confessions of faith often check any further pursuit after truth, confine the mind into a particular way of reasoning, and give rise to frequent
separations." Leland did not represent the mainstream Baptist view in his disdain of external sanctions; most Baptists were fighting in the 1770s for official recognition of their denomination.

The majority of Baptists defended their churches against state aggression by publishing an advertisement of grievances against the state. Their accounts were brought to Bellingham in 1770, and the Baptist Association resolved to petition the King in Council for redress and relief. The Baptists justified their going above the heads of the legislature on the fact that they were being taxed without proper representation. Their situation vis-a-vis the Congregational Church paralleled the colony's position against the crown. Naturally their actions upset the majority of Congregationalists, many of whom were colonial patriots. The petition capitalized on the colonial objections to the Tea Act and defended the dissenters' position in terms of the colonists' arguments: "That no taxation can be equitable where such restraints are laid upon the taxed as take from him the liberty of giving his own money freely." The Ashfield proprietors denied the analogy, stating that their case did not involve natural rights. Ecclesiastical taxes were a civil matter, argued the authorities. "Natural rights ... are in this province wholly superseded in this case by civil obligations and in matters of taxation individuals cannot with the least propriety plead them." The king disagreed with the proprietors' and in July 1771 he disallowed the Ashfield Act. The Baptists received minor compensation and believed they had been denied full justice. Quarrels continued to vex the town for years. Technically the repeal of the act signified a victory
for the Baptists; however, they suffered socially and politically from the association forged between their denomination and royal powers. The king and the governor continued to assist dissenters up to the Revolution, not because they cared about the dissenters' rights but because they saw religious developments as an opportunity to divide public opinion still further. One result of the King's decision in favor of the Baptists is that in some colonists' eyes it linked the Baptists with imperial forces just as revolutionary fervor began to boil. By seemingly turning against their neighbors, the Baptists aroused suspicions of disloyalty to the colonial cause (This would later injure their case for disestablishment during the Massachusetts constitutional convention in 1778-80). The northern Baptists aggressively courted dissent because they believed they spoke the truth. Victory over the establishment seemed attainable if they could balance support for colonial rights with their conflict over religious freedom.40

By utilizing colonial revolutionary tactics, the Baptists drew upon the most persuasive colonial rhetoric and placed themselves in the position of the beleaguered colonists. This use of revolutionary language would later influence Leland's political tracts and religious sermons. Emulating the Sons of Liberty, the Baptists used civil disobedience as a means of showing their opposition to religious tithes. In 1773 the Baptist Grievance Committee refused to turn in any further exempting certificates and published a pamphlet explaining their rationale in An Appeal to the Public for Religious Liberty. It stated that government officials "are not representatives in religious matter, and therefore have no right to impose religious taxes." In a thinly disguised call for
separation of church and state, the Appeal argued that in addition to the state’s unhealthy effect on the church, a hypocritical establishment also injured civil society.41

The Baptists attempted to reach a national audience when the Warren Association sent a contingent of members to Philadelphia with a list of grievances before the Continental Congress in 1774. Written in the same year of Leland’s conversion, this memorial outlined the history of New England intolerance toward dissenters and criticized the temporary measures granting relief. The Baptists did not seek noble concessions, the document stated, but in the republican rhetoric of the day, demanded the recognition of inalienable rights.42 The memorial concluded that

Religion is a concern between God and the soul with which no human authority can meddle; consistently with the principles of Christianity, and according to the dictates of Protestantism, we claim and expect the liberty of worshipping God according to our consciences, not being obliged to support a ministry we cannot attend.... These we have an undoubted Right to, as men, as Christians, and by charter as inhabitants of Massachusetts Bay."43

The memorial upset many of the delegates to the convention but not nearly as much as the face-to-face meeting between the opposing factions. Ezra Stiles, John Adams, and Samuel Adams met with Isaac Backus, President Manning of Rhode Island College, and Quaker Israel Pemberton. John Adams recorded his impression of the event as a "self-created tribunal, which was neither legal nor constitutional."44 Backus cited various cases of injustices towards the Baptists, but John Adams countered by arguing that Massachusetts possessed one of the
mildest establishments in the world. Adams conceded by promising to provide some assistance in their relief. This aid did not signify, however, immediate amelioration of the Baptists' treatment in the state. Backus wrote that Adams commented that "we might as well expect a change in the solar system, as to expect they would give up their establishment."\textsuperscript{45} Ezra Stiles, a leading Congregational minister and co-patriot of Adams, concurred with the authorities' position. The religious liberty of which he wrote, referred solely to the Congregational establishment in New England. The Standing Order would not willingly or easily relinquish its position, and Stiles reminded the people to recall the initial purpose of the Massachusetts Bay Colony. "Let the grand errand into America never be forgotten."\textsuperscript{46} To many of the convention delegates, these dissenters were not only interfering with the colony's historical foundation but were also interfering with the colony's larger battle against the British.

Quaker Israel Pemberton's speech caused more suspicion of the dissenters by his efforts to repeal all discriminating laws and "place things as they were in Pennsylvania." John Adams suspected that Pemberton was "endeavoring to avail himself of this opportunity to break up the Congress, or at least to withdraw the Quakers and the governing part of Pennsylvania from us."\textsuperscript{47} Adams believed Pemberton hoped to stymie any colony-wide agreement or at least to place the Pennsylvania colony in the forefront of any movement. Stiles also suspected the Baptists' motives. After the meeting he complained that in their attack on Massachusetts's establishment, the dissenters failed to mention the discrimination in Virginia and Maryland where "they not only pay
ministerial Taxes for building Churches but are imprisoned for preaching in unlicensed Houses." He foreshadowed the establishment's position in the future disestablishment battle of 1778-80 in Massachusetts when he stated in 1774 that "we shall not forget this Work of our Brother Esau." Stiles and Adams suspected the Baptists of disloyalty at a time when the colonies required a unified front against the British. "Because they hate Congregationalists who they know are hated by the King, Ministry, and Parliament, they will leave the general Defence of American Liberty to the Congregationalists to the Northward and Episcopalians to the Southward; and make Merit themselves with the Ministry, who are glad to play them off against us, and for this End promise them relief. Their Partiality and Malice are great."\(^4^8\) Unknown to Stiles, Baptists such as John Leland became some of the most fervent supporters of revolution, unlike the divided Anglicans. During most of the revolutionary era Leland lived in Virginia. By 1777, before the battle over the Massachusetts constitution, he was itinerating around the South spreading revolutionary rhetoric as it pertained to the Baptists.

Stiles noted that the New England and Philadelphia associations did not unite with their southern brethren to combat the Anglican establishment. He assumed that because the Baptists did not offer an intercolonial anti-British declaration, they were secret Tories. Stiles mistakenly believed that the Baptists were a unified denomination. In reality the New England brethren had little communication with their southern counterparts. Moreover, their unification required a common enemy. In New England the Baptists were fighting authorities for the disestablishment of the Congregational Church as well as opposing
British tyranny. They fought a two-front battle, one against their neighbors for religious freedom and another against the British for political rights. The southern Baptists, however, focused their enmity on the Anglican establishment, which allowed them to protest the political hegemony of the English at the same time. The Baptists in the South also found political champions among the social elite. Men such as Thomas Jefferson, James Madison, and George Mason assisted the battle for religious freedom, whereas the New England Baptists never received prominent support from the ruling class. Madison would become an important ally of Leland's in Virginia during the struggle to disestablish religion.

The Baptists in New England, like their southern brethren, eventually did embrace the revolutionary cause. But the northern Baptists benefitted from the authorities' use of republican rhetoric as propaganda in the ecclesiastical battle. Backus reversed the arguments of the patriots in his speech to the Continental Congress. "All America are alarmed at the tea tax; though if they please they can avoid it by not buying tea; but we have no such liberty.... These lines are to let you know, that we are determined not to pay either of them." Authorities resisted this argument by denying the analogy. "There is an essential difference between Persons being Taxed where they aren't represented, therefore against their Wills, and being Taxed when represented and when what is Taxed is only in consequence of what was the very condition of their Grant." Members of the colonial establishment resisted the full implications of revolutionary rhetoric when it dangerously approached disestablishment and freedom of conscience.
Accepting the implications of republican rhetoric and granting equal status to religious dissenters might have garnered English sympathizers, but it would also have signified the conclusion of the Standing Order's dominance in New England. Massachusetts leaders attempted to close this Pandora's Box by rejecting the internal contradiction made manifest by the dissenters' application of their revolutionary language. Dissenting ministers hammered home this contradiction to their audiences. Leland grew up amidst this battle over language and drew upon a tradition of revolutionary discourse to create his own brand of political and religious rhetoric after his move to Virginia in late 1776.

The Baptists continued to incorporate revolutionary language into their petitions to the Massachusetts General Assembly. At the 1775 General Assembly at Watertown a memorial was presented maintaining the theme of taxation without representation by comparing Congregationalists to the tyrannous British. It stated that "under the legal dispensation, where God himself prescribed the exact proportion of what the people were to give, yet none but persons of the worst characters ever attempted to take it by force."52 After the General Court put aside this memorial, the Warren Association planned a colonial conference to stimulate national consciousness. Emulating the Continental Congress in its raising of a colonial-wide consciousness, the Baptists hoped a national meeting might force authorities to consider religious liberty in the makeup of the infant nation.53

Religious righteousness also fueled the Baptists' claims for freedom of worship. They responded to many Congregational accusations
by criticizing the Standing Order for disloyalty to their Puritan tradition. The Baptists claimed that they were the true heirs of New England's pietistic legacy. The Baptists' position on church government, believers' baptism, and, most importantly, their defense of religious liberty reinforced their belief that they were following the example of the founders who fled English oppression for American freedom. The belief in separation of church and state was also embedded in the Baptist theology that stressed local church autonomy. Leland also used this argument to legitimize the Baptists in Virginia as the true heirs of the American experiment.

Leland and the Baptists thrived on the use of republican rhetoric in the 1770s. The Baptists identified themselves with the endangered "liberty" of the republican rhetoric, threatened by the encroaching "power" of the persecuting Congregationalists. Astute Baptist leaders highlighted the parallels between the colonies' relation to England and the Baptists' relation to the Standing Order in New England. This Scylla and Charybdis situation, however, could not be indefinitely maintained. As revolutionary forces began clashing, the Baptists had to make a choice. Despite early persecution from the local authorities, the Baptists sided with the colonists against the British.

The Baptists' revolutionary position might seem surprising because of their early persecution from and their antagonism toward the ruling elite in the 1770s. The Baptists constituted fewer than 5 percent of the population in New England and were regarded by both the patriots and the loyalists as an indeterminate faction. The Baptists' estrangement from the powerful segments of society was also evinced
by the paucity of Baptists in the Sons of Liberty, the Committees of Correspondence, and the Committees of Safety. Because of the Baptists' early ties with the Crown, which had defended their interests, some patriots regarded the Baptists as potential Tories. The Baptists reversed their exclusion from revolutionary organizations by scorning what they considered to be the Standing Order's hypocrisy. How could authorities complain of taxation without representation when they unjustly taxed dissenters in their own state? "Sons of Liberty," said one Baptist minister, "but they treat me like sons of VIOLENCE." 57

New England Baptists sought redress from imperial forces against the persecution of the revolutionary patriots. Dissenters protested the unofficial establishment in the state and its use of parish majorities and regulations of the General Court. 58 But at the same time they worried along with their neighbors about the encroachments on their rights as Englishmen. From which direction came the greatest threat to their liberties? The Baptists recognized the importance of civil liberty in preserving religious principles and so resolved to fight the British on that front, yet they also resolved to continue battling the Standing Order for religious freedom. 59 Leland did not have to face this dilemma after he left Massachusetts in 1776. As demonstrated by Leland, the Virginia Baptists felt no qualms about embracing the revolutionary cause. In Virginia the persecuting establishment and the threat to civil liberties resided in the same source. There Leland fought the single enemy of his religion and his politics until the end of the revolution.

Throughout the colonies the Baptists might have been tempted to
ignore the arguments in the political realm altogether in favor of their personal religious situation. Their faith primarily stressed the individual's religious state. In Leland's memoirs, for example, he placed little emphasis on his political actions in Virginia and Massachusetts, focusing instead on his evangelical accomplishments. The Baptists regarded the political realm as secondary to individual salvation. The fight over taxation without representation, they said, was the Standing Order's battle and not "ours." 60

The Massachusetts Baptists eventually recognized that more harm than good would come of totally alienating the authorities. Although the Baptists might struggle with the Standing Order over freedom of conscience, they realized that the political future lay on the side of the colonies. The Anglican establishment in Virginia did not provide more freedom for its dissenters than the New England Congregationalists. Royal authorities, the Baptists realized, hoped to divide colonial power rather than grant real liberties to its dissenters. Governor Hutchinson, in whom Baptist hopes for relief from the Congregationalists had lain, wrote in 1771 that "All who attend a Baptist minister are not exempt; if they should be, the congregations would be broke to pieces in all parts of the province."61 Baptists allied themselves with the colonists because they too were attracted to the rhetoric "that all righteous government is founded in compact, expressed or implied; which is equally binding upon ruler and ruled." This revolutionary rhetoric sounded remarkably similar to the foundations of their individual churches. Moreover, as citizens of Massachusetts, the Baptists believed they would ultimately achieve their goals through
political pressure within their colony. "Though heavy corrections were to be expected, yet a strong hope was begotten of Final deliverance to this land; the good effects whereof might hereafter return to the people who now invaded our rights."^62

The Anglican Church contributed to its colonial alienation by consistently lagging behind the religious temper of the colonies. Not only had the Anglicans estranged its potential audience, but it was inextricably bound to the crown. One Tory remarked that "Episcopacy and Monarchy are, in their Frame and Constitution, best suited to each other," and "Episcopacy can never thrive in a Republican Government, nor Republican Principles in an Episcopal Church."^63 These statements, intended to bolster support for an Anglican bishop in Virginia, alienated potential loyalists and contributed to the revolutionary fervor.

Many historians have pursued this tie between evangelical religion and revolutionary politics further by placing part of the Revolution's cause in the Great Awakening. Republican rhetoric or Radical Whig ideology, Edwin Gaustad suggests, is only dissenting Protestantism, once removed. This rhetoric, Robert Middlekauf states, attracted colonial support because it revived the concerns of a Protestant culture on the verge of Puritanism. Debates over public and private virtue, luxury, and arbitrary exercise of power tied the two concerns together. "The generations that made the Revolution were the children of the twice-born, the heirs of this seventeenth-century religious tradition."^64 Leland's accommodation of religion and politics in his writings help reveal this link.

Many Massachusetts Baptists, regardless of the political future,
could not endure allying with the Standing Order and migrated south to escape further persecution. Leland was one of those ministers fleeing persecution and seeking greater freedom in Virginia. Most persecuted Baptists journied south to continue spreading the gospel of redemption. Greater opportunity for proselytization, it was believed, might be found in the southern states where church and state ties were not so tightly bound. Leland received firsthand information of New England ministers' establishing successful flocks in Virginia and North Carolina. Shubal Stearns, pastor of the Baptist church in Tolland, Connecticut, established the first southern Separate Baptist church in 1755 at Sandy Creek in North Carolina. The minister who replaced Stearns in Tolland was Noah Alden, Leland's baptizer and minister at Bellingham. Stearns' brother-in-law, Daniel Marshall, encouraged Stearns and his church to follow him down south. Leland must have received news of the Baptists' trials and triumphs in Virginia in the 1770s as they pursued political and religious freedom. Stories of the emigrant clergy filtered back north, describing the backcountry's thirst for vital religion or any religion that could reach the isolated regions. For an itinerant like Leland, the situation seemed tailor-made.

Massachusetts also propelled Leland southward. The Standing Order's firm hold on the state prevented evangelicals from achieving complete freedom to itinerate and preach. The Ashfield case, and other examples of political, social, and economic discrimination, revealed not only local opposition but the official disdain of the state court system as well. Again Noah Alden, Leland's baptizer and pastor, witnessed the 1771 Ashfield incident and might have offered a firsthand account of
the persecution of the Separate Baptists in that state. Alden also received reports of socio-religious prejudice from other ministers in the state. A member of the Warwick Baptist Church wrote Alden in 1774 that the Standing minister and the selectmen of the town heckled an itinerant Baptist preacher and warned him to leave town or be arrested as a vagabond. Alden was also probably the author of some certificates that caused several Bellingham Baptists to be distrained in 1773 because the documents did not state that they were "conscientiously" Baptist members.66

Leland did not discuss his political beliefs during this period nor did he retrospectively record his early impressions of the revolutionary efforts. Nevertheless, the "contagion of liberty" encompassed his world and must have made a significant impact on his later activities in Virginia, where he resided beginning after his marriage to Sally Devine in 1776.67 In one of his later speeches he remarked on the difference between "moral evil and state rebellion: not considering that a man may be infected with moral evil, and yet be guilty of no crime, punishable by law.... If a man worships one God, three Gods, twenty Gods, or no God-- ... wherein does he injure the life, liberty or property of another?"68 Obviously Leland's constitutional studies, in consideration of a potential law career, heightened his political sensitivity. He possessed a keen knowledge, unlike most ministers, of the legal and political language of government. Leland would effectively use that knowledge in Virginia to support republican candidates and promote the separation of church and state.

New England's ecclesiastical foundation contributed to the shape
of Leland's political and religious thought. Born in the waning years of the Great Awakening, he had access to itinerant, evangelical preachers who promoted the people's salvation. Leland also witnessed the Standing Order's tireless efforts to stamp out dissent and enforce conformity by means of imprisonment and pecuniary damage. By the 1770s authorities realized that their hope for a unified colonial front against the British was threatened by these dissenting sects. The colonists' propaganda efforts backfired as the Baptists used the same republican and revolutionary rhetoric employed by the patriots. Leland benefited from both the patriots' rhetoric against English oppression and from the dissenters' use of that language against its authors. During the battle for disestablishment in Virginia, he would translate this language into political action through his influential sermons.
Endnotes to Religion and Revolution

18. Nathan O. Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity* (New Haven, 1989), 45. "Within the structured Protestant churches there was no room for lay persons to compete with the qualified ministry in preaching the word of God. Nor was there room for 'self-initiated associations of the people meeting outside of regularly constituted religious or political meetings,' for to do so was to relocate authority collectively in the mass of the common people."


27. *Ibid.*, 75-76.
40. Ibid, i, 531, 546.
43. Hovey, A Memoir of the Life..., of Backus, 210.
53. Jacob Conrad Meyer, Church and State in Massachusetts from 1740 to 1833 (New York, 1968 reprint of the 1930 ed.), 95-96.
60. Ibid, 555. Leland boasted of his ministerial powers by keeping a faithful record of his baptisms. In 1834 Leland wrote that he had baptized 1524 people. Leland, Writings, 39.
63. Gaustad, Faith of Our Fathers, 32.


68. Ibid, 221. There is little explanation for Leland's embrace of republican ideology other than the environmental influences of revolutionary New England. Butterfield, Gaustad, and McLoughlin all focus on the use of Leland's rhetoric in the colonial era in the battle for separation of church and state. Nathan O. Hatch's The Democratization of American Christianity focuses more on the democratic implications of individualist evangelicals such as Leland, rather than on the origins of Leland's political thought.
Virginia: Religion and Republican Rhetoric

Virginia became the setting for John Leland's greatest religious and political triumphs during his fourteen-year sojourn in the state from 1777 to 1791. Understandably, histories of Virginia mention him more often than those in the state of his birth, Massachusetts, where he spent the majority of his life. The protracted struggle for religious freedom in Virginia and the involvement in that struggle of the brightest stars of the revolutionary era added luster to Leland's role. In his fourteen years in the Old Dominion he would act as a spokesman for the Baptist Association in the state legislature, sway votes for republican candidates, and help elect James Madison to the Constitutional Convention.

Leland's accomplishments were grounded by his views on personal redemption, autonomy, and church-state relations, which originated from the seeds of his New England childhood. The political and intellectual climate of late eighteenth-century Virginia, however, shaped the bulk of his opinions. Leland could not help but be affected by the Enlightenment philosophy exemplified by the works of Thomas Jefferson and James Madison. These learned statesmen spread the rhetoric of revolutionary republicanism that was already a part of Leland's upbringing in Massachusetts. Both religious and political leaders borrowed from one another and blended the language of republicanism and evangelicalism. Leland offers a dramatic example of the combination of these ideologies. He gave Virginia, and thus the
nation, an original model for discussing individualism, freedom of conscience, and republican ideology, while he also helped achieve the separation of church and state.

In migrating south, Leland traded the battle against an unofficial establishment of Congregationalism in New England for the battle against the official establishment of Anglicanism in Virginia. He came to realize that the fight against an official church might be easier than a battle against the amorphous standing order in Massachusetts. In Virginia the Baptists openly confronted their enemies and, encouraged by their growing strength, they decided to fight. Capitalizing upon the democratic sentiment in the air and utilizing the tools of legal petitions, the Baptists pushed their political agenda through the state legislature and into the national consciousness. To understand this accomplishment and Leland's role in that struggle, it is necessary to outline briefly the Baptists' struggle in the colony during the middle decades of the eighteenth century.

The Baptists' achievements in the 1780s should not overshadow their intense struggle in the preceding three decades. Unlike Congregationalism in Massachusetts, Virginia Anglicanism was theoretically more firmly planted from its inception. In terms of its social, religious, and political life, Virginia followed English models of behavior closer than the other American colonies.\(^1\) A 1643 law prohibited anyone who was not a minister of the Church of England from preaching or teaching religion in Virginia. At the same time this statute
ordered expulsion of all nonconformists from the colony. Authorities in England, however, needed to guarantee the support of dissenters after the Glorious Revolution. In 1689 Parliament passed the Toleration Act to reward dissenters for their loyalty to the crown. Although religious dissenters continued being taxed for the support of the Anglican church, once registered, they were allowed to worship in their own meeting houses.

The Anglican Church nevertheless did not fare well in the southern colonies. Without colonial bishops and with a faulty administrative structure, local vestries strangled church affairs; and there was little incentive for missionary work. Churches were far apart, often one to a county, making attendance inconvenient for the struggling farmer. The Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts, England's answer to the religious apathy in the colonies, could not satisfy the needs of the growing backcountry. Moreover, many of the emigrant clergy were neither the pick of England's ministerial pool nor sufficiently paid and supported in Virginia. This combination of factors prevented the development of a vital religious faith in seventeenth--and early eighteenth--century Virginia.

Increasing social distances between the elite and the common inhabitants also worked against a pietistic, or personalized religious experience, in the Anglican faith. In the tidewater region, privilege dominated society in politics and in the church. Rather than being a time for communal sharing, Sunday masses became an opportunity for the gentry to display their dominance in this hierarchical society. The
churches often alienated the people even on the occasions when the institutions reached the more remote counties. Often, Virginians were simply unchurched. 6

Not surprisingly, dissenting sects began quietly entering Virginia in the late seventeenth century. Quakers, Presbyterians, Lutherans, and German pietistic groups settled in the backcountry, usually without attracting much attention from authorities. The Baptists began their settlement in 1714 in Virginia's southeastern counties. These early General Baptists embraced the belief in an Arminian general redemption. They believed God provided for the salvation of all people if they only accepted His offer of grace. The Particular Baptists, on the other hand, followed a more selective predeterminism. 7 Their God had only selected or predestined a privileged few for justification, and, as formulated by the English Calvinists or Separates, these few might be recognized by their piety and outward signs of grace. The Particulars, arriving later in the colony, eventually swayed the Generals to their more deterministic theology, with the two sects combining into the Philadelphia Association in 1742. Despite their label and recognition of the Bible as their only rule of faith, the combined "General" Baptists were a surprisingly selective sect. They required a learned clergy and "an intelligible relation of his experience of an effectual calling...," so they remained a small and influential group. 8 The "Generals" were content with their churches and willing to continue paying taxes to the establishment in exchange for toleration. The same could not be said for a still later group, the
Separate Baptists.

The Separates' origins lay in the Great Awakening of the 1740s and 1750s. George Whitefield's message of redemption was the well-spring of the Separates' appeal. He was inclined toward Calvinism, although he said that he had "never read anything that Calvin wrote." Whitefield believed that people had some ability to turn themselves toward God but that salvation was in no sense by works. 9 Throughout his travels in the South and in New England he stressed that knowledge of salvation came through the heart rather than the mind. Any person might obtain this knowledge once they had heard the Truth, and so Whitefield spread a message that downplayed nuanced theological distinction and encouraged mass evangelization. This straightforward message had wide appeal across class and colonial lines. New England Congregationalists affected by his message pushed for incorporation of such doctrine in their churches, and they became known as "awakened" Congregationalists. Eventually these churches broke away to become Separate Congregationalists, and some completely split away and became Separate Baptists. The Separates incorporated Whitefield's belief in the urgency of the missionary task. From 1750 onward the Separate Baptists spread their fervent emotional message far and wide. 10 In New England these Separate Baptists employed emotions that often "deeply affected themselves while preaching," causing correspondent affections "by their pious hearers, which were frequently expressed by tears, trembling, screams, shouts and acclamations." 11

Dynamic colonial ministers took up Whitefield's missionary call,
beginning with Shubal Stearns of Boston. He became a Separate Baptist preacher in 1751 and, feeling himself called by the Holy Spirit, moved south in 1754. His original sojourn in northern Virginia met with opposition from the association of General Baptists there as well as from the population. The Separates' animated preaching style upset the populace, causing Stearns and his brother-in-law Daniel Marshall to move further south in search of a more receptive audience. Along with their party of New Englanders, they settled at Sandy Creek in Guilford County, North Carolina, in 1755. 12 Backcountry Anglicanism formerly had consisted of little more than a system of rules and restraints, and Stearns' new emotional message stirred up the region. The Baptists employed strong gestures to convey their message; the minister seemed to search every individual's soul. General Baptists (also known as the Regular Baptists to distinguish themselves from the more enthusiastic Separates), however, deplored this emotional style of preaching and worship. When Stearns called on a Regular Baptist minister to assist in ordaining his brother-in-law Marshall, the minister refused. "He believed them to be a disorderly set: suffering women to pray in public, and permitting every ignorant man to preach that chose; that they encouraged noise and confusion in their meetings." 13

Although the Baptists' appeal lay chiefly with the lower economic strata, their energetic proselytizing began attracting those from other social classes. One early convert, Samuel Harriss, had previously distinguished himself as an Anglican church warden, sheriff, justice of the peace, and colonel of the county. An early Baptist
historian, Morgan Edwards, said, "the name of so important a citizen gave the Separate Baptist movement a momentous lift in Virginia, for he was the first person of prominence to join the Separates in that state." 14 Along with James Ireland, Harriss helped organize Carter's Run church, one of the largest Separate churches in Virginia. William Marshall, uncle of Chief Justice Marshall, became one of many converts. 15

The Separates tapped into the Virginians' desire for a faith responsive to their situation. The Separate Baptists formed a ministry, a preaching style, and a theology that spoke directly to the common people who felt alienated by the barren established church. This preaching focused on the individual's relationship to God, not the fellowship of the church or society. The Baptists directed their message at the individual seeking salvation, whose susceptibility to emotionalism was usually increased. This led to preachers addressing their sermons to the emotions and the mind, rather than the mind alone. 16 Moreover, they did so with styles and symbols fitted to regional patterns of speech and life. "These people needed a distinctive symbol and a comparatively formless faith; they found the one in adult baptism by immersion, and the other in the wide compass of Bible teaching...."17 The Baptist minister's stark biblical message focused on the simple choice offered to the sinner: heaven or hell. Salvation became a matter of choice since the sinner was expected to "get religion" rather than religion getting the sinner. 18 Evangelicalism rejected reason in favor of a psychological attack upon sin and the promise of personal salvation. The democracy of emotion appealed to the masses more than the
hierarchy of intellect. Rather than wait for lengthy instruction or arduous religious preparation, the unconverted were invited simply to claim the power of grace.

To fulfill these roles, preachers were chosen for their fervor rather than for their learning. They were generally poor, and usually they emerged out of the congregation because of the church's emphasis on lay preaching. The frontier conditions allowed them to be "licensed first, study when and if they could, and be ordained only when they were called to a church." 19 The backcountry preachers spoke the people's language and were connected with the everyday realities of frontier life. Philip Schaff attributed their appeal to their "decided aptness for popular discourse and exhortation." 20

The Anglican clergy could not compete with this popular faith. Comparisons of the conflicting faiths revealed that the established clergy's social distance alienated them from the population. The Baptists capitalized on this alienation by exposing the Anglican ministers as "men of classical and scientific educations, patronized by men in power, connected with great families, supported by competent salaries, and put into office by the strong arm of civil power." 21 Anglican ministers were hardly men of the people.

Anglican Virginia based its social and religious structure on a hierarchical conception of society, similar to the Puritan Great Chain of Being. According to this theory, everything on earth and in the heavens was ranked according to its inherent value. Thus God oversaw the angels who oversaw the classes of men, women, animals, and down to
inanimate objects. All people were accorded a place in the structure, with degrees of deference accorded to each person above and below one's rank in the hierarchy. Each class maintained its distance from the other classes, thus stabilizing the social structure and bolstering the gentry's image. Evangelicals upset this "natural order." They inverted tradition and religious authority. Rather than respecting learning, decorum, or tradition, evangelicals exalted youth, emotion, and free expression. God, they said, had reserved divine insight for the poor and humble rather than the powerful and learned. The Great Awakening upset the foundations of the establishment. By weakening the underpinnings of social assumptions, it contributed to the further crumbling of hierarchy and deference prior to the Revolution.

Separate Baptists prided themselves on their distance from Anglican society. They transformed what was a rejection by the ruling elite into a reaffirmation of their simple circumstances. "The greater part of every denomination, are as poor, and as unlearned as we .... But riches and honour and carnal wisdom, are no badges of the Christian Religion." In part they consciously rejected the dominant values of competition and ostentatiousness by embracing the evangelical lifestyle. Borrowing from the New Testament, New England Separate Baptists, and their English separatist forebears, Virginia's Separate Baptists styled a personal faith appropriate for an isolated society.

The older Regular Baptists in Virginia identified themselves more with the social mores of the Anglicans than with the rowdy Separate newcomers. The Regulars, along with many Virginians, still
characterized the Separates as illiterate and awkward enthusiasts. David Thomas, an educated Regular minister, disapproved of their methods and attempted to differentiate the two sects. An ordained Baptist minister, he wrote, was not one simply called by the Spirit, but rather one who "by a series of constant reading and study, has a tolerable acquaintance with the Holy Scriptures," and whose "conversations should be becoming the gospel." 26

The Separate Baptist emphasis on simple living gave them a sense of superiority over the materialistic tidewater society characterized by ownership of slaves and an ostentatious style of living. The Baptists differentiated themselves by prohibiting frivolous activities that characterized Anglicanism. They rejected "the singing of carnal songs, or the playing or dancing wanton tunes, or the racing of horses, as it is commonly carried on, or the use of cards, and dice ...." The Baptist also prided themselves on their pious services. There was in their services, "no bowing, no talking, no laughing, nor removing to and fro...." 27 Leland also attacked the Anglican ministers for their dry, uninspired sermon delivery. He pursued this line of argument so far as to inspire later charges of anti-intellectualism. "The preachers of that order, in Virginia, for the most part, not only plead for theatrical amusements, and what they call civil mirth, but their preaching is dry and barren, containing little else but morality." 28 Leland composed various poems satirizing this formal approach to religion.

"They labor hard with all their power and skill,  
To make God's stream supply their self-made mill."
Authors they quote, and old translations mend,  
(Their words grow wiser, as their views extend),  
If, for their creeds, the Scripture will not speak,  
They leave the English and adopt the Greek...." 29

More and more frequently the Baptists' barbs were aimed at the clergymen themselves in the 1760s and 1770s. "Some of the cardinal precepts of morality, were disregarded, and actions plainly forbidden by the New Testament," wrote an early Baptist historian, "were often proclaimed by the clergy, harmless and innocent, or at worst, foibles of but little account." 30 Baptists especially attacked the Anglicans' practice of infant baptism, advocating instead believer baptism. Leland strongly advanced this belief and began employing political rhetoric in his religious arguments. He convinced many Virginians of the unscriptural basis of unconverted baptism based in part on contemporary political language. "The manner of initiating members into the Church of England, is arbitrary and tyrannical. The subject, (for a candidate I cannot call him) is taken by force, brought to the priest, baptized, and declared a member of the church...." 31 Leland and the Baptists also loudly objected to the mode of baptism by pouring water instead of immersion, set prayers, and the Anglican structure of government. 32

By rejecting Anglican clergy and society as corrupt and unscriptural, the Baptists reinforced their sense of a rejuvenated life in Christ. Individual regeneration required an evident change of life after conversion. Regular Baptist David Thomas stated this renewal "will be followed with a corresponding reformation of manners, and a suitable deportment." 33 Leland noted that this outward appearance of
righteousness in the southern Separates, corresponded with the current politics of the 1760s and 1770s, in its rejection of imported English goods. Colonists might overcome British injustices by boycotting their manufactured goods, and at the same time they might avoid the moral corruptions of English society. "Upon the first rise of the Baptists in Virginia, they were very strict in their dress. Men cut off their hair, like Cromwell's round-headed chaplains, and women cast away all their superfluities; so that they were distinguished from others, merely by their decoration." 34

The growth of the Baptists threatened the social order of traditional society, as more Baptists rejected the dominant values. Samuel Harriss, a prominent Virginia gentleman turned Baptist, offered an example of this transformation. Harriss began preaching of the necessity of the new birth when a worldly associate suddenly interrupted him, saying: "Colonel, you have sucked up much eloquence from the rum cask to-day." Harriss replied, "I am not drunk." When he continued proslytizing, another militia officer said: "Sam, you say you are not drunk; pray, are you mad, then? What the devil ails you?" 35 Harriss, like his backcountry coreligionists, had rejected establishment mores. Leland cited an example of another prominent convert repudiating the dominant society. Captain Robert Howard of York at first objected to his wife's conversion but soon followed her example. After his reform, while riding with Leland, Howard's uncle accosted them. "Nephew Bobby, I pity you in my heart, to see you following that deluded
people, and wasting your time so much, that you will raise no corn this year." "My uncle," said the Captain, "I wish you had pitied me as much two years ago, when you cheated me out of my mill." 36 The gentry objected to the Baptists' repudiation of the gentry's materialistic lifestyle. Of course both of these accounts are taken from Baptist sources, who are portrayed as rejecting what they perceive to be a worldly and secular ethos.

The increasingly popular Baptist church also reinforced the democratic spirit of 1770s Virginia. Individual Baptist congregations were considered independent republics. Each member had an equal vote and voice, whether they were upper class or the lowliest initiate.37 Many Baptists hoped these similarities might aid them in the emerging struggle to sever religion's relationship with the government. The time was ripe for their battle to influence the new nations' cultural and legal legacies because of the states malleable condition. Early persecution in Virginia had revealed the degenerating effects of a state establishment, and they focused on building a wall of separation between church and state. Many Baptists wished to recreate the primitive church of the Apostles when religious adherents were not only unsupported but harassed by authorities.

The Baptists in Virginia began their battle to disestablish the church in the early 1770s as revolutionary fever swept the land. They employed the Democratic and natural rights rhetoric to plead their cause, which also aided them in garnering sympathy from certain elite Virginians. The Baptists utilized such terms as inalienable rights, the
social contract, natural law, and the contractual basis of government to place themselves in the colonists' role in relation to England. Early persecution by the establishment legitimated the Baptists' enmity. One Episcopal historian remarked that "they were consistent to the end, and the war which they waged against the church was a war of extermination." 38

As the Baptists made headway among the populace in the eastern counties, authorities partial to the Anglican establishment sought official means of discouragement. Baptist historian William Taylor Thorn defined 1770 as the turning point of popular reaction in favor of the Baptists and the beginning of persecution by the civil authorities. 39 Fearful at first, many Virginians accepted the Baptists' faith while the gentry responded to the increase in conversions with violence. Authorities feared that this upstart religion might gain a majority voice, so they began to attack the dissenters with the laws already in place. Virginia's toleration laws had allowed a certain measure of religious autonomy. Anglicanism by necessity was a broadly uniform faith, and dissenters had been tolerated provided they stuck to their own congregations. The evangelicals' proselytizing and itineracy violated this agreement by destroying church order, hence a threat. "Some thought they were deceitful, others, that they were bewitched, and many being convinced of all [Baptist beliefs]... [believed] that God was with them of a truth." In the eyes of the establishment, enthusiasm upset public decency; and so authorities justified their attacks of the Baptists based on their so-called civic improprieties. Leland described this
initial fear as a warning call to the Anglican Church. "The usual alarm of the Church and State being in danger, was echoed through the colony." 40

Toleration laws on the Virginia records prevented imprisonment of dissenters solely on the grounds of preaching. Preservation of the peace laws, however, served the establishment's purpose. One of the first instances of imprisonment of Baptist preachers occurred in Spottsylvania in 1768 when John Waller, Lewis Craig, and James Childs were seized by the sheriff. At court they were arraigned as disturbers of the peace. A lawyer revealed the actual offense by testifying that "these men are great disturbers of the peace, they cannot meet a man upon the road, but they must ram a text of scripture down his throat." 41 One notorious instance of violence perpetrated by the clergy as well as by the magistrates involved Waller. In 1771 while he was preaching outdoors, the Anglican minister of the parish rode up to the stage and tumbled Waller's book of Psalms. When Waller began to pray, the minister ran the end of his whip into Waller's mouth and the county clerk pulled him down and dragged him to the sheriff, who whipped him violently. But sore and bloody as he was, Waller remounted the stage and preached "a most extraordinary sermon." 42

Far from impeding Baptist growth, such persecution highlighted their martyr status. The patient manner in which the Baptists suffered emphasized their piety and goodness to the population. Preaching from jail doubled the weight of their sermons, thoroughly negating the authorities' intentions. Leland noted that between 1764 and 1774 the Baptists inexorably spread "over the greatest part of the state that was
peopled." 43 The populous eastern counties followed the backcountry by converting in droves to the Baptist faith. According to association records, there were thirty churches in the Southside and twenty-four north of the James River by 1774. There were Separate churches in twenty-eight of Virginia's sixty counties, including every county in which Baptists had been imprisoned. At the end of 1775, Semple listed about 10,000 Baptists in the colony, a number which rapidly rose to 20,000 by the end of the century. 44

The Baptists' success in Virginia revealed the push and pull effect of religion. The competitive and hierarchical structure of Anglican society, in part, sent many people in search of a more personal faith. In those terms Virginia Anglicanism repelled people by its mimicry of English society. Rhys Isaac wrote that the Baptists' popularity was based on Virginians' reaction against the hierarchical and impersonal religion of the tidewater Anglicans. The pull of the Baptist religion, however, should not be underestimated in overcoming the isolated backcountry. Insular communities responded to the Baptists' simple, individual message of redemption more than to the barren, uninspired establishment. Moreover, Anglicanism had not yet sunk firm roots in the backcountry regions, and so these newly converted areas could not be interpreted merely as "reacting against" the established church. 45

The Baptists confronted more strident opposition in the settled eastern counties, the stronghold of the establishment. The Separate Baptists might have encountered less hostility had they obtained
licenses to preach, but they purposely avoided this outlet. They had no intention of obeying what they considered a tyrannical law. This defiance signalled the inevitable political battle to come. The Baptists would not consent to colonial laws, placing them in the forefront of the battle for religious freedom. 46

Political reality forced the Baptists to harness their growing numbers in order to realize their influence. They needed some organization to direct their actions as well as provide a fellowship desired by the dispersed members. An association was organized to fulfill both these needs. Although the Baptists traditionally considered their faith to be very individual-oriented, they also based their faith on a "churchly" understanding of Christianity, whereby the individual was encouraged to join with other Christians in worship. The revolutionary ideas fermenting in Virginia also emphasized the importance of individuals organizing their voices into a responsive republic. There were to be no solitary citizens or Christians. The realization of their faith and later their political lives would find its outlet in the community. 47

The Baptists formed the General Association in 1771 in order to organize their communication. Semple’s record stated their intention to "promote acquaintance among brethren, and afford the opportunity to consult, respecting the best modes of counteracting national grievances." They could not "interfere with the internal concerns of [other Baptist] churches except where their advice is requested by any church." Church discipline was a local prerogative. 48 Leland wrote that such church
government "is not national, parochial, or presbyterian, but congregational." The Baptists' desire for organization also alarmed those members, such as Leland, fearful of excessive centralization. They supported congregational autonomy and usually rejected formal creeds and confessions of faith. These trappings were often associated with the oppression of New England's Standing Order and the barren services of Virginia's Anglican church. The preeminence of the Separate Baptists' voluntary association tapped into the eighteenth-century reaction against centralization of imperial administration in the colonies.

In 1775 the Baptist General Association commissioned a memorial to be sent to the state convention. Its objectives were threefold. The Baptists decried the oppressive political treatment by the British toward the colonies, urged independence from England, and advocated complete religious freedom. "All religious denominations ought to stand upon the same footing, and that to all alike the protection of the government should be extended." This memorial stands out primarily because at that time few political leaders contemplated independence with Britain. In this memorial the Baptists also pledged support in any armed conflict. The state convention could not refuse any early support as it wavered over severing their colonial ties.

Religion was in a state of flux in Virginia at this time, and so it easily became entwined with the changing political rhetoric. As Baptist historian Thom wrote, "liberty was getting to be in the air--liberty, the heritage of his race, all the dearer to the poor man in that he was poor."
Into this religious and political maelstrom arrived John Leland in 1777. Leland and his wife Sally Devine made their way south, stopping first in Philadelphia and then Fairfax. They arrived in Culpeper County, where Leland joined the church at Mount Poney and began preaching there every other Sunday. The congregation ordained him without the imposition of the hands of a presbytery of ministers, a necessity for most of the Baptist churches in Virginia. Trouble soon began when the independent Leland began taking long trips around the state preaching the gospel and neglecting his pastoral duties. "I spent all my time travelling and preaching, and had large congregations." His self-ordained role as itinerant preacher better suited his individual temperament than that of stationary minister. "I was too young and roving to be looked up to as a pastor." His apparel also troubled the congregation. "Mr. Leland and others, adhered to the customs of New England, each one putting on such apparel as suited his own fancy. This was offensive to some members of the church," wrote an early Baptist historian. When the Baptist association in the county rejected Mount Poney's delegates because of Leland's improper ordination, the congregation had had enough. "My stay in Culpeper was not a blessing to the people," Leland later wrote. After receiving a "dismission and recommendation," he moved to Orange County in 1779, which remained his base in the state for the duration of his residence in Virginia.

Leland's initial difficulty in Virginia also arose because of his dismissive attitude toward ordination. He had not been ordained by a
presbytery of ministers. Shubal Stearns originated the practice of officiating over Separate Baptist ministers. Stearns would not even consider his brother-in-law Daniel Marshall properly ordained until another minister assisted in the procedure. The Regular Baptists, always more conscious of form, had also required an official means of ordination. Regular Baptist David Thomas stated that all ministers must "have the hands of the eldership solemnly laid upon them. And this is but to follow the example of the primitive Christians." 54 In part the Culpeper congregation dismissed Leland because he had not been "properly" ordained in Massachusetts or in Virginia. Leland finally submitted to the standard procedure for the sake of propriety and to continue his political activities. In order to pursue further political counsel for the General Committee, Leland was ordained by the laying on of hands in June 1786 by ministers Nathaniel Saunders, John Waller, and John Price. 55 He did not seem to place much faith in official ordination. Leland's radical individualism lay behind his viewpoint: "imposition and non-imposition of hands are equally pleaded for; but, after all, a commission from Heaven, to preach and baptize, is the great quintessence." 56 Neither the laws of the colony nor the tradition of church associations superseded the call of God. Only the individual could determine his readiness to spread the word of God.

Leland soon became well-known in the state for his extraordinary preaching tours. He travelled as far south as the Pee Dee River in South Carolina before concentrating his energies east of Orange County in 1779. From November 1779 to July 1780 he preached in and
around Orange to York, approximately 120 miles, and baptized 130 people. His chief success came in 1781 in York, where Lord Cornwallis and his troops were held prisoners. Leland's stamina also became a cause for remark as revealed by one case in which he was to preach someone's funeral sermon near Bedford County. His horse had been injured, so Leland "arose at daybreak and travelled twenty miles, preached to the people, and then returned on foot to my friend's, where my beast was."  

Leland also earned notoriety for his piety and conversion skills. He stressed the importance of turning away from the traditional and accepted lifestyle. Near Fredericksburg he came upon a bridegroom and his family celebrating with music and dancing. Leland asked him the cause of the noise inside; and when the man replied it was a fiddle, Leland asked to see it. The man went into the house and "by the time I got in, the fiddle was hidden, and all was still. I told them, if fiddling and dancing was serving God, to proceed on, and if I could gain conviction of it, I would join them." Leland prayed among them and left. The next week he returned to their house to preach and baptized some of the family. While Leland was not always such a pious killjoy, he usually emphasized the decorum of the justified individual but not at the expense of a joyful existence. Some critics even attacked his "theatrical" manner, but it was more often said of him that "he seldom held a congregation long without exciting a smile...." The sedate Isaac Backus complimented Leland's "ready wit" but called him eccentric and "sometimes unstable and unsound." Most contemporaries described his
eccentricities as "so inherent and essential to his character, and his wit was so spontaneous... that they neither interrupted the current of his own piety, nor often weakened the religious influence of his discourses upon others." One story attributed to Leland reveals his satiric manner. While riding in company with Elder Hull they were suddenly overtaken by a slight shower. Leland urged his companion to seek shelter, but the other man remarked, "Brother, I am ashamed of you--a Baptist minister, and afraid of a little water!" "Ah! Brother Hull," replied Leland, "I never like these sprinklings."59

The more Leland's reputation spread around the state, the more he took umbrage at the limitations still imposed on dissenters. His individualistic nature rebelled against the restrictions set by the establishment, and he soon took to testing these limits. In one ironic example, he confronted James Madison's father. Leland claimed the right to preach at the vestry of St. Thomas Parish in Orange County on the grounds that the buildings were community property. Madison, Sr., speaking for the vestrymen, called Leland's request "new and ... unprecedented" and said Leland's assertions lacked validity. The property was "reserved to the use of the church by law established." 60 State law supported the senior Madison, as Leland soon discovered.

Persecution affected Leland more in the personal than in the political sense. He was never imprisoned but was threatened several times with bodily violence for his convictions. One particularly violent episode occurred when a gentlewoman in Orange invited Leland to preach at her home. Her son, a captain in the militia, warned Leland not to
preach in the house and withdrew with threats. When Leland stood to begin the meeting, the captain rushed into the house, drew his sword from his scabbard, and exclaimed "let me kill the damned rascal!" When Leland's wife saw the captain draw back his arm for the fatal thrust, she "sprang like the lightning of heaven, clasped her hands together, and held him like a vice, till the men took away his sword." 61 In a less dire example, Leland recounted how he baptized another gentlewoman against her husband's wishes. The husband refused to sleep with her that night or eat breakfast with her in the morning. When asked for advice Leland stated: "I knew the lady to be an excellent cook, and her husband was fond of good dinners. My answer was 'My sister, give yourself no uneasiness; his appetite will bring him to his reason by dinner time;' which accordingly came to pass." 62 Taken from Leland's own writings, such examples demonstrate the degree to which the Baptists were initially shunned by traditional society.

By the 1770s Leland and the Baptists were already winning the battle for the hearts and minds of the people even in the upper classes, and so they began focusing on changing the opinions of the members of the assembly. Leland's role in the fight for religious freedom was not recorded until the 1780s, whereas the Baptists had begun making important political advances during the revolutionary era. The Baptists' rise followed the development of revolutionary fervor in the colonies, and during the 1770s they revealed their willingness to oppose tyranny and defend colonists' rights. Many Baptists displayed their ability by defending the rights of the backcountry residents in the War of the
Regulators. Members faced little opposition from their leaders in joining the resistance against England. To many evangelicals, the government of the king and the church represented a common foe. Their civil and religious liberties had been infringed by this establishment. Semple remarked that "they were to a man favorable to any revolution by which they could obtain freedom of religion." Leland wrote that their religion "allows them to bear arms in defence of their life, liberty and property...." Thereafter the Baptists carried a double role in Virginia by striving for religious freedom during the war as part of the revolutionary struggle itself. Their early political support for the colonists' cause forced the legislature to alter their religious restrictions in order to maintain evangelical support.

Politicians recognized the strength of this growing denomination might play an important part in the struggle and began attending to the annual petitions sent by the Baptists. Some political leaders deplored the persecution waged against the Baptists and worked to equalize their treatment, while others merely attempted to harness their growing influence in the state. One of the most important of the former politicians was James Madison. He led the struggle for religious freedom in Virginia out of a genuine desire to provide freedom of conscience for all inhabitants of the new nation. Leland became an early supporter of Madison and eventually shared a correspondence with the Virginian. Madison would also become indebted to the iconoclastic minister for political support in Leland's home base and Madison's political home of Orange county.
Madison's first action in Virginia politics involved religious freedom. Some historians believe it was this concern for freedom of conscience that led Madison into politics and away from his studies. In 1776 the legislature decided to revamp the laws of Virginia to accompany its independence. George Mason drew up a Declaration of Rights, protecting religious dissenters in its sixteenth amendment. It stated "that religion, or the duty we owe to our Creator and the manner of discharging it, can be directed only by reason and conviction, and not by force or violence; and, therefore, that all men should enjoy the fullest toleration in the exercise of religion" (Italics mine). Madison proposed, with Patrick Henry as his vocal sponsor, that the highlighted phrase be replaced with the following phrase: "all men are equally entitled to the free exercise of religion." This linguistic alteration placed all religions on equal footing rather than in the position of receiving concessions from an established faith.

The Baptist General Association, flush with these successes, realized that authorities still considered a potential tax for support of all denominations. This action would threaten true religious freedom. The Association declared in a memorial that this tax was "pregnant with various Evils destructive to the Rights and Privileges of religious Society...." Jefferson agreed with their sentiments and included the memorial in his writings and may have been responsible for its printing in the Virginia Gazette in March 1777. This statement was the earliest declaration of Baptist beliefs printed in a Virginia newspaper. The state's influence, the document said, necessarily corrupted religion and
would lead to the church's ultimate dissolution. The memorial postulated that "those whom the state employs in its Service, it has a right to regulate and dictate to; it may judge and determine who shall preach; when and where they shall preach; and what they must preach.... Yea, farewell to the last Article of the Bill of Rights! Farewell to 'free exercise of Religion.'" Lyman Butterfield speculated that this might have been the first direct contact between Jefferson and the Baptists, although this exchange might have remained indirect. Jefferson's actions nevertheless won the support of the Baptists.

Religious dissenters helped Jefferson to pass what he considered to be one of his greatest achievements, the 1779 Bill for Establishing Religious Freedom. Jefferson philosophically justified freedom of the human mind from any state constraint. The Baptists immediately approved its contents: "the said bill, in our opinion, puts religious freedom upon its proper basis; prescribes the just limits of the power of the state, with regard to religion, and properly guards against partiality towards any religious denomination."

Unfortunately the Virginia General Assembly did not feel disestablishment would beneficially unshackle the minds of the people. Authorities feared for the loosened morals of the infant republic at a time when it was assumed private virtue was necessary to form a virtuous public. Mercy Otis Warren wrote that "religion viewed merely in a political light, is after all the best cement of society, the great barrier of just government, and the only certain restraint of the passions, those dangerous inlets to licentiousness and anarchy." The
atmosphere of risk caused by independence increased the new nation's fears for their social character. "We shall succeed if we are virtuous," Samuel Adams told John Langdon in 1777. The colonies broke from England precisely to separate themselves from what they perceived to be a morally corrupt imperial power. To succeed as an independent republic the people needed to direct their behavior towards the ultimate goal--the emergence of a morally sound, independent nation. Urgency infused their rhetoric because republicans realized they had only one opportunity to shape the nascent character of the nation. Republican leaders hoped to establish a tradition of religion in the country's infancy to ensure its morality. Since religion was viewed as a barometer of the people's morality, they believed it was of enormous importance to the fate of the nation.

The establishment's leaders also believed the Revolution might cleanse the country of its immoral characteristics. Religion would introduce "the same temperance in pleasure, the same modesty in dress, the same justice in business, and the same veneration for the name of the Deity which distinguished our ancestors." Most Americans, whether southern planters or New England clergy, did not believe the country's morals were virtuously intact. The prevalence of vice, emphasized by their belief in republican rhetoric, revealed the malevolent force of power preying upon the colonies' liberty and freedom. The royal authorities were not the only culprits to blame in this scheme. Republican rhetoric also laid the blame on the moral character of its citizens. Continued connection to Britain would
contribute to this degeneration in public virtue. The colonists revolted in 1776 because they feared their special destiny of virtue and egalitarianism might not be fulfilled while they were still connected to England. Thomas Paine's warning in 1776 galvanized the urgency for separation in order to preserve that destiny.\textsuperscript{73} Disestablishment exacerbated these worries over virtue and seemed to be a precursor to moral decline, regardless of contrary messages pouring forth from dissenters.

Republican rhetoric stipulated that human nature was balanced between good and evil. Radical Whig ideologues, popularized in the newspapers and in broadsides, believed this balance was constantly in danger of faltering on the side of evil. Corruption constantly threatened freedom in the form of vice, bureaucracy, standing armies, and later, established churches.\textsuperscript{74} This ideology also stressed that republics should be simple, pre-commercial societies where every yeoman farmer might exist without the burden of debt to some impersonal merchant. Corruption thrived more often in advanced societies where great wealth and inequality promoted dependence of men and encroached on their liberty.\textsuperscript{75}

This republican rhetoric sounded remarkably similar to evangelical calls for purging society of luxury and vice. The austere doctrines and lifestyles of the Baptist communities accorded with the revolutionary calls for a moral reformation.\textsuperscript{76} Even "secular" republican discourse, such as the Cato letters, expressed sentiments appropriate for an evangelical sermon. "What turned power into a malignant force,
was not its own nature so much as the nature of man-his susceptibility to corruption and his lust for self-aggrandizement. Leaders of various denominations agreed with these prescriptions, including Episcopalians, Lutherans, Presbyterians, and Baptists such as Isaac Backus and John Leland. They all equated the success of a republic with moral virtue, but they disagreed over the means of its acquisition. Despite widespread support from Baptists, Presbyterians, some Anglicans, and Methodists, Jefferson's bill for religious freedom did not pass in 1779. Instead the Assembly deprived the establishment clergy of their salaries, which had been suspended since 1776. Anti-establishment forces then lost its most vocal supporter when the legislature elected Jefferson governor of the state, thereby removing his presence in the legislature.

Regardless of the bill's initial defeat, the Baptists used every concession granted from the legislature to pursue their ultimate goal. The majority of people seemed to support Jefferson's bill, but by rejecting it, the members of the Assembly felt they were legislating for the good of the state. The legislature believed that state support was essential for religion to thrive. Despite the surge in evangelical religion, societal leaders believed government needed to legislate the correct type of morality. The increasingly popular Baptist faith was not the religion authorities wanted as the foundation of the new nation. Leland revealed this prejudice on his preaching tour from Orange to York. Near Warwick he was preaching in a woman's home when a Colonel Harwood and six others entered the house. They meant to do no violence, they said. "I did not come to fight, but to stop you from preaching."
Another gentleman present, the son of a counsellor, said, "Col. Harwood, you are a representative in the General Assembly, and the Assembly has just made a law to secure the religious rights of all, and now you come to prevent them. What does that look like?" The colonel replied that it was an unlawful meeting and drew people away from the established church. Mrs. Russell, the mistress of the house, replied, "Hah! Col., I think it is a pity that people cannot do as they please in their own house." The populace would not allow the Assembly to dictate their religious choices or the means of its support. Political power, however, was required to force the legislature into recognizing the changing temperament in Virginia.

Authorities were slow to realize that the Baptists no longer existed on the fringes of society. The Baptists strove to organize themselves into a respectable denomination in the state. After the establishment of enough churches, the Baptists organized themselves into a General Association. Its formation offered fellowship for Baptists all over the state as well as acting as a focus for political action. Into the 1770s and 1780s, however, the independent-minded Baptists worried about the growing strength of the organization. The Baptists realized their numbers threatened to turn the General Association into a centralized authority. They decided in 1782 to divide the Association into districts but to maintain "a standing sentinel for political purposes," called the General Committee. Although it might have seemed heroic for the Christians to fight their battles individually, the Baptists realized they needed organization and strategy. The General
Committee, begun in 1783, would "give their opinion on all queries sent to them from any of the Association, originate all petitions to be laid before the legislature of the state, and consider the good of the whole society." This clearinghouse for political activity continued to present petitions to the legislature up to 1802.80

The General Committee's toughest battle was ironically fought not against a specific Anglican establishment but against those favoring a tax for the support of all religions. Pro-establishment forces proposed a general assessment for the support of all Christian teachers. Virginia inhabitants would be taxed for religious purposes, but their funds would be directed to the denomination of their choice. The general assessment divided the people of Virginia because it included all denominations. Anti-establishment forces had to convince the people that any connection between the church and state would be detrimental to all religions. Jefferson's bill had rejected all state intervention in ecclesiastical matters, leaving the support of churches to the members' responsibility rather than to any compulsory force. In 1779, however, dissenters were not strong enough to fulfill the hopes of the Baptists and those political leaders who favored an independent conscience.

The general assessment for all faiths received the backing of those who believed religion required the state's support. The former Anglicans, Methodists, and, in part, the Presbyterians backed the tax. Former Baptist advocate Patrick Henry led the forces for the assessment and used his famous oratorical skills to raise the stakes of the debate. He espoused equality for all faiths but believed the state should provide
the means for their existence. At first the Baptists stood alone in opposing this general tax. They believed all religions would profit from an absolute exclusion from government. Any involvement in its support, they said, necessarily allowed the state to dictate to the church. Jefferson and Madison took the Baptist, and what they considered the philosophic, view of freedom of conscience. Leland defined an assessment in typical republican ideological style. "If government says I must pay somebody, it must next describe that somebody, his doctrine and place of abode. That moment a minister is so fixed as to receive a stipend by legal force, that moment he ceases to be a gospel ambassador, and becomes a minister of state."

The Baptists feared centralized power's affect on spiritual matters. Because theirs was such an individualistic faith, large institutions, they believed, distanced the believer from God. Worldy interests cheapened the relationship and, as Leland wrote, "turns the gospel into merchandise, and sinks religion upon a level with other things." The state necessarily corrupted religion whenever the two mingled. Religion and its leaders, Leland said, should rely instead on the voluntary spirit of its members. Any general establishment for all denominations would lead to the decline of all faith.

Unfortunately religious fervor sputtered in the state in the early 1780s, reinforcing the Assembly's belief that shorn of state support, religion would sink. What the Assembly ascribed to religious decline, however, the Baptists blamed on the continuing church-state connection. Allowing all individuals the choice of supporting or not supporting their
own particular denomination, the Baptists argued, strengthened religion's foundations. Moreover, the inception of the weakened Articles of Confederation after the revolution, Virginia's economic depression, and social dislocation after the Revolution contributed to the low state of religion. Leland cited the "siege of Lord Cornwallis, the refunding of paper money, and removals to Kentucky," as the reasons why "religion ran low in Virginia...."83 Political leaders such as Madison cited the need for a new code of law and justice to govern the public virtue and increase the public piety of the population. Madison promoted personal example rather than legislation as a means of increasing personal virtue.84 He did not overconcern himself with the idea of individual piety but focused more on whether the state had any right to tax its citizens for religious purposes.

Madison led the anti-assessment forces in the legislature and in 1785 tapped the support of the dissenters by constructing his forceful "Memorial and Remonstrance." The editors of Madison's papers stated that Madison "surely ... discussed the matter with his neighbors, including the obstreperous Elder John Leland."85 Madison's petition served as a focal point for both his rational and the Baptists' evangelical stance on religious freedom. Later in his life, Leland often cited Madison's memorial as a symbol of enlightened statesmanship.

Madison's "Memorial and Remonstrance" combined parts of Baptist petitions with Madison's own enlightenment education into an eloquent argument for freedom of conscience. Madison's sixteenth amendment to the Declaration of Rights, cited near the beginning of the
memorial, echoed an earlier Baptist belief. Madison stated that religion could be directed only by "reason and conviction, not by force or violence." David Thomas had written more than a decade earlier that "we ought to strive to convert them by argument, by persuasion.... For it is absolutely impossible to force conviction on the mind." Madison also stated that Christianity had survived long before there were establishments. "For it is known that this Religion both existed and flourished, not only without the support of human laws but in spite of every opposition from them." The Baptists incorporated this use of the primitive churches into their own petitions. Leland wrote in his 1791 *Virginia Chronicle* that "religion must have stood a time before any law could have been made about it; and if it did stand almost three hundred years without law, it can still stand without it." For the Baptists the 1770s presented a historic opportunity for them to return to an untarnished age when religion was not directed by worldly forces.

Leland's influence in Virginia increased throughout the struggle for religious freedom. He attended General Assembly meetings as a legislative agent on behalf of the Baptist General Committee. Along with Reuben Ford he presented a petition in August 1786 bearing his rhetorical style. "We cannot see with what propriety the General Assembly could incorporate the Protestant Episcopal Church .... If this is not done by force, what force can there be in law? and to what lengths this may lead; and what violence it may produce, time only can discover, but we fear the awful consequences. The act appears a Bitumen to Cement Church and State together; the foundation for Ecclesiastical
Tyranny, and the first step towards an Inquisition."\(^90\) Recalling the earlier fear of an Anglican bishop, Leland and the Baptists believed an American establishment would reintroduce state influence into religious services. Republican ideology highlighted the danger of an ecclesiastical conspiracy against American liberties.

Anything that smacked of a religious establishment alarmed Leland. Even toleration was anathema to him, as it was to Madison and Paine. Madison's sixteenth amendment addressed this problem by his substitution of freedom for toleration in the Declaration of Rights. Thomas Paine described the difference between the two terms. "Toleration is not the opposite of intolerance, but it is the counterfeit of it. Both are despotisms. The one assumes to itself the right of withholding liberty of conscience, the other of granting it. The one is the pope armed with fire and faggot, the other is the pope selling or granting indulgences."\(^91\) Leland despised toleration as much as if not more than Paine. The liberty Leland fought for, was more than mere toleration. "The very idea of toleration, is despicable; it supposes that some have a pre-eminence above the rest, to grant indulgences; whereas, all should be equally free, Jews, Turks, Pagans, and Christians."\(^92\)

Madison's memorial also expressed his fear of the power of a majority over the beliefs of the minority. "Who does not see that the same authority which can establish Christianity in exclusion of all other religions may establish with the same ease any particular sect of Christians in exclusion of all other sects?" Madison believed the glory of America and its greatest protection lay in the multiplicity of sects.
He later used this argument to great effect in Federalist Number 10. Leland also believed in the benefits of multiplicity. He feared even his own denomination might become oppressive if given the opportunity.

Madison's "Memorial and Remonstrance" joined other petitions arriving from all over the state protesting the impending assessment. Fifty-five hostile petitions from forty-eight different counties came after October 1785 within the space of a month and a half. Only one county, Surrey, sent a petition favorable to the assessment; and twenty-two counties, out of seventy-one, sent no petitions. Evangelicals inundated the Committee for Religion with petitions. The tide continued to turn when Patrick Henry was appointed governor, eliminating his considerable pro-assessment rhetoric from the Assembly. The opposition overwhelmed the assessment proposal and defeated the bill.

Besides the evangelical and rationalist forces, economic motivation also aided the disestablishment of the church, in that many citizens preferred withholding their support from any religion. Leland caustically remarked: "When the time came, the Presbyterians, Baptists, Quakers, Methodists, Deists, and Covetous, made such an effort against the bill that it fell through." Apparently economic interest motivated certain citizens as much as the philosophical justification influenced others. Following the assessment's defeat, the Act to Incorporate the Episcopal Church, originally passed in December 1784 before the assessment controversy, also suffered defeat. In 1787 the Assembly repealed the Episcopal Incorporation Act but left the part relating to
Episcopal church property intact. The Episcopal church struggled to delay any relinquishment of its former property. The Assembly hoped to maintain as much support of its former establishment as possible and was slow in selling off the glebes.

Prior to all of these political actions, Leland traveled and preached, endeavoring to bring the message of redemption to as many bodies as possible. An uneasy lag in conversions after the war worried Leland and the Baptists, causing many to despair. In 1784 Leland recorded an unproductive six-week, one-hundred-and-fifty-mile preaching tour down near the Dismal Swamp. Uncertainty over the emerging religious landscape worried both the populace and its ministers. This uncertainty preceded, however, the release of religious energies in the state. Despite a temporary lull in conversions, the Baptists soon realized the rewards of the political revolt, increased religious freedom, and their aggressive proselytization.

Leland and the Baptists reached a religious turning point in 1785. An awakening began in Powhatan County and then broke out all along the James River Valley. In the spring of 1786 Leland preached at Hodger’s Seat on the line between Louisa and Goochland counties. There many people “seemed to be on the alert for heaven.” Leland began a hymn “O that my load of sin were gone” and soon felt the power of his oratory touch the multitudes.
All of a sudden, it seemed as if something fell from heaven upon the people. I could not speak for weeping, for some time.... The sermon which I then preached was hardly middling, but the effect on the people was amazing. Some were crying out, some on their knees, and others prostrate on the floor.

Compounding this enthusiasm, Leland noted the conviviality of the various denominations during the awakening. "I have generally observed, that when religion is lively among the people no alienation of affection arises from a difference of judgement." During the revival, converts offered every denomination increased congregations. Leland wrote that the most popular form of religion merged Calvinism's sovereign grace, "mixed with a little of what is called Arminianism." Years later he would partially retract this statement. He would baptize only those who "came in at the door of repentance toward God, and faith towards the Lord Jesus Christ, and not those who climbed up some other way." Leland did not quibble over views he deemed inessential for salvation. He did not censure those who differed or denied his beliefs. Leland still recognized other denominations as fellow Christians and never denounced those he baptized but who chose a faith other than the Baptist. "It is not the doctrine or system that a man believes, that makes him either a good or bad man, but the SPIRIT he is governed by." His unusual position emerged from his genuine belief in the necessity for conversion and baptism. Afterwards, the justified individuals would live a rejuvenated life in Christ, reflected by their lifestyles. This unusual tolerance would later cause disputes with his fellow Baptists in New
England.

Leland stressed the necessity for baptism, not as an exclusive doctrine of a particular sect but as a general religious principle. Other denominations, he wrote, emphasized it as everything, anything, and nothing. "The Episcopalians make it everything; they say that the water is blest to the mystical washing away of sin .... The Methodists make it anything; either sprinkling, pouring or immersion .... The Quakers make it nothing; but when they regard the word of God more, and the word of Barclay less, they will then find baptism, not only to be a command but the first command, after repentance and faith."¹⁰² Except for the necessity of the new birth, Leland advocated a moderate faith among the Baptists. He never moved so far as to approach an Episcopalian belief in salvation by works, and he shunned their uninspired prayers, but he did move toward a more Arminian doctrine of general salvation. Because he shrank from formal creeds, he did not hold others to specific standards. Technicalities of theology did not interest him but rather made him "reach for his nightcap." He made no claim to divine knowledge or absolute certainty on religious matters (except for his belief in God's saving grace), and in a letter to Robert Carter he stated this belief. "When I was about 24 years old I could have answered your Request at once with great assurance; but now at 34 I am more doubtful; perhaps at 44, should I live so long, I may know less about it still, if less can be."¹⁰³ Carter's request was not revealed, although one might guess it dealt with a theological matter for which Leland had little patience. Later in life Leland did reconcile his own beliefs in regard to grace and
free will. "That preceptive part of the gospel addresses men as able to do, and commands them to do; but the gracious part considers men as weak and polluted, and reveals what God does for them. The former shows holy authority, the latter gracious benevolence.\textsuperscript{104} Leland's moderate Calvinism, similar to George Whitefield's, conquered the South in tandem with the movement for religious freedom, which Leland was supporting with so much success.

Leland criticized the need for any creed, save baptism, that tied an individual to a set of rules. He objected to all confessions of faith and set prayers. Such dogma "often check any further pursuit after truth, confine the mind into a particular way of reasoning, and give rise to frequent separations."\textsuperscript{105} In that same letter to Carter, Leland wrote "I would not now write a creed of any length, and bind myself to live and die by it, for the price of my head." At that time many evangelicals did not strictly require specific creeds. They relied on the autonomy of the believer in deciphering the revelation of the scriptures. Personal experience became the proof of salvation, not assent to a creedal statement. One's personal dependence on Christ meant more than acceptance of a man-made document. The overall mood was for "no creed but the Bible" and the right of "private judgement," under grace, in its interpretation.\textsuperscript{106} Leland admitted his closest approximation to a confession of faith in 1788, fourteen years after his baptism. He believed in God, the Bible, Jesus as Messiah, man's fallen state, the necessity for a new birth, and "what system or spirit power a man may have does not lead him to love God, hate sin, deny himself and follow
after Holiness, is certainly wrong." Other than this vague statement, he tolerated differing interpretations. Leland's statement represented what he considered to be the minimum necessity for faith. All other doctrines might enhance individual beliefs, but these tenets were essential for salvation.

One of Leland's few concessions to outward conformity came in 1786 when he was properly ordained by a formal presbytery of ministers. Upon his arrival in Virginia in 1777, Leland had not received the sanction of official certification. To participate fully in the Baptist community in the 1780s, however, he was required to submit to the ceremony. The same year of his ordination the various Baptist sects finally united into one entity. Their interests merged in the struggle for religious freedom and by the fact that the Separates removed a major obstacle to the union by adopting the Philadelphia Confession of Faith. The May 1786 statement specified that Baptists would not hold communion with others who did not practice believer's baptism. This view, in opposition to infant baptism, required that persons be old enough to understand what they professed. The Philadelphia Confession allowed every church member to decide whether or not he or she had been baptized in unbelief, and left the liberty of deciding a member's fitness to the minister. Therefore all Baptists became members of the United Baptist Churches of Christ in Virginia, soon shortened to the United Baptists and in the 1790s simply to Baptists. 108

Disestablishment forces were also celebrating the passage of Jefferson's Bill for Establishing Religious Freedom in 1786. It
formalized the legal separation between church and state. Madison used the momentum generated by the evangelical petitions, which defeated the Assessment bill, to push through Jefferson's legislation. Virginia's grudging acceptance in 1786 reversed the 1779 rejection. The bill stated that "... No man shall be compelled to frequent or support any religious worship, place or ministry whatsoever; nor shall be enforced, restrained, molested or burthened in his body or goods, nor shall otherwise suffer on account of his religious opinions or belief." 109

The Episcopal church still, however, retained control of its former property after the passage of Jefferson's bill. The Baptists would not rest until all discriminatory practices were abolished, which included possession of church property by the former established Anglicans. The Baptists sent petitions demanding the logical conclusion to disestablishment. All citizens should benefit from what they felt was public property. In 1786 the Baptist General Committee protested the incorporation act and advocated "that the public property which is by that act vested in the Protestant Episcopal church be sold and the money applied to public use; and that Reuben Ford and John Leland attend the next Assembly as agents in behalf of the General Committee." They sent petitions annually to the Legislature until 1799-after Leland had left Virginia and returned to Massachusetts-when the Assembly finally passed "An Act to Repeal Certain Acts," which removed all special privileges accorded to the Episcopal church. 110

While Leland agreed with Jefferson's entire bill, the Assembly was never ready to embrace Jefferson's philosophical justification for
religious freedom based on intellectual liberty. The omitted preamble to Jefferson's Bill for Establishing Religious Freedom stated that "men depend not on their own will, but follow involuntarily the evidence proposed to their minds; that Almighty God hath created the mind free, and manifested his supreme will that free it shall remain by making it altogether insusceptible of restraint."\(^{111}\) Leland probably would not have followed Jefferson's deistic tendency to its logical conclusion. Leland interpreted the preamble in terms of allowing freedom for the individual conscience to choose or not to choose God's saving grace. He did not, unlike Jefferson to an extent, repudiate the absolute values of good and evil dictated by society. Thus Leland's support of Jefferson and his bill may have been built on Leland's willingness to overlook the deistic implications of the legislation.

Leland agreed with the document's spirit, not with its deistic conclusions. Going beyond his denomination, Leland supported Jefferson's actions on behalf of freedom of conscience. "It would be sinful for a man to surrender that to man, which is to be kept sacred for God. A man's mind should be always open to conviction, and an honest man will receive that doctrine which appears the best demonstrated. Finally, a religion is a matter between God and individuals: the religious opinions of men not being the objects of civil government, nor in any way under its control."\(^ {112}\) Chances for conversions multiplied when every individual's mind was released from external controls and open to seek God. Whereas religious establishments discouraged thinking and encouraged surface professions of Christian faith, Leland interpreted
religious freedom in the light of an opportunity to increase the numbers of heartfelt adherents to Christ. Disestablishment would allow more people the choice of salvation denied them under an uninspired state church.

The Evangelical and the rationalist motives behind religious freedom differed, and these differences were highlighted by the Assembly's approval of Jefferson's bill on the same day it passed the observance of Sunday as a day of rest. Persons found working on the Sabbath or employing apprentices, slaves, or servants on that day, "except (when) it be in the ordinary household office of daily necessity, or other work of necessity or charity," would be fined ten shillings.¹¹³ The Baptist Committee did not object to this bill, foreshadowing future squabbles concerning state involvement. Government might best serve the public interest by "supporting those Laws of Morality, which are necessary for Private and Public Happiness." In this capacity the state might act as "Guardian" in the public sphere.¹¹⁴ Many Baptists, both in the North and the South, supported this legislation, but the prickly individualist Leland rebelled at any infraction of church-state separation.

Sabbath laws infringed on absolute individual moral responsibility and betrayed Jefferson's Bill. Although evangelicals rallied behind Jefferson's Bill, their motives were clear from the simultaneous passage of sabbatarian laws. They lobbied for equal treatment of religious denominations and supported disestablishment to insure no one church would dominate. However, evangelicals also
intended to legislate morality by forcing state recognition of the sabbath. Leland broke with his denomination in vociferously protesting this breaching of the wall between church and state. Public legislation on religion, such as the sabbatarian laws, denied the right of individual conscience and again allowed the government to obtain a foothold in the religious sphere. Like the omnipresent "power" of republican rhetoric, the state would inevitably attempt to usurp the "liberty" of the churches. Leland's modern ideas clashed with those of his brethren by his maintaining an absolute position on religious freedom. He incurred the wrath of fellow Baptists by his firm position and his defense of Jefferson, even when later evangelicals attacked Jefferson for his deistic beliefs. The editor of Leland's writings, L. F. Greene, believed he heeded others' opinions but never allowed them to overwhelm his strong personal beliefs. "He did not undervalue the importance of the objections that might be urged against his opinions; but giving them their full weight, he advanced his own arguments to meet them; following, in this respect, the example of Madison, whom he often quoted as a model of candor and fairness in debate."115 By firmly upholding his belief in the total separation of church and state, Leland hoped Virginia's religious legislation might become a model for the nation.

Jefferson's Bill for Religious Freedom set a national precedent for relations between religion and democratic government and provided a critical model for political and religious development in the fledgling republic. A decade earlier, in 1776, John Adams had written Patrick Henry, "We all look up to Virginia for examples."116 Responsibility for
this religious precedent lay with the coalition of enlightened politicians
and the evangelical faithful. Episcopal historian F.L. Hawks wrote that
"the Baptists were the principal promoters of this work, and in truth
aided more than any other denomination in its accomplishment."\textsuperscript{117}

The uniting of rationalist political leaders and evangelicals
enabled disestablishment to become a reality. These forces banded
together to reach their goals, but they approached the problem from
opposing motivations. Edmund Randolph said of Jefferson, "His opinions
against restraints on conscience ingratiated him with the enemies of the
establishment, who did not stop to inquire how far those opinions might
border on skepticism or infidelity. Parties in religion and politics rarely
scan with nicety the peculiar private opinions of their adherents."\textsuperscript{118}
Both rationalists and evangelicals supported freedom of religious
conscience and the belief that man's relationship to God is prior to man's
relationship with the state. Their similarities ended there.

The postrevolutionary optimism of the Founding Fathers was
openly secular and not religious. Franklin, Washington, Jefferson,
Hamilton, (and Madison to an extent), all professed belief in religion, not
willing to risk the charge of atheism, but they possessed a vague,
ethereal view of spirituality. They could not be classed in the same
pious tradition as the evangelical, Congregational, and Episcopalian
clergymen who backed the Revolution. As early as the Declaration of
Independence, the rationalists and the pietists revealed their opposing
origins. Religion played a secondary role in the makeup of that document.
The religious world alluded to was a deist's world. The god appearing in
the Declaration was nature's god rather than a scriptural god, such as when Jefferson wrote of "the laws of nature and nature's God." ¹¹⁹

The rationalists and the evangelicals arrived at their common goals from opposing viewpoints. The rationalists supported reason in the pursuit of truth and natural rights. Reason enabled humans to grasp the revelation of the Creator. Individuals could be guided only by the evidence they contemplated in their minds. Imposition of uniform religious opinion, Jefferson thought, had served only "to make one half the world fools, and the other half hypocrites." The evangelicals stressed the personal relationship between the individual and God and strove to recapture the spiritual purity of the unsupported primitive church.¹²⁰ They believed every individual had the right to interpret scripture for him or herself. Evangelicalism elevated the individual by emphasizing the early Protestant belief in removing all obstacles between the person and God. In this respect the evangelical rhetoric resembled the rationalists' belief in individual ability. The rationalists' and evangelicals' opposing starting points did not, however, prevent their brief unification and mutual borrowing to further their common goal of separating church and state.

After disestablishment, the coalition fell apart. Once their political goals were accomplished, most evangelicals returned to their traditional background rooted in piety. The rationalists came to be viewed increasingly as infidels with their deistic or atheistic tendencies.¹²¹ Their merger, however, at the time of America's national foundation left reminders. Americans inculcated both traditions into
the national psyche. Martin Marty has remarked that the ideological inheritance of pietism and the Enlightenment rests uneasily in many Americans' stomachs. "He is unable to digest them and unwilling to regurgitate them. American life is full of paradox and contradiction, and this particular ability to live with apparent religious incompatibilities is an example." 122

In large part this interpretation of a rationalist and pietist coalition seems to set up an unwarranted dichotomy. Leland, himself, represents the integration of these two beliefs. As an evangelical minister he traveled the state inducing conversions and preaching God's salvation. As a political figure he acted as an agent for the Baptist association and influenced elections. Assuming a contest between the revivalists and the Enlightenment figures, between the heart and the head, negates the positive relationship between the two forces. Jefferson and Madison, like Leland, emphasized the importance of the moral sense over intellectualism. The Common Sense philosophy of the Scottish Enlightenment played a prominent role in the Founding Fathers' education. As taught by Thomas Hucheson, it became the central topic of courses taught at Philadelphia, Princeton, New York, and Williamsburg. Scottish thinkers developed John Locke's assertion that God had given humans sufficient faculties to deal with their problems. They downplayed the search for abstract, ultimate solutions. Thomas Reid, Hucheson, and Madison's teacher John Witherspoon all contributed to this theory that appealed to the American common sense. Witherspoon stated at the Continental Congress that "a person of integrity will pass
as sound a judgement on subjects of this kind by consulting his own heart as by turning over books and systems." The rationalists displayed the same faith in individual reasoning as the evangelicals' faith in scriptural interpretation.

The estrangement of the rationalists and the pietists developed long after the Revolution. Their separation stemmed from the basic opposition many rationalists felt toward organized religion. Leland, however, realized their impiety would not affect the people’s acceptance of religion. He excused the rationalists' personal beliefs because of his faith in their politics. In theory the rationalists and the evangelicals actually had more in common than the evangelicals and the Anglicans. The emphasis of the heart over the head in the rationalist Scottish Common Sense theory echoed the evangelical belief in spontaneous, emotional religion. The evangelical sought salvation not through formal study but through a personal relationship to God. The emotionalism of the conversion experience that determined salvation surpassed intellectual disquisitions and appeals to reason. Many rationalists could not accept such a formal organization and opted instead to embrace the civil religion of the republic as their denomination.

Leland embodied the combination of the two patterns through his political actions and writings. Although he was an important evangelical minister, Leland also influenced many of the voters in his congregation. He helped spread the rhetoric of Jefferson and Madison by incorporating their philosophy into his writings. Leland as a pietistic minister never approached the deistic conclusions of Jefferson, but Leland did not allow
religious beliefs to impinge on his political opinions. Jefferson supported separation of church and state, republicanism, and free inquiry of the human mind— all causes and pursuits of Leland. For this reason Leland overlooked or chose never to acknowledge Jefferson's irreligion and remained a political supporter and admirer all his life. Leland directed this support in the political arena through work for his denomination. He never admitted to political aspirations or influence, an area of his greatest legacy, but boasted more often of his religious skill at conversion.

Leland, like other evangelicals, proved his skill by enumerating the number of baptisms undertaken by his influence. He attributed this in part to God's mercy and partly to the release of constraints on ministers by civil laws. "When the work seemed to languish in one neighborhood, it would break out in another, and consequently, there was a continual fall of heavenly rain from October, 1787 until March, 1789."

In this interim Leland baptized about 400 people, 300 in 1788 alone. This revival lent credence to the evangelical assertion that an independent conscience would embrace true religion. Leland, however, pursued this belief much further than his Baptist brethren. In pursuing freedom of conscience he was atypical among the evangelicals in Virginia to an extent and of the Baptists in later Massachusetts where they believed in the necessity of legislating certain aspects of public morality. True freedom of religion, Leland argued, rather than leading to dissolute living, actually encouraged the emergence of piety. "True religion can, and will prevail best, where it is left entirely to
Christ.\textsuperscript{125} Leland pointed to the evangelicals' success in post revolutionary Virginia as proof of its pious inhabitants. Disestablishment only encouraged the godly work of a multitude of evangelical faiths. As a result of Virginia's political decision, the Anglican church no longer held a monopoly on religion.\textsuperscript{126}

The Baptists continued to gather strength as a result of the converts they won in 1787 and so played an important role in determining the new form of government in the states. When the new nation began questioning the effectiveness of the Articles of Confederation, the Baptists and Leland contributed to the political outcome. Constitutional delegates realized in the 1780s that dependance on public virtue alone would not guarantee an effective government. Private interests could not be eliminated simply by calling upon the good intentions of the people. The nation required a more balanced system of government, and the Baptists became one source of inspiration and support for those leaders searching for a new form of rule.

The evangelical emphasis on the sinful individual influenced the political foundation of the proposed Constitution. Government no longer assumed the people's virtue would overcome faction. Instead, the government would base itself on the assumption of competing interests. Private interests motivated the people, the Federalist papers stated, and so government would play these interests off one another by the system of checks and balances. Madison, Father of the Constitution, constructed
a system that incorporated language evangelicals could understand. Constitutional rhetoric was based on the belief that individuals would not act for the good of the nation but would look after their own interests. The Baptists had always taken the sinfulness of the people for granted and never expected the unconverted to act for the good of the whole. The proposed Constitution now pitted individual interests against one another to insure an effective balance of power.\textsuperscript{127}

Despite these surface similarities, Madison should have anticipated evangelical fear of a strong central government. The Anti-Federalists were quick to manipulate this fear in an attempt to defeat the new Constitution. At this crucial political moment Leland played perhaps his greatest role in Virginia history by throwing his support to the Constitution in the county election despite his initial Anti-Federalism. The election of delegates to the Virginia State Convention would test the appeal of Federalist and Anti-Federalist arguments. The convention would in turn cast its state vote for or against the Constitution. Madison, kept out of the Assembly in Virginia by Patrick Henry and the Anti-Federalists, needed a seat in the Convention in order to lead the ratifying forces. Madison ran as a candidate in the county of his residence, Orange, which was also Leland's home county. As an important Baptist leader in a predominately Baptist county, Leland had the power to sway many votes. Along with other Baptist leaders he had become an extremely influential figure in the state. The party that could woo the Baptists might also decide the fate of the Constitution.
The Federalists' situation appeared grim as the election neared. Most Baptists feared the new federal government did not sufficiently secure the liberty of conscience so recently won. "Perhaps our jealousies were heightened, by the usage we received in Virginia, under the regal government, when mobs, fines, bonds and prisons were our frequent repast," wrote Leland. In March 1787 the Baptist General Committee considered whether the new federal constitution would be able to secure religious freedom, and "it was agreed unanimously, that, in the opinion of the General Committee, it did not." Madison tried assuring doubters that guarantees for liberties would be added as amendments after ratification. Anti-Federalists led by Patrick Henry, another politician favored by the Baptists in Virginia, exacerbated fears for religious freedom.

Leland and the Baptists, while supporting Madison in the past, could not risk their newly won freedoms to a new constitution that was vague on guarantees. Leland supported the Anti-Federalists in Orange County and drew up his list of objections to the Constitution for Madison's rival candidate, Thomas Barbour. Leland questioned some of the Articles stipulating term limits and separation of powers but objected primarily to the absence of a Bill of Rights protecting freedom of religion. Madison's protestations to the contrary were neither loud nor vigorous enough to overcome the Anti-Federalist fears of religious tyranny. Madison did not, however, feel it was necessary to canvass the state himself, and so he lingered in Philadelphia writing the Federalist papers. As a result he approached the elections in March 1788 behind in
the voters' opinion.

Federalist forces worried that Madison's election, and thus the fate of the Constitution in Virginia, might be endangered. Anti-Federalists deflected evangelical support for Madison into fear for religious liberty. James Gordon, a friend of Madison's, urged him to assure the voters in Orange. "The sentiments of the people of Orange are much divided. The best men in my judgement are for the constitution but several of those who have much weight with the people are opposed, Parson Bledsoe & Leeland with Colo. Z. Burnley." Gordon told Madison to visit the county as "the loss of the constitution in this state may involve consequences the most alarming to every citizen of America."131

Gordon echoed the sentiments of many in the various states concerning the importance of Virginia in the national convention. Its large population and founding status allowed Virginia to act as a role model for the rest of the colonies. Undoubtedly Madison was the leader of the Federalist forces in the legislature, and his presence in the convention was necessary to offset the charismatic Anti-Federalist Patrick Henry. Barbour, the author of Madison's eulogy, placed Madison at the crux of the Constitution. "But for James Madison, we should have had no Constitution.... He, above all others, created it. He, above all others gave it to the ratification of Virginia. Without Virignia, the Union was disjointed, and was no Union, had every other State accepted, adopted and ratified the Constitution."132

In order to take his place at the convention, Madison undoubtedly needed the support of the Baptists in his state. Captain Joseph
Spencer--a Revolutionary officer who had been imprisoned for Baptist beliefs--conveyed this urgency in a letter dated February 28, 1788, reaching Madison in Fredericksburg. "The Prechers of that Society are much alarm'd fearing Relegious liberty is not Sufficiently secur'd thay pretend to other objections but that I think is the principle objection.... Mr. Leeland & Mr. Bledsoe and Sanders are the most publick men of that Society in Orange, therefore as Mr. Leeland lyes in your way home from Fredericksburg to Orange would advise you'll call on him & spend a few Howers in his Company." 133 Although there is no documentation for the meeting between Madison and Leland, circumstantial evidence attests to its occurrence. Embellished fables grew around this encounter. The truth is probably less colorful than the stories surrounding the meeting. One account portrayed Madison riding along a road when he met Leland walking in his "home-spun suit." The two embarked on a Homeric battle of minds until the sun set with Leland finally pledging support. "'Then,' said Madison, shaking eagerly the proferred hand, 'I'm elected.'" 134

Many historians do not doubt that Madison met with Leland to assuage the minister's fears for religious liberty. Evidence ranges from a history of Cheshire to articles in Harper's Monthly and Green Bag. Local lore located the meeting place at Gum Spring, six miles from Orange on the road to Fredericksburg. A memorial marker was placed at the spot in 1946. J. S. Barbour's 1836 Eulogy for Madison stated that Madison's elocution "changed two ministers of the Gospel of the Baptist church on the day preceeding the election, and that conversation carried him into the Convention. The celebrated John Leland was one of them. His mind
was thrown open to the lights of reason and the power of argument."
Barbour gleaned his knowledge from Madison's brother, William.135 A
Madison historian, Ralph Ketcham, fully accepted the account of the
meeting. "The meeting took place between February 20-28, 1788.
Madison convinced Leland that the constitution was not hostile to
religious freedom, and Leland re-enforced Madison's willingness to
support an amendment explicitly guaranteeing that freedom."136

A later account purportedly straight from Leland is found in
William Sprague's 1865 Annals. Massachusetts Governor George Briggs
remembered an afternoon spent with Leland a couple of years before the
minister's death. Briggs reported that instead of Thomas Barbour, Leland
ran against Madison himself. Despite this inaccuracy, Briggs' account
bolsters other evidence. Barbour's Eulogium cited Leland's influence on
the Ratification Convention via Madison. "It was by Elder Leland's
influence that Madison was elected to that Convention."137 Leland,
Briggs said, gave his history of the event during the afternoon together.
Leland said that Madison had indeed stopped in the county to explain his
position.

A public meeting was scheduled in Orange for the two candidates
to address the people. According to Briggs's testimony concerning
Leland's reminiscenses, Madison stopped en route home from Philadelphia
and met with Leland. After greetings, Leland stated "I know your errand
here," said he, "it is to talk with me about the Constitution. I am glad to
see you, and to have an opportunity of learning your views on the
subject." Madison spent half the day with him, conveying his opinions on
the new government and the constitutional guarantees of religious freedom. On the day of the address, Madison spoke for two hours on the stump, which was a "hogshead of tobacco, standing on one end." After his speech, Leland rose and "went in for Mr. Madison; and he was elected without difficulty. This," said he, "is, I suppose, what Mr. Barbour alluded to."\textsuperscript{138} Despite the rhetorical flourishes, Briggs's account has the ring of truth.

The results of the election certainly seem to support Briggs' account. Whereas the Baptists had formerly arrayed against Madison, the county ended up by voting him into office. The results of the election on March 24, 1788 show Madison with 202 votes, fellow Federalist Gordon 187, Barbour 56, and Porter 34. Apparently Anti-Federalist Barbour's head start in canvassing could not overcome the Baptist county leaders' support for Madison. Some catalyst caused the change in the Baptist opinion in the county, and it appears to have been the result of Leland's influence in the community. The meeting's celebrity is justified if Leland's influence put Madison into the state convention. Madison's leadership there ensured a victory for the Constitution, and his promises to Leland and other Baptist leaders also ensured the inclusion of the first ten amendments.\textsuperscript{139}

Outside evidence also supports the purported meeting. The diarist Francis Taylor, who recorded the election results above, also noted Madison's itinerary from Philadelphia to Virginia. The Taylors of Rosebud in Orange were neighbors and friends of the Madisons. Taylor recorded the initial Baptist opposition to the Constitution. "Much talk
amongst the people about the Constitution, the Baptists and ignorant part of them against it." By March 20 his family expected a visit from "Col. Madison" from New York, and two days later he recorded "Major Moore (expecting that Col. Madison would be at his house to day) had sent for H Taylor, Col. Taylor & Major Minor, and we went with them and dined there, R Taylor and wife were there but Col. Madison did not get there before we came away." On the 23rd he reported that "Col. Madison got to Major Moores last night and proceeded to day to his fathers (at Montpelier)." It seems possible Madison did not follow his schedule exactly and missed his friends on the 22nd because of his meeting with Leland.140

Leland possessed an important influence in the county. Evangelicals certainly looked to their own ministers for leadership and information rather than to the established clergy. In characterizing the inflamed public opinion in the Revolution, Tory Peter Oliver cited "Mr. (James) Otis's black regiment, the dissenting clergy." In remote communities the minister became the source of news and political theory by way of the Sunday sermon, lectures, and annual election sermon. In Connecticut, a British official reported that in the rural communities "they are all politicians and Scripture iearnt," as a result of the preacher.141 If this was so for New England, how much more would the isolated farmers of Virginia rely on their ministers? From Leland's writings, it is evident that he did not shrink from expressing his political views from the pulpit.

After receiving Leland's aid in the election, Madison pushed for
the ratification of the Constitution without a bill of rights at the
convention. He employed an argument, well used by Leland, stating that
the best protection for religion was the multiplicity of sects. "For
where there is such a variety of sects, there cannot be a majority of any
one sect to oppress and persecute the rest.... the United States abound in
such variety of sects, that it is a strong security against religious
persecution."142 Madison developed this argument earlier in the
Federalist Papers, especially Number Ten. He wrote his father on July 1,
1788, that he sent "herewith 2 Copies of the Federalist, one for Mr.
Leland- the other for Mr. Bledsoe."143

Madison reversed his belief in the necessity for a bill of rights,
overcoming his earlier distaste for its inclusion. He promised to include
a version of the Virginia Bill of Rights into the national Constitution as
the first ten amendments after ratification.144 The first amendment
begins by stipulating that "Congress shall make no law respecting an
establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof...."
After a long and bitter contest the Virginia Convention ratified the
Constitution by 89 votes to 79.145 Madison realized the question of
religious freedom had nearly cost him the entire constitution. He was
determined to sit in the first precedent-establishing Congress to insure
the fulfillment of his promises to religious leaders such as Leland.

The Baptists supported Madison once again when Patrick Henry
questioned the sincere inclusion of the amendments. Henry and the
Anti-Federalists blocked Madison's election to the Senate and tried to
prevent Madison's election to the House in the first Congress. George
Nicholas wrote on January 2, 1789, worried about Madison's standing, and urged Madison to call again on his influential friends. "Your country man Leland has great influence in Louisa and Goochland cannot he be prevailed on to exert himself. Culpeper and Spotsylvania are most to be dreaded and the greatest efforts made in that quarter."\textsuperscript{146} Nicholas feared this contest would divide the Baptist loyalties between Madison and its other favorite son, Patrick Henry. Apparently Leland exerted himself, for Madison beat his opponent James Monroe handily in early February, 1789.

Leland expressed his satisfaction with the election in a letter to Madison in February. "I congratulate you in your Appointment, as a Representative to Congress; and if my Undertakings in the Cause conduced Nothing else towards it, it certainly gave Mr. Madison one Vote.... One thing I shall expect; that if religious Liberty is anywise threatened, that I shall receive the earliest Intelligence." Leland revealed his political acumen as well as sought repayment for his support in the latter half of the letter. "If Mr. Madison can get Leisure enough in Congress it would please my Fancy to have a List of all the Names of the Members of Congress; in which State they reside, and which House they fill: and it would inform my Mind to have an Account of all our National Debts; to what Powers they are due, and at what pr. Cent; and likewise of our internal debt.... No doubt, there will be printed Statements, at proper Times; but I am so little acquainted with the literary and political World, that without the Aid of a particular Friend, I shall never see them."\textsuperscript{147} Leland intended to become the ideal republican
citizen by remaining independent and informed.

The new government pleased Leland's individualistic sensibility and he lauded the new leaders' intentions. Although George Washington had never specifically supported Baptist positions, the Baptists as well as most Americans approved his selection as the first president. The Baptist General Committee authorized a congratulatory letter, drafted by Leland, for the new president. "If religious liberty is rather insecure in the Constitution, 'the administration will certainly prevent all oppression, for a WASHINGTON will preside."\textsuperscript{148}

Washington replied to the letter with assurances. "If I could have entertained the slightest apprehension, that the constitution framed in the convention, where I had the honor to preside, might possibly endanger the religious rights of any ecclesiastical society, certainly I would never have placed my signature to it.... Every man, conducting himself as a good citizen, and being accountable to God alone for his religious opinions, ought to be protected in worshipping the Deity according to the dictates of his own conscience."\textsuperscript{149} The consequences of liberty for the individual conscience insured that one faith would never predominate.

The new government incorporated multiplicity into its structure. Leland heartily agreed that multiple interests would prevent the oppression of any one group. The mix of state and federal, appointive and elective offices, insured that one power could not dominate the rest. Thus the evangelical belief in a fallible human psyche might be balanced with other equally competing psyches. "More than twenty religious
societies are in them, which render it almost impossible for one order to oppress all the others. This is a greater security for religious liberty than all that can be written on paper." Like Jefferson and Madison, Leland approved the multiplicity of beliefs, even at the expense of his own denomination. He disapproved of one church, even the Baptist, enveloping America. Receiving all people into one church, he believed, contributed to religious oppression. "By this method, in general, a great majority of the church will be ignorant of the new birth, and consequently of the nature of the gospel; and therefore, of course, appeal to the civil law, for protection, which naturally brings on oppression upon all nonconformists."150

Leland also approved the absence of religious tests for office. Although he would not go so far as to proclaim the Constitution's perfection, as seen by his list of objections for use against Madison in the 1788 election, Leland proclaimed it "the best national machine that is now in existence."151 He located the Constitution's fallibility in the deaf ear it turned to slavery. Although Leland did not address the document's treatment of the slave trade, he clearly disapproved of its existence. Leland never stated the origins of his antislavery position. Perhaps he reached his views during the period when many other evangelicals rejected slavery as an aristocratic, gentrified sign of the establishment. Leland's antislavery beliefs might have arisen from the revolutionary "contagion of liberty." Arguments with Britain concerning the shackling of America could not fail to highlight the inconsistency with which Americans kept blacks enslaved. Leland used political and
religious terms attacking slavery as "contrary to the laws of God, man and nature," and a "violent deprivation of the rights of nature, inconsistent with a republican government." Leland noted that slavery subverted "that liberty absolutely necessary to ennable the human mind."

Leland framed his attacks on slavery in this same republican language when he chastised owners who withheld spiritual freedom from their slaves. "Liberty of conscience, in matters of religion, is the right of slaves, beyond contradiction; and yet many masters and overseers will whip and torture the poor creatures for going to meeting, even at night, when the labor of the day is over."\(^{152}\)

Leland attempted to merge his antislavery beliefs into Baptist church policy. He persuaded the Baptist General Committee in 1789 to pass his resolution denouncing slavery as a moral evil. "Resolved, that slavery is a violent deprivation of the rights of nature and inconsistent with a republican government and therefore recommend it to our brethren to make use of every legal means to extirpate this horrid evil from the land; and pray almighty God that our honorable Legislature may have it in their power to proclaim the great Jubilee, consistent with the principles of good policy."\(^{153}\) Unfortunately, Leland represented only a minority of opinion in the state; and when the Committee submitted the resolution to individual congregations, they heartedly disapproved. They used Leland's own defense of congregational integrity to defeat the resolution. The Roanoke Association in Pittsylvania said that "neither the General Committee nor any Religious Society whatever has the least right to concern therein." The Strawberry Association comprising Bedford,
Botetourt, and Franklin counties answered "We advise them not to interfere with it." Leland hoped to dictate to the congregations when his other instincts forced him to shy away from centralization.

Apart from his early antislavery resolution, Leland did not become an important advocate for manumission. He focused his energies on removing all vestiges of government involvement with religion. To this end he integrated his evangelical beliefs with republican ideology. Leland promoted religion while also contributing to the formation of republican government. This type of government, he believed, was the best form of rule and most conducive to evangelical religion. He wanted to protect individuals from the overweening power of the government as well as from powerful central churches. In so doing, he combined the notion of the rationalist and the pietist. At the same time Leland helped spread republican doctrine to the masses, acting as a disseminator for both freedom of conscience and the elevation of the common individual.

Along with the elevation of the individual, Leland and the evangelicals contributed to another movement overtaking the nation—the downgrading of the intellectual in America. Leland scorned the rhetorical wranglings of intellectual theologians. They used their educations to distance themselves and the people from a personal relationship with God, said Leland. In terms of politics, the people's sovereignty in government decreased the need for the gentleman politician and increased resentment against them. Leland contributed to this belief, although he was himself unusually learned. Self-taught to an unusual degree, Leland represented a small minority of Baptist
clergymen at that time. Leland's erudition, common during the colonial period, did not extend to the majority of ministers after the Revolution. Leland, however, scorned theologically minded ministers and minutiae-obsessed politicians. His opinions reached an audience already replete with a diet of revolutionary and republican rhetoric that stated that all power originated from the common people.

The populace responded to this message by claiming the powers attributed to them by their revolutionary leaders. They elected leaders from their own ranks and forced candidates to speak their language in order to win election. Publications increasingly addressed the mass audience, omitting the classical allusions and the need for a classical education. "The Key to Liberty" as well as Leland's own political writings demonstrated the receptivity of the new nation to these common voices. Within a generation the eighteenth-century world of the gentlemen's society began to change. They no longer held a monopoly on information as the audience increased beyond their expectations. 155 This new, far more democratic political consciousness frightened certain religious and revolutionary elites, the unwitting causes of the system; ironically, these elites hastened the demise of their own class.

Jefferson and Madison encouraged the spread of popular politics and heralded the triumph of democratic tendencies. Jefferson and Madison contributed to the movement by also influencing religious leaders, such as Leland, who incorporated these political beliefs into his sermons and pamphlets. Both Jefferson and Madison admired the structure of the Baptist church because it paralleled the classical
republics of their studies. These rationalist leaders borrowed from the pietists, finding themselves not so much polarized as mutually admiring. One Baptist historian said: "Our religious education agrees with, and perfectly corresponds with, a government by the people." Leland wrote that "as far as church government on earth is the government of Christ, it is of democratical genius.... The spirit and rule by which the subjects of Christ's Kingdom are to live one among another, greatly resemble the genius of a republic, and as greatly confronts the inequality and haughtiness of monarchies." Jefferson noted the makeup of these churches and applauded their voluntary nature. "It is voluntary because no man is by nature bound to any church. The hope of salvation is the cause of his entering into it. If he find anything wrong in it, he should be as free to go out as he was to come in." The simple organization of the Baptist church impressed Jefferson for embodying "the true principles of civil government."\[156\]

Leland internalized their arguments and combined them with his own personal brand of republicanism to form an individual ideology. He agreed that a republic depended on the virtue of its people but disagreed with those who would establish that virtue by a religious establishment. "As it is generally seen that the people are more virtuous than those in power; consequently, a republican, responsible government is best." Like other religious leaders, Leland agreed that the people's inherent sinfulness made some form of government necessary. Echoing Tom Paine's remark that "Government, like dress, is the badge of lost innocence," Leland believed that "Civil government is certainly a curse to
mankind; but it is a necessary curse, in this fallen state, to prevent greater evils.... If there was no sin in the world, there would be no laws needed. The more virtuous people are, the more liberal their laws should be; but the more vicious the people are, the more severe the laws must be, to restrain their unruly passions."157

Most ministers did not boast about their political influence, and even Leland downplayed his political activities later in life. His writings, however, reveal his interest in the political issues of the day and his pride in witnessing the momentous events of the late eighteenth century. Certain speeches display his political expertise and absolute adherence to the doctrines of revolutionary republicanism. In "The Rights of Conscience Inalienable, and Therefore Religious Opinions not Cognizable by Law; or, The High Flying Churchman Stripped of His Legal Robe, Appears a Yaho," (1791) Leland stated his political creed.

First, that the law was not made for a righteous man, but for the disobedient. Second, that righteous men have to part with a little of their liberty and property to preserve the rest. Third, that all power is vested in, and consequently derived from the people. Fourth, that the law should rule over the rulers, and not rulers over the law. Fifth, that government is founded on compact. Sixth, that every law made by legislators, inconsistent with the compact, modernly called a constitution, is usurping in the legislators, and not binding on the people. Seventh, that wherever government is found inadequate to preserve the liberty and property of the people, they have an indubitable right to alter it so as to answer those purposes. Eighth, that legislators, in their legislative capacity, cannot alter the constitution, for they are hired servants of the people to act within the limits of the constitution.158
Leland's political activities in Virginia continued up to the time of his departure from the state in March 1791. The General Committee recorded in May 1790 that Leland was "allowed the sum of £4 00 for eight days service, in waiting on the Assembly with our petition." They were again protesting for the sale of the glebes. Leland left Virginia before the next annual meeting in 1791. By 1790 the Baptists were an important and increasingly powerful denomination in the state and their composition had begun to change— for the worse, Leland might say.

The individualistic, simple religion that, beginning in the 1750s, swept Virginia began to transform under the pressures of a changing society. The congregations no longer encompassed the simple backcountry folk of the early period. Incorporation of "respectable" members of society began causing a desire for denominational respect. As mentioned earlier, the total number of Baptists was approximately 20,000 in 1790. This was the result of the awakening begun in 1785 in which Leland baptized three hundred in 1788 alone. This revival culminated in 1787-89, checking the spread of Methodism and consolidating the Baptist position in the state. Their membership included over one-third of the total number in North America. Leland recorded that there was one General Committee, 11 Associations, 202 Churches, 150 Ministers, and 20,000 members. "There are more people who attend the Baptist worship, than any kind of worship in the state." In part the Baptists owed their success to the Revolution, which in turn owed part of its success to the evangelicals in Virginia. The
Baptists' emphasis on individual rights, lay control, and local autonomy typified the American spirit in that era. The revolutionary mood in turn reinforced the individualistic and highly self-assertive ethos of the Baptists. Leland trumpeted both Baptist and American freedom. Baptist democracy wedded itself to independence and lay control of the local churches, as a buttress against centralized dominance. These foundations allowed the Baptists to regard themselves as a truly American church.\textsuperscript{161} The essence of their teaching placed all members on a plane of equality in the church. Like the Methodists, social rank initially did not count in the church. It was open to both slaves and freemen, poor or rich, provided they professed God's justification in their lives. A levelling influence worked in the evangelical churches during the revolutionary era. In a revolutionary climate they represented the goal for the new republic. "Don't tread on me," expressed a national mood wary of any infringement on individual rights. Devoted to liberty and highly individualistic in nature, Leland and the Baptists typified an era.\textsuperscript{162}

In 1791 Leland concluded his success by leaving the arena of his political and religious triumphs. He had baptized seven hundred people (which he meticulously recorded in his writings) and given invaluable leadership in both the Baptist growth and the separation of church and state in Virginia. His reasons for departing are open to interpretation, although he offers some hints in his writings. In 1790 he returned to New England to visit his father and family for four months. The next winter he made arrangements to move back permanently. Perhaps he
missed his relatives, but more importantly perhaps Leland believed he had finished his work in Virginia. The Baptists were in the midst of a revival and he could apply his efforts to better use in New England where the Standing Order continued to harass dissenters in general and Baptists in particular. Leland could use his reputation and influence earned in Virginia to replicate his accomplishments in the north. On leaving Virginia he stated "the thoughts of death, in general, are not as painful as the thoughts of living for nothing."163 In Connecticut and Massachusetts, however, Leland would face a bitter battle against the Congregationalists without the benefit of the revolutionary events or the alliance forged between the evangelicals and the republican leaders.
Endnotes to Religion and Republican Rhetoric

16. Lumpkin, Baptist Foundations, 150.
17. Thom, Struggle for Religious, 32-33.
22. Hatch, Democratization, 35.
24. Thomas, Virginia Baptist, 55.
26. Thomas, Virginia Baptist, 29..
27. Ibid, 20, 35.
32. Thomas, Virginia Baptist, 41.
33. Thomas, Virginia Baptist, 12.
34. Leland, "The Virginia Chronicle," Writings, 117.
35. Semple, History of the Rise, 381.
37. Thom, Struggle for Religious, 37.
40. Leland, "The Virginia Chronicle," Writings, 105-06.
42. Ryland, Baptists of Virginia, 58. Isaac, Transformation of Virginia, 163, 172-77.
43. Leland, "The Virginia Chronicle," Writings, 105. Leland also contrasted the persecution of Baptists in Virginia with their bloodier treatment in New England. "The dragon roared with hideous peals, but was not red - the Beast appeared formidable, but was not scarlet colored. Virginia soil has never been stained with vital blood for conscience sake." Leland, Writings, 107.
44. Ryland, Baptists of Va., 85; Semple, History of the Rise, 25; Thom, Struggle for Religious, 42.
50. Lumpkin, Baptist Foundations, 63, 159.
52. Semple, History of the Rise, 178.
54. Thomas, Virginia Baptist, 16.
56. Ibid, 102.
58. Ibid, 28.
59. Leland, Writings, 71. Backus, History of New England, 473. Another humorous anecdote occurred when Leland arrived at a public house where he was acquainted and intended to pass the night. The owner, having built a new barn, was prepared to accomodate the clergy. "I have," said
he, "a very elegant stable, with all the improvements, for Episcopal horses; a comfortable sort of stable for Presbyterian horses; while I keep the old barn for Baptist horses; the feed is according to the style of stable." "Well," Leland replied, "everybody knows that I am a Baptist, but my horse is an Episcopalian." Leland, *Writings*, 254.

60. Thomas E. Buckley, *Church and State in Revolutionary Virginia, 1776-1787* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia, 1977), 66.


64. Leland, "The Virginia Chronicle," *Writings*, 120.


71. Albanese, *Sons*, 142. Patriotic rhetoric, in its call for public virtue and in its struggle against corruption from without and within, also correlated with the austere lifestyle of the Baptist communities.


73. Ibid., 107.


75. Drew McCoy, *The Elusive Republic: Political Economy in Jeffersonian America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1980), 67. Besides explaining the cosmic battle between liberty and power, republican rhetoric also contributed to the reorganization of society. "[Republicanism] challenged the primary assumptions and practices of monarchy- its hierarchy, its inequality, its devotion to kinship, its
patriarchy, its patronage, and its dependency. It offered new conceptions of the individual, the family, the state, and the individual's relationship to the family, the state, and other individuals." Gordon Wood, *The Radicalism of the American Revolution* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1991), 96.

76. Beeman, *Old Dominion*, 141.


82. Leland, *Writings*, 118.


86. Thomas, *Virginia Baptist*, 18.


88. Leland, "The Rights of Conscience Inalienable, and, Therefore, Religious Opinions not Cognizable by Law; or, The High-Flying Churchman, Stripped of His Legal Robe, Appears a Yaho," *Writings*, 182. "It is error alone, that stands in need of government to support it; truth can and will do better without: so ignorance calls in anger in a debate, good sense scorns it. Religion, in its purest ages, made its way in the world, not only without the aid of the law, but against all the laws of haughty monarchs, and all the maxims of the schools." Leland, *Writings*, 118.


American Library, 1961),
94. Thom, Struggle, 78.
96. Ryland, Baptists of Va., 130.
97. Leland, Writings, 24.
98. Ibid, 25.
100. Leland, "Letter to the Editor of the Baptist Chronicle, at Georgetown, KY," Writings, 570.
102. Ibid, 102.
104. Leland, Writings, 114.
105. Ibid, 68.
106. Mead, Lively, 60.
108. Lumpkin, Baptist Foundations, 141-42.
110. Semple, History of the Rise, 73.
113. William Waller Hening, The Statutes at Large... (Richmond: Early American Imprintss. Second series; no. 19121, 1809-1823), XII, 337.
114. Buckley, Church, 140.
120. Buckley, Church, 180; Mead, Lively, 61.
121. Mead, Lively, 43.

124. Many historians believe that the separation of church and state allowed the heterogeneous sects to unite under a "neutral" worship of the state. Robert Bellah explained his term for this ideology as "certain common elements of religious orientation that the great majority of Americans share.... This public religious dimension is expressed in a set of beliefs, symbols, and rituals that I am calling the American civil religion." "Civil Religion in America," in American Civil Religion, edited by Russell E. Richey and Donald G. Jones. (New York: Harper & Row, 1974), 24.

125. Leland, "Events," Writings, 27.

126. The Baptist petitions ceased with the passage in 1802 of an act for the sale of the glebes and the appropriate distribution of the profits. William Fristoe, A Concise History of the Ketocton Baptist Association (Staunton: Early American Imprints. Second series; no. 15077. Reprint of the 1808 ed.), 95; Semple, History of the Rise, 74; James, Documentary, 145.

127. Gordon Wood, Creation of the American Republic (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1969). "Instead of choosing men for their abilities, integrity and patriotism," the people seemed too prone to "act from some mean, interested, or capricious motive," 501n. Hartford Courant, Nov. 27, 1786, Feb. 5, 1787; Madison expressed the advantages of a heterogeneous society as the best protection for a republic. "In a large Society," concluded Madison, "the people are broken into so many interests and parties, that a common sentiment is less likely to be felt, and the requisite concert less likely to be formed, by a majority of the whole." The Federalist, No. 10.

128. Leland, Writings, 53.

129. Semple, History of the Rise, 24. Patrick Henry paid the fines for several imprisoned Baptist ministers and defended others in court in the early 1770s. He also assisted them by securing the right for Baptist ministers to preach to the troops in 1775. "From the shackles of tyranny, the Baptists found in Patrick Henry, an unwavering friend. May his name descend to posterity with unsullied honor!" Semple, History of the Rise, 24.

130. Butterfield, "Elder John Leland," 187-88; Madison, LC.

131. Madison, Papers, X, 516.

132. James Barbour, Eulogium upon the Life and Character of James
Madison (Washington: Gales and Seaton, 1836)
133. Irving Brant, James Madison: Father of the Constitution, 1787-1800
   (New York: The Bobbs-Merrill Co., Inc., 1950), 188, from Joseph Spencer
   to Madison, February 28, 1788, Papers of James Madison, Library of
   Congress.
   of the Presbyterian Historical Society, 38 (1960), 78.
137. William Sprague, Annals of the American Pulpit: The Baptists (New
139. Butterfield, "Elder John Leland," 189; Francis Taylor Diary, MS.
140. Butterfield, "Elder John Leland," 191-92, from Francis Taylor Diary,
   MS. The next day Taylor entered in his diary: "Colonel Madison addressed
   himself in a speech to the people in defense of the new Constitution, and
   there appeared much satisfaction after the election was determined."
   Brant, James Madison, 188; Leland told Governor Briggs that he kept a
   correspondence with Madison for many years after Leland moved back to
   Massachusetts. "He [Leland] said he had given to his friends all Mr.
   Madison's letters, except one, and that he showed to me..." Sprague,
   Annals, 180. In the First Baptist Church in Cheshire, Massachusetts
   there is a document signed by Madison verifying Leland's status as a
   minister of the Baptist faith, signed October 27, 1788. Letter by James
   Madison in the First Baptist Church in Cheshire, Massachusetts. In a
   speech dated July 4, 1805, Leland alluded to his relationship with
   Madison. "From an intimate acquaintance with him, I feel satisfied that
   all the state of Massachusetts, for a bribe, would not buy a single vote of
   him." Leland, Writings, 287.
141. Winthrop Hudson, Religion in America (New York: Scribner, 1965),
   97.
   Sidney Mead develops this argument of a "neutral" civil religion
   negating the multiplicity of sects in America. He attributes the Bill of
   Rights with preventing "any sect, or combination of sects, from
   monopolizing the word of God, and insofar kept them from becoming
   heteronomous in the society." "The 'Nation with the Soul of a Church,'"
   American Civil Religion, 68.
143. Madison, Papers, X, 185.
144. Stuart Leibiger, "Parchment Barriers: James Madison and Amendments to the Constitution, 1787-1789." Forthcoming, Journal of Southern History. Leibiger implies that during Madison’s and Leland’s meeting Madison still did not believe in the necessity for a written guarantee but embraced merely recommendatory amendments. It seems surprising that Leland would endorse Madison without some firm commitment to a religious amendment.


146. Madison, Papers, XI, 408.
147. Ibid, 443.
148. Leland, Writings, 52.
149. Ibid, 53.
150. Ibid, 122, 120.


152. Ibid, 174, 96.


156. Gewehr, Great Awakening, 195; Mead, Lively, 58.


158. Leland, Writings, 180.
160. Thom, Struggle for Religious, 39-42; Leland, Writings, 116-17; Lumpkin, Baptist Foundations, 136; Gewehr, Great Awakening, 106; Leland, Writings, 117.
162. Gewehr, Great Awakening, 187.
163. Leland, "Letter of Valediction, on Leaving Virginia, in 1791," Writings, 171. Another possible explanation for his departure may have been his attitude toward slavery. Fellow Baptist minister David Barrow could not bear to remain in Virginia while opposing the blacks' enslavement. Leland does not write extensively on slavery, however he seemed to feel real anguish over their plight and over any resolution of the situation. Perhaps after the defeat of his slavery resolution among the Baptist associations, Leland felt no alternative but to leave the state.
Conclusion

With evangelical religion and republican government secure in Virginia, Leland did not return to Massachusetts in 1791 merely to settle down. The battles for disestablishment in Connecticut and Massachusetts had only begun, and Leland would be involved in many of the political and religious movements of the first third of the nineteenth century. Nevertheless, it was Leland's activities in Virginia that shaped his subsequent writings and politics. He never strayed far from the ideology formed by the brief merger of evangelical and revolutionary rhetoric in the late eighteenth century. Leland continued to involve himself with various movements combating authority while most Baptists focused exclusively on disestablishment or on legitimating their denomination. The Baptists hoped to create a more respectable denomination and so began a campaign of organization and centralization. This increase in denominational status, at the cost of the Baptists' congregational simplicity, became another part of Leland's struggle. He fought to preserve the Baptist churches' original evangelical impulses.

Leland's emphasis on local church autonomy neatly coordinated with his belief in republican government and its rhetoric. His republican tendencies accompanied the movement toward individualism emerging in the nineteenth century, specifically in the Age of Jackson. Leland predictably embraced Jacksonian Democracy, thus bridging the gap between the eighteenth-century Jeffersonians and the individualist Jacksonians. At the same time Leland's explicit merger of revolutionary
and evangelical ideology contributed to his impressive political record. Few Baptists intertwined their political and religious activities or resisted the inevitable organization of their denomination as did Leland. In that respect he lagged behind the prevalent Baptist view in early nineteenth-century Massachusetts. He fought a losing battle to preserve the insular autonomy of the simple Baptist congregation as the denomination inexorably matured. During his Virginia residence, ironically Leland was ahead of his time in foreseeing the movement toward increased individualism and anti-authoritarianism. While embracing personal responsibility, Leland also eschewed any infringements upon this personal autonomy which included any overbearing denominational or governmental authority.

Into the nineteenth century, the Baptists increasingly organized and obtained a new measure of respectability by founding colleges, mission boards, bible societies, and salaried ministers. The Baptists' decentralized structure previously had prevented excessive "organization," and they had resisted calls for a paid ministry. No other denomination was so prejudiced against an educated and paid clergy as the Baptists. Leland scorned salaried ministers and boasted that he had always supported his family by farming or through voluntary contributions. He protested even louder against ministers receiving salaries in the military and in the state and federal legislatures. Congress' institution of a chaplaincy in 1801 appeared to breach the wall separating church and state. Leland believed that these chaplains might serve only if they received no remuneration. Since the people had no voice in electing them, "why then should they be taxed, where they are
not represented?"  

The nineteenth century proved to be an age of organization for the Baptists. The General Missionary Convention in Philadelphia in 1814 marked a watershed in Baptist history. It created a national denomination out of various autonomous Baptist churches. The new measure of respectability signified the Baptists' coming of age.  

The formation of mission societies upset Leland more because he believed that the church's corruption—the modernizing mania for organization—was the result not of the state's outside influence but of the Baptists themselves.

When I went to meeting, I expected to hear the preacher set forth the ruin and recovery of man, and labor with heavenly zeal to turn many unto righteousness.... But now, when I go to meeting, I hear high encomiums on Sunday-schools, tract societies, Bible societies, missionary societies, anti-mason societies, etc., with a strong appeal to the people to aid with their money those institutions which are to introduce the millennium; assuring the people that 'every cent may save a soul.'

These developments, Leland believed, moved the emphasis of religion away from the salvation of the individual and onto the "church." He resisted the Baptists' inevitable organization.

Leland emphasized religion's voluntary nature because his own religious and political callings had been personal, uncoerced experiences. God had called him, he said, and Leland merely responded. A leader, whether that person be religious or political, should rely on God and the people's will. Fitness for leadership should be determined primarily by the individual's ability to sway the masses. Social status and inherited positions should count for naught in a genuine republic. This applied to
both denominational and party leaders. After all, religious leaders, like Leland, often served as denominational politicians. Tocqueville stated that in America "you meet with a politician where you expected to find a priest."^{5}

An increased political sense seemed to be an outgrowth of the revolutionary movement. Colonial society had always stressed a coherent Christian culture; most of the disseminated information had a religious message. This changed as the ideology of an informed citizenry combined with republican rhetoric. Now information and news of a secular and political variety became the rule. Individual citizens had a duty to be informed about political issues just as good Christians were to be familiar with scripture.^{6} Leland subscribed to the belief in his role as a disseminator of political as well as religious information— to a fault, charged some critics. It was said by one minister that Leland's religious usefulness was injured by "his almost mad devotion to politics.... Some would doubtless say that he magnified his office as a politician at the expense of lowering it as a Christian minister." Leland apparently believed his office justified his political pronouncements, or perhaps he could not resist expressing his opinion. One surly minister lent Leland his pulpit and recounted the sermon based upon the line "the cup that my Father hath given me, shall I not drink it?" Leland's tone of spirituality and evangelical fervor caused the minister "to think it was impossible that he should descend from such a height to anything so low as party politics.... [But] By some association that occurred to him, [Leland] was carried in the twinkling of an eye, from the the scenes of Calvary to the War of 1812."^{7}
Leland exerted his political influence most keenly through elections. As shown by his legendary meeting with James Madison and his support for Madison's candidacy in Virginia, Leland felt no qualms about using his pulpit to put forth his own agenda. He strongly campaigned for Jefferson in the bitter election of 1800, denouncing the charges of deism and immorality leveled against Jefferson. After the passage of religious freedom legislation, the evangelicals and the rationalists found that their common interests were not so common after all. Pious minded voters now objected to this overtly deist leader. Leland fought against this perception and his efforts for Jefferson's Republican party bore fruit despite the fact that the Hamiltonian Federalists were more entrenched in Massachusetts than in any other state. In the town of Cheshire, Leland's geographical base in Massachusetts, it was said he converted the populace so thoroughly to republicanism that when a ballot for a Federalist candidate was discovered among the votes, it was considered an impossibility and discounted. From 1800 to 1808, Cheshire voted for Republican governors by an average plurality of 200 to 2. Leland acted as a medium for Jeffersonian political thought to the mass of voters.

Jefferson's deist beliefs, however, prevented Leland from completely embracing all of the Virginian's doctrines. Regardless of Jefferson's religion, Leland still supported his politics. Leland believed so firmly in the separation of the religious and political realms that he nevertheless supported a Deist politician. Although Leland hoped the entire nation might experience conversion, he did not condemn those who had not yet received grace and believed the unconverted might still
judiciously govern the republic. In an 1801 sermon Leland stated that "If you wish to prevent the spread of deism and infidelity, renounce State aid and convince the world that religion can stand alone." Later, as the charges against Jefferson spread, Leland again defended the president and his party. "The republican class contains those who fought, not only to be independent of Britain, but also from that policy which governs her- those who contend for the civil and religious rights of all men and some beside. As Deism is an opinion about religion, and not so much connected with government, the Deists might be left out of the question." 10

Leland's support for Jefferson popularly manifested itself in the celebration over the election of 1800. At that time Leland called for all Cheshire inhabitants to bring the curds from one days milking to create a giant cheese to present to Jefferson in Washington. Federalist cows were of course excluded from participation. Leland accompanied the mammoth 1,235 pound cheese, created in a wine press, to Washington, and he soon became known as the "Mammoth Priest." Jefferson cordially received him, and Leland addressed Congress before returning triumphantly to Massachusetts. 11

Jefferson was not the only beneficiary of Leland's political acumen. Leland supported Madison throughout the War of 1812, and into the 1820s and 1830s he embraced Jacksonian democracy. Leland's biographer offered this encomium: "He studied the fundamental principles of government, and drew his conclusions directly from them, without any intervening medium of self or party interest.... In his attachment to the administrations of Jefferson, Madison, Jackson, and
Van Buren, he felt that he was contending for the same principles of
democracy that nerved the arms and strengthened the hearts of the
Whigs of '76."\(^{12}\)

The values of the "Whigs of '76" remained in Leland's writings
and influenced his sometime unpopular positions. In Massachusetts he
never attained the accolades he had received in Virginia. His iconoclasm
was not well-received by Baptist authorities such as Isaac Backus. Even
his own Cheshire congregation found fault with Leland's individual moral
stances. His disdain for creeds and clerical structure led him to refuse
administering the Lord's Supper for a number of years. His defense in
1806 was that "for more than thirty years experiment, I have had no
evidence that the bread and wine ever assisted my faith to discern the
Lord's body. I have never felt guilty for not communing, but often for
doing it."\(^{13}\) Leland solved the dilemma by leaving town, a common
response of his to pastoral disputes.

Leland's endurance of this personal criticism reinforced his
intransigence before the Baptists' organizations. Previously Leland had
deplored the increased desire for denominational respectability and the
boards and societies that moved autonomy away from the individual
churches. In this respect Leland stood out among his northern brethren
for his views shaped during his Virginia tenure. There the emphasis still
centered on the local church. He objected to the decrease in
congregational lay control in the North and all the self-appointed
societies which stifled congregational freedom.\(^{14}\) Moreover these
organizations soon joined the nineteenth-century movement to legislate
public morality. Leland quickly took up his pen against this internal
breach of separation of church and state.

The Sunday mail controversy, which forcibly closed businesses and stopped mail delivery on Sundays, incensed Leland's sense of personal religion and opposition to state interference.

As it is not the province of civil government to establish forms of religion, and force a maintenance for the preachers, so it does not belong to that power to establish fixed holy days for divine worship.... As the appointment of such days is no part of human legislation, so the breach of the Sabbath (so called) is no part of civil jurisdiction. I am not an enemy to holy days, (the duties of religion cannot well be performed without fixed times,) but these times should be fixed by the mutual agreement of religious societies, according to the word of God, and not by civil authority. I see no clause in the federal constitution, or the constitution of Virginia, to empower either the federal or Virginia legislature to make any Sabbatical laws.¹⁵

The Sabbatarian movement angered Leland because it seemed to be a step backward from the disestablishment victories in Virginia and in other states. Since the colonial era the New England sabbath had been rigorously enforced. Dissenters in that area should have fought, Leland believed, to remove state influence, not to create new legislation. Genuine religion required no prop, as embodied by an establishment.

Senator R. M. Johnson, in communication with Leland, issued a report to the Senate in 1829 in response to the outcries over the Sunday mail. Johnson's committee views resembled Leland's language in that "all religious despotisms begin by combination and influence; and when that influence begins to operate upon the political institutions of a country, the civil power soon bends under it." Leland hailed the Johnson report as a milestone in religious freedom, utilizing "the language of John Milton,
Roger Williams, William Penn, and Thomas Jefferson...

Leland bemoaned the fact that his own denomination would curtail their recently won freedoms. The evangelicals in the North were using state influence to enforce Christian values as shown by the temperance movement. "The King of Israel gave that people their laws and order," wrote Leland, "but Christ has given laws for the regulation of Christianity." Therefore, "if the sacred code in the New Testament is not sufficient to govern Christians... either the wisdom or the goodness of Christ is deficient." Leland maintained his censure of state and church combinations by also condemning Ezra S. Ely's Christian Party in 1832. The threat inherent in the clergy's direct influence in politics would force every denomination "to sacrifice its peculiar characteristics, and all unite to form a Christian Phalanx..."

Leland believed public morality could be achieved only through individual conversion. Morality was not part of the state's jurisdiction because it was only sincerely ascertainable from within. Republican government, he wrote, was the best form of government for the fallen masses. If all were saved, there would be no need for government at all, Leland hypothetically wrote. It was the government's duty to punish behavior contrary to the laws, regardless of the "religious" motivations. If an individual disturbed "the peace and good order of the civil police, he should be punished according to his crime, let his religion be what it will." The key word, however, was behavior, not speech or opinion. The state could not govern personal conscience.

Religious influence, however, was not totally eradicated from government. The state represented society as a whole, and the church
represented one segment of that society. The state also needed to regulate some of the church's material affairs, of course doing so with a large degree of restraint and respect for religious liberty.20 Leland's political activism in the pulpit and in his actions also belied such separation. In 1811, Leland consented to sit in the Massachusetts' legislature from the town of Cheshire, in order to assist the disestablishment movement in the state.21 His electioneering helped elect many republican candidates; and when that party split into four parts in 1824, Leland supported Andrew Jackson.

The Jacksonian Democrats embodied much of Leland's ideology. The strongly individualistic Jackson represented Leland's ideal republican leader. However, Leland did mourn the passing of the old revolutionary guard of Jefferson and Madison. Leland decried the nation's acceptance of a new modern ethos as well as the public's tolerance for a strong, central government.

When Jackson shall have finished his administration, there will be none living, young enough to be president, who had any hand in the revolutionary war. A generation will then take the lead, who never saw the works which were done by Moses and Joshua. If they will have a king to reign over them, that they may be like other nations; or a whole life or hereditary aristocracy, with an established order of ecclesiastics, so it will be. We can only weep all night, like Samuel, in view of the apostacy, but must always keep in mind that our descendents will have the same right to choose a government for themselves that we or our fathers have had.22

In this statement Leland mourned the people's perceived choices, but, like Jefferson, he acquiesced to the public's right to choose.23 Leland respected Jefferson's opinion, which encouraged a revolutionary change
of government every twenty years. This revolutionary ideology was transferred into the quest for localism and independence represented by the Jacksonians and encouraged by Leland.24

Strangely enough, this stress on autonomy, independence, and soul liberty did not act as a centrifugal force on the Baptists in America. They maintained a remarkable amount of unanimity and even increased their centralization, as seen by the Baptists' legitimization efforts and their support of legislation for public morality.25 Their ideology followed the national mood in its embrace of first Jeffersonian and then Jacksonian democracy. Leland witnessed the change in New England from a corporate Christian commonwealth into an atomistic, individualistic, laissez-faire, quasi-secular democracy.26 Leland never remarked on the outcome of these changes, since he had always encouraged such a transformation. He agreed with almost any movement that loosened the people from societal structures. Natural authority embodied in the church, state, school, and even family should not restrict the individual. This ideology resulted from Leland's blending evangelical urgency with the Jeffersonian promise of a virtuous republic. He declared a divine economy, wrote Nathan Hatch, that was "atomistic and competitive rather than wholistic and hierarchical."27

Leland lived in period of tremendous energy and change. The nation underwent a change in government, religion, and social roles all in the space of fifty years, or between 1780 and 1830.28 In the late eighteenth century and into the early nineteenth century, ordered society seemed to be dissolving. State churches had been left to survive by their own means, and intellectuals no longer held a monopoly on public opinion.
A greater part of society felt freer to participate in national debates and castigate its leaders. Moreover, the nation now accepted a classical liberal political economy signifying the freedom of the economic individual. The rights of private property and freedom of the marketplace from political control were now under the aegis of "individual freedom."\textsuperscript{29}

The "gospel of individualism" had always played a large part in Leland's ideology, and he lived long enough (until 1841) to see its fruition. By the first half of the nineteenth century, both Connecticut and Massachusetts had disestablished their state religions, in 1818 and 1833 respectively. Leland spent the remainder of his life writing both religious and political tracts, itinerating around New England, and involving himself with national concerns. He believed, as a responsible citizen, that it was necessary for individuals to be vigilant of their representatives in order to maintain the nation's original principles. Those principles were the well-spring of Leland's political thought, and he was proud of his association with the Founding Fathers of the republic. One early historian remarked that Leland's presence in the 1770s and 1780s in Virginia, as well as his early achievements there, caused him to demean the attainments of others. Every person takes on the cast of the times in which they live, and Leland experienced some extraordinary circumstances at a malleable point in his life. Those circumstances were of so striking a character that it was not unusual that they made a lasting impression upon his beliefs and his future actions.\textsuperscript{30}

Leland's life straddled a period of transformation in American
life. From the hierarchical, Christian establishment of his New England childhood, through the upheaval in revolutionary Virginia, and back to an increasingly modern North, Leland maintained the views shaped in his early adulthood. Blending parts of the Baptists' evangelical religion with republican ideology, mixed with a little civil religion, he fashioned a faith and political ideology that sustained him and many in the nation through that tumultuous era. Leland became a disseminator of Whig politics by his popularization of their doctrines. Leland saw no contradiction between his abhorrence of church-state interaction and his political activity. He continued to castigate church-state connections, but he also continued producing political tracts. His status as a Baptist minister, he believed, did not excuse him from fulfilling his duties as a republican. As a patriotic citizen and a pious minister, Leland blended his two roles, spreading the gospel of evangelicalism and helping to realize his ideal republic.
Endnotes to Conclusion


    Preaching is now a science and a trade,
    And by it many grand estates are made;
    The money which I spent at grammar school
    I'll treble now by teaching sacred rule.
    My prayers I'll stretch out long, my sermons short,
    The last write down, the first get all by rote;
    While others labor six days, I but one,
    For that day's work I'll gain a pretty sum.


10. Leland, "A Blow at the Root," Writings, 253; "An Oration Delivered at Cheshire, July 5, 1802, on the Celebration of Independence," 263; "When Mr. Jefferson was elected president, the pulpits rang with alarms, and the presses groaned with predictions, that the Bibles would all be burned; meeting-houses destroyed; the marriage bonds dissolved, and
anarchy, infidelity and licentiousness would fill the land. These clerical
warnings and editorial prophecies failed," "Address at a Democratic
Meeting held at Cheshire, August 28, 1834," Writings, 652; "Convince the
world that the religion of Jesus will stand upon its own basis, without
law or sword; so will you contribut[e] more for the destruction of Deism,
than all the arguments of Leland, Lock, Addison, Steel, Tennyson, Wesley or
Gill," "A Blow at the Root: Being a Fashionable Fast-Day Sermon,"
Writings, 252-53.
11. Browne, "Cheese," 147. Leland's triumphant homeward journey was
needled by critical Federalists one of whom said: "Is it true, Elder, that
President Jefferson found some skippers in the mammoth cheese when he
cut it?" The Elder, who was a match for anyone at repartee, replied: "It
is quite possible, for although we tried to exclude all Federalists we
learned afterwards that one or two of them got by us and some of their
curds may have contaminated the cheese." Browne, "Cheese," 151. From
Hampshire Gazette of Northampton, Massachusetts, for September 30,
1801 an anonymous humorist wrote a poem with biblical overtones
commemorating the event. (Leland often used the pseudonym Jacknips).

The Great Cheese

"And Jacknips said unto the Cheshirites, behold the
Lord hath put in a Ruler over us, who is a man after our
own hearts.

Now, let us gather together our Curd, and carry it
into the valley of Elisha, unto his wine press, and there
make a Great Cheese, that we may offer a thank offering
unto that great man."

13. Ibid, 60.
Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society 62 (October, 1952),
(1959),149; Bodo, The Protestant Clergy, 42. From W.A. Blakely,
American State Papers on Freedom in Religion (Washington, 1943),
190-96; Leland, Writings, 567-68.
18. Ibid, "The Mosaic Dispensation," 670; "Rulers often fear that if they
leave every man to think, speak, and worship as he pleases, that the whole cause will be wrecked in diversity; to prevent which, they establish some standard of orthodoxy, to effect uniformity. But, is uniformity attainable? Millions of men, women and children, have been tortured to death, to produce uniformity, and yet the world has not advanced one inch towards it." Leland, "The Rights of Conscience Inalienable," Writings, 184; "Guard against those men who make a great noise about religion, in choosing reepresentatives. It is electioneering intrigue. If they knew the nature and worth of religion, they would not debauch it to such shameful purposes," Writings, 267; Bodo, Protestant, 47.

19. Leland, "The Yankee Spy," Writings, 228; "Hence it appears that all political evils are moral evils, but all moral evils are not political evils. No evil, simply moral, is punishable by a political tribunal, yet every political evil comes within the jurisprudence of the Almighty, because it is morally wrong," "A Blow at the Root: Being a Fashionable Fast-Day Sermon," Writings, 237; "Remember that the genuine meaning of republicanism is self-government; if you would, then, be true disciples in your profession, govern yourselves. The man who has no rule over his unruly passion, is no republican, let his profession be what it will," Writings, 267.


22. Leland, "Short Sayings on Times, Men, Measures and Religion," Writings, 582.

23. Leland spoke of revolutionary change like Jefferson but he too supported their republican government and always bowed to the majority will. He acquiesced to the democratic process by paying it a strange tribute in last year of his life. With the election of Harrison, the hated Whigs came into power and he wrote in his diary: "Jan. 6, 1841, Gen. Harrison comes into the presidency by an overwhelming majority; of course, the greatest part of the people are pleased. If, as many men believe, the means made use of for his promotion, have been ridiculous, false, and deceptive, degrading to any country that looks for respectability, still he is the chosen one. I will acknowledge him. For him will I pray." Leland, Writings, 741.


25. Winthrop S. Hudson, Baptists in Transition: Individualism and
Christian Responsibility (Valley Forge, Pa., 1979), 148.
28. Ibid, 6; Catharine Albanese, Sons of the Fathers: The Civil Religion of the American Revolution (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1976), ix, foreword by Martin Marty. "The late eighteenth century is a hinge period, the pivot or turning point for the spiritual side of American history.... It may also explain why Americans have been able to tolerate so much toleration, experiment with so much experiment, and endure so much change while feeling that they are in continuity with their past."
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