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Enlightened Evangelicalism and the American Revolutionary War: A Comparison of John Witherspoon and John Zubly

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ENLIGHTENED EVANGELICALISM AND THE AMERICAN REVOLUTIONARY WAR

A COMPARISON OF JOHN WITHERSPOON AND JOHN ZUBLY

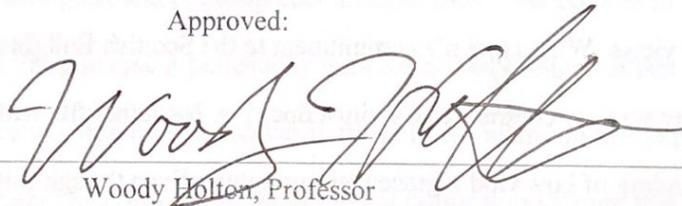
By

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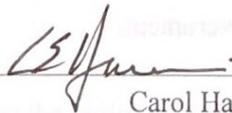
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Summary

This paper compares the religion, philosophy, and politics of Presbyterian ministers John Witherspoon and John Zubly leading up to the American Revolutionary War, during which Zubly was a Loyalist and Witherspoon was a Patriot. The two ministers integrated Enlightenment thought and evangelical Calvinism differently which led to hold opposing political views. Witherspoon's commitment to the Scottish Enlightenment concept of ethical sensibility was not contrary to Calvinist doctrine, but rather fits within the Reformed understanding of how God's grace restores nature. Even though Zubly ended up becoming a Loyalist during the Revolutionary War, his pre-war political leanings are complicated, as he shares qualities of both Whigs and the friends of government.

Introduction

How did two Presbyterian ministers that upheld the same confession of faith end up on opposing sides of the Revolutionary War? From their sermons and other writings, it is evident that both John Witherspoon and John Zubly wanted to remain faithful to their Reformed faith, not promote a political faction. However, John Witherspoon ended up a founding father, signing the Declaration of Independence and supporting both the Articles of Confederation and the Constitution, while Zubly remained loyal to the British crown during the Revolutionary War. Even though Witherspoon and Zubly shared many similarities in thought and life, they are remembered for belonging to opposing factions during the American Revolutionary War, with Witherspoon remaining a Patriot and Zubly declaring himself a Loyalist late in 1775.

This paper is an inquiry into the political and religious thought of Witherspoon and Zubly as displayed in their political sermons and essays. While the decision to be a Patriot or a Loyalist was ultimately a political decision, it is impossible to neatly separate Witherspoon and Zubly's political thought from their theological and philosophical thought. Subtle differences in the two men's methods of combining Enlightenment philosophy with Reformed evangelicalism led Witherspoon and Zubly to publicly oppose one another in the political realm. In this paper, I will argue that Witherspoon and Zubly had opposing conceptions of political modernity that flowed out of their different ways of combining Enlightenment thought with evangelical thought and piety.

Before considering the writings of Witherspoon and Zubly, I will begin by giving brief biographies of the two men and a summary of current historiography related to them, which is surprisingly lacking for Witherspoon and almost non-existent for Zubly. Then, I will inquire into the way that Zubly and Witherspoon combine Enlightenment influences on their thought with

their strict devotion to the Reformed evangelical faith, arguing that, contrary to current trends in historiography, Witherspoon remained consistent with his evangelical Calvinism, while Zubly inconsistently applied Enlightenment principles to his evangelical faith. Finally, I will argue in my second section that Zubly's political leanings are best described as a form of "Enlightened Royalism," while Witherspoon aligned politically with the radical Whigs.

Before contrasting Witherspoon and Zubly, I will give brief biographies of the two ministers to provide context and show the many similarities they shared, and I will also summarize the contemporary historiography surrounding the two men. John Witherspoon was a Presbyterian minister and president of the College of New Jersey at Princeton during the outbreak of the American Revolution.¹ Born in Scotland in 1723, Witherspoon received his education during the Scottish Enlightenment at the University of Edinburgh, and the enlightenment ideals that he was exposed to at Edinburgh followed him his entire life. Historian Jeffrey Morrison wrote that, on top of his ecclesiastical and political career, "Witherspoon was also an amateur scientist, political economist, rhetorician, and philosopher . . . His interests and abilities made him the sort of well-rounded man we associate with American Enlightenment characters."² Witherspoon immigrated to the colonies in 1768 to become the president of the College of New Jersey, which is now Princeton University, a role that he held until his death in 1794.

Witherspoon really had three careers: pastor, college president, and politician. From the early years of the American Revolution, Witherspoon opposed what he perceived to be

¹ Morrison, *John Witherspoon and the Founding of the American Republic*, 2. Though historians have devoted more attention to Witherspoon than Zubly, Witherspoon has received far less attention from subsequent generations than his contemporaries expected. I have consulted Morrison's work on Witherspoon for biographical information.

² Morrison, *John Witherspoon and the Founding of the American Republic*, 2.

tyrannical actions of the British Parliament, and he supported the Patriot cause during the Revolutionary War. As both a respected churchman and political leader, John Witherspoon was the only clergyman to sign the Declaration of Independence, giving him a unique role as a founding father. In fact, Witherspoon signed the Declaration, voted to approve the Articles of Confederation, and voted to ratify the Constitution in the New Jersey state legislature, giving him an important role in three founding documents of the United States. The vast majority of Presbyterian ministers shared in his patriot political leanings during the American Revolution, though none was as politically active as Witherspoon. After all, many in Britain and Europe, including King George III, called what we now consider the Revolutionary War the “Presbyterian Rebellion.”³ Historians ought to give more attention to the interaction between religion and politics during the American Revolution, and the life and writings of John Witherspoon offer a glimpse into this complex interplay.

Historians tend to focus on Witherspoon as an educator, especially his role in bringing Scottish Enlightenment ideals to the American education system. In *John Witherspoon's American Revolution*, Gideon Mailer attempts to reconcile Witherspoon's commitment to evangelical Presbyterian doctrine with his enlightenment concept of ethical sensibility. Mailer argues that historians have “depicted Witherspoon . . . as a conduit in America for the Scottish Enlightenment appraisal of an innate moral capability common to all men—a relatively sunny vision of ethical sensibility that belied the evangelical emphasis on unregenerate sin.”⁴ Mailer pits the reformed doctrine of the inability of unregenerate man to do spiritual good against the Scottish Enlightenment idea that humans have an innate ethical sensibility. While these two

³ Morrison, *John Witherspoon and the Founding of the American Republic*, 6.

⁴ Mailer, *John Witherspoon's American Revolution*, 7.

concepts may appear to be in conflict, I will argue later in the paper that Witherspoon's idea of innate ethical sensibility does not contradict reformed orthodoxy laid out in the doctrine of total depravity.

I will reference two primary sources by Witherspoon throughout this paper. The first source is Witherspoon's popular sermon *The Dominion of Providence Over the Passions of Men*. Written, delivered at Princeton, and published in 1776 during the general fast appointed by Congress, Witherspoon's *Dominion of Providence* is his most political sermon, as it comes just months before the Declaration of Independence and gives practical insight into wartime spirituality. The second source is Witherspoon's political pamphlet, *Considerations on the Nature and Extent of the Legislative Authority of the British Parliament*, that he published in 1774. This pamphlet provides insight into the political philosophy of Witherspoon, as he explicitly addresses many of the political debates of the Revolutionary Era.

John Joachim Zubly was a Presbyterian minister in Savannah, Georgia during the outbreak of the American Revolution.⁵ Born in Switzerland in 1724, Zubly received his education and was ordained in the German Reformed Church while in London. Soon after being ordained in 1744, Zubly left London for the colonies. After holding a pulpit in South Carolina for over a decade, Independent Presbyterian Church in Savannah called Zubly to be its first resident minister, where he served until the outbreak of the Revolutionary War when he was driven from the pulpit for his loyalist convictions. As an immigrant and man of the enlightenment, Zubly spoke many languages, both ancient and modern. As a public intellectual, Zubly maintained

⁵ Miller, "Zubly, John Joachim (1724-81)." There are few secondary sources dedicated to the life and thought of Zubly.

correspondence with ministers and scholars across the continent. He also assembled a sizeable personal library in Savannah.

During his lifetime, Zubly was a well-known and respected public figure throughout the colonies, particularly between 1745 and 1775 when he still criticized the British Parliament and king for their unjust treatment of the colonists. Zubly impacted both the church and colonial politics as a Reformed minister and a politician. As a delegate from Georgia to the Second Continental Congress of 1775, Zubly drew the attention of the colonial elite. Since Georgia leaned toward Loyalism, having delegates from Georgia at the Second Continental Congress surprised colonial leaders. Describing the Second Continental Congress in a letter to his wife, John Adams wrote that Zubly was “a Man of Learning and Ingenuity . . . Master of several Languages, Greek, Latin, French, Dutch and English. In the latter it is said, he writes tolerably. He is a Man of Zeal and Spirit, as We have already seen upon several occasions.”⁶ It seems as though Adams respected the intellect and boldness of Zubly. But this respect for Zubly was conditional. Two weeks later, after the delegates from Georgia left the Second Continental Congress, Adams wrote that Zubly “speaks but broken English,” and he quoted Zubly as saying, “Dat is enough.—Dat is enough.”⁷ After Zubly’s motives no longer aligned with his own, Adams resorted to a pernicious expression of nativism in an attempt to maintain his view of colonial superiority.

Since Zubly, as a Presbyterian, was a religious minority in Britain, scholars have assumed that he primarily associated with the religiously tolerant Whigs. Randall Miller made such an assumption when he wrote that “Zubly's faith, congregationalism, Swiss background, and

⁶ John Adams to Abigail Adams, Sept. 17{?}, 1774, *Founders Online*.

⁷ John Adams to Abigail Adams, Oct. 1{?}, 1774, *Founders Online*.

Whiggish bent all bred in him a suspicion of any arbitrary and, especially, distant power.”⁸

However, contrary to Miller’s claim that Zubly had a “Whiggish bent,” I will argue that Zubly had an enlightened royalist bent. Although Zubly shared in several Whiggish beliefs, even radical Whiggish beliefs, his political bent was toward a natural hierarchy that could not be overthrown without disobeying God. Zubly’s political sermons evidence his extreme distrust of the British Parliament and his desire for less self-interested representatives of the people. However, Zubly often showed admiration for King George III. While many of the founding fathers showed respect to the king, few praised his magnificence, kindness, and justice like Zubly. Because Zubly disdained the British Parliament but admired King George III and the monarchy, his political affiliation was complicated, especially as a Presbyterian minister. As a man of the Enlightenment and a religious minority, Zubly advocated for religious toleration, like the Whigs. However, unlike the Whigs, Zubly maintained his belief that religious authority came directly from God to the king, unmediated by the people governed. Thus, Zubly supported reform of, or even rebellion against, the tyrannical authority of the British Parliament, but he did not support rebellion against the crown.

I will reference two primary sources by Zubly throughout this paper. The first source is Zubly’s sermon, *The Stamp-Act Repealed*, that he preached and published in 1766. By directly addressing the repeal of the Stamp Act, Zubly shows some of his underlying political beliefs. During this time, Zubly was near the peak of his popularity among colonists for his stance against the perceived injustices of the British. However, I will argue that this sermon shows signs of Zubly’s future Loyalism. The second source is Zubly’s sermon, *The Law of Liberty*, that he preached at the opening of the Provincial Congress of Georgia in 1774. Since Zubly was

⁸ Miller, "Zubly, John Joachim (1724-81)."

addressing legislators, his sermon is explicitly political and provides insight into his political beliefs.

Enlightened Evangelical Thought and Piety

During the Great Awakening of the 1730s and 1740s, emerging evangelicalism seemed to directly oppose the popularization of Enlightenment thought. However, historians have gone too far in pitting the two movements against one another. Witherspoon's sermons, writings, and lifestyle are evidence that a form of enlightened evangelicalism emerged on the heels of the Great Awakening. Witherspoon's thought was molded both by his deep Presbyterian heritage and his education at Edinburgh during the height of the Scottish Enlightenment. Similarly, Witherspoon's piety and practice of religion in the public sphere are indebted to both historical Reformed practices and Enlightenment influences. While Zubly was less affected by Enlightenment thought than Witherspoon, his brand of evangelicalism bears several marks of the Enlightenment as well.

Historians argue that Witherspoon's Scottish Enlightenment influence conflicts with his Calvinist theology. However, contrary to Mailer, who argues that Witherspoon's Scottish Enlightenment idea of intuitive morality is "a relatively sunny vision of ethical sensibility that belied the evangelical emphasis on unregenerate sin," I will argue that Witherspoon's Reformed confessionality seamlessly integrated with his Enlightenment philosophy.⁹ His moral philosophy of ethical sensibility did not temper his evangelicalism. Rather, enlightened moral philosophy worked alongside, but did not compete with, his evangelical convictions to make his thought, and his College of New Jersey students, more appealing as statesmen in the political arena during the nascent years of the nation.

⁹ Mailer, *John Witherspoon's American Revolution*, 7.

Enlightenment thought influenced Witherspoon in his approach to public scholarship. While Zubly appeals to the king throughout his sermons, Witherspoon makes his appeals to the educated public. Both Witherspoon and Zubly show their underlying bent in their discussions of the necessity of unity for the public good. Whereas Zubly appeals to the king's self-interest, Witherspoon appeals to the interest of the public. Zubly writes that "gaining the affection of loyal subjects would be a greater security to his reign and kingdom than any submission he could force them into by any act of mere power. Union of minds and interests is the real strength of any nation, a kingdom divided against itself cannot stand."¹⁰ His concept of unity was intertwined with his concept of submission to a monarch. Witherspoon, on the other hand, warned his fellow citizens that if they acted in a merely self-interested way, then "you are doing a greater injury to the common cause than you are aware of."¹¹ He views unity as the mutual pursuit of the common cause and downplays self-interest. According to Zubly, George III had the power to restore unity, so he appeals directly to the king. While he openly appeals to the king's self-interest, Witherspoon appeals to the public to stop acting self-interestedly, displaying the influence of the Scottish Enlightenment on his public discourse.

While Witherspoon denounces a form of self-interest as opposed to the public good, Zubly never denounces any self-interested motives. Zubly even appeals to the self-interest of the king, showing that he saw self-interest as a potential good. Witherspoon's denunciation of unbridled self-interest emphasizes the complexity of applying his Scottish Enlightenment education. It may seem like Witherspoon's negative view of self-interest directly opposes Adam Smith's central argument in *The Wealth of Nations*. However, Witherspoon does not simply

¹⁰ Zubly, *Stamp-Act Repealed*, 13.

¹¹ Witherspoon, *Dominion of Providence*, 47.

denounce every form of self-interest. Rather, he opposes the type of self-interest that is governed by the passions and tied to competing factions and provinces. He wrote that “local provincial pride and jealousy” led people to act passionately and would lead to the ruin of colonial society.¹² Passionate self-interest is different than the type of self-interest that Scottish Enlightenment thinkers thought promoted the public good, which was tempered by fellow feeling, or a natural faculty of ethical sensibility.¹³ If a merchant is interested in making money for himself, then he is less likely to engage in any number of behaviors that harm the public good: riots, public drunkenness, and dueling, among others. However, passionate self-interest, which empowers one faction or location over another, leads to an increase in riots and conflict.

Witherspoon’s Scottish Enlightenment idea of a natural ethical sensibility is not at odds with his evangelical Calvinism that emphasizes the depravity of man. While the Westminster Confession of Faith teaches that the total depravity of human nature means that all parts of a person are tainted by sin, rendering people incapable of doing spiritual good on their own, total depravity does not mean that human nature is as sinful as it could possibly be. The Westminster divines wrote that, after the Fall, mankind is “wholly defiled in all the faculties and parts of soul and body.”¹⁴ Clearly the divines did not mean that all the faculties of the soul and body are wholly incapable of working, because even with original sin, people can still reason to the truth, experience emotion, see, and hear. However, our reason is prone to error and our hearts are perverted such that we cannot do spiritual good apart from the grace of God. Man’s inability to do spiritual good does not render his conscience completely incapable of sympathizing with a

¹² Witherspoon, *Dominion of Providence*, 47.

¹³ Fiering, “Irresistible Compassion,” 195–218.

¹⁴ *Westminster Confession of Faith*, 6.2.

suffering man. It just means that even the best works done out of man's natural ethical sensibility are not meritorious before God.

The perceived contradiction between ethical sensibility and the Reformed doctrine of total depravity stems from a misunderstanding of how grace restores nature. Calvin wrote that the "power of choosing rectitude" is not one of the "common endowments of human nature." However, it is one of the "special gifts of God, which he distributes in diverse forms, and, in a definite measure, to men otherwise profane. For which reason, we hesitate not, in common language, to say, that one is of a good, another of a vicious nature."¹⁵ Witherspoon treats ethical sensibility the same way that Calvin treated the "power of choosing rectitude." For Witherspoon, ethical sensibility is a special gift of God's grace given to even unregenerate men. It is not a part of human nature untainted by sin. Rather, it is a part of human nature that God's common grace ordinarily restores in people. In order to prove a contradiction between Witherspoon's evangelical Calvinism and ethical sensibility, one would have to find Witherspoon claiming that a portion of human nature was not tainted by sin. However, Witherspoon need not make such a concession to be consistent in believing in ethical sensibility.

Zubly and Witherspoon address their arguments for the extension of the rights of the British constitution to the colonists to different people. Zubly appealed to the king for rights when he wrote, "your Lordship . . . bring the present unnatural contest to a speedy, just, and honorable issue."¹⁶ His purpose was to persuade the king to act. On the other hand, Witherspoon acted more as a public scholar. He wrote that "The foregoing Considerations [about the rights of Americans under the British constitution] have induced me to publish a few remarks" in the form

¹⁵ Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 180.

¹⁶ Zubly, *Law of Liberty*, 18.

of an essay to the general reading public.¹⁷ His purpose was to persuade the educated public. In their arguments for the rights of the colonists under the British constitution, Zubly and Witherspoon explicitly state to whom they are appealing. By appealing to the public rather than the king, Witherspoon distinguished himself as a man of the Enlightenment. However, Zubly's appeals to the king do not prove him to be unenlightened. Rather, Zubly desired a monarchical government headed by a philosopher king that was sympathetic to reasonable pleas from his subjects.

Witherspoon and Zubly show themselves to have opposing views of how liberty fits into the natural order. Zubly argues that liberty is good, but it is an instrumental good. In other words, liberty is good insofar as it leads to peace and harmony, which are goods in themselves. Zubly wrote that "The day that restores [the Americans] liberty, restores everything to their former channel."¹⁸ Earlier, he wrote that restoring the constitutional rights of the Americans would "restore peace and harmony" between Britain and the colonies.¹⁹ However, Witherspoon argues that liberty is a good in itself, because depriving someone of liberty breaks a law of nature, as it opposes the natural order. Witherspoon wrote that "the cause of liberty ought not to be despaired of."²⁰

Zubly and Witherspoon show their differing views of the natural hierarchy in their discussions of natural rights. While Zubly views the authority of some rulers as coming directly from God, Witherspoon views the authority of all rulers as coming directly from the people.

¹⁷ Witherspoon, *Considerations*, 2.

¹⁸ Zubly, *Law of Liberty*, 17.

¹⁹ Zubly, *Law of Liberty*, 17.

²⁰ Witherspoon, *Considerations*, 2.

Zubly wrote that Christianity “teaches superiors to rule in the fear of God, and to look upon their subjects as their fellow creatures and brethren.”²¹ Rulers must rule in fear of God as their superior and view their subjects as equals insofar as their humanity is concerned. The check on the king’s authority is that he derives his authority from God. On the other hand, Witherspoon wrote that “All men are, by nature, equal and free.”²² This is a different kind of equality between rulers and their subjects than Zubly’s view of shared humanity.

Zubly’s view seems to agree more with Plato’s conception of the guardians in his *Republic*, while Witherspoon seems to share Hobbes’s conception of the state of nature in his *Leviathan*. According to Zubly, people are either subjects or rulers by nature. While he makes an exception that parliamentary representatives derive their authority from the people, he thinks that some rulers, like the king and various noblemen are born to rule. But according to Witherspoon, all people are free and equal by nature, including the king. Thus, someone is not born with the nature of a subject or the nature of a ruler, but a human nature like all other men. Therefore, unlike Zubly, Witherspoon views the natural hierarchy as including all men on the same level.

Minor disagreements on the natural order lead Zubly and Witherspoon to different conclusions on the morality of the Revolution. Since Witherspoon considers liberty a good in itself, any perversion of liberty is an offense against the moral order. Therefore, Witherspoon thinks that the Americans are not only justified in their revolution, but even fighting on behalf of morality. However, Zubly does not think that liberty is good in itself, but only in relation to other goods like peace and unity. Therefore, rebellion is not justified on the grounds of freedom alone, because rebellion destroys peace and unity.

²¹ Zubly, *Stamp-Act Repealed*, 26.

²² Witherspoon, *Considerations*, 3.

Differences in enlightened evangelical thought led Witherspoon and Zubly to live out their faith in different ways in their unique historical moment. While doctrine always affects the way one lives, this connection becomes even clearer during a contentious time like the American Revolution. Witherspoon and Zubly exhort their congregants to live differently as Christians even though they share many of the same underlying theological convictions. Their divergent ways of integrating enlightenment thought with their evangelical faith led to opposing views of how Christians ought to live in light of the Revolution. Witherspoon and Zubly demonstrate this opposition in at least two ways. First, they have different views on the connection between pious living and the blessings and pleasure of God. Second, Zubly tends to seek freedom, while Witherspoon tends to seek justice.

Zubly and Witherspoon differ in how they view the link between piety and God's pleasure. They display this difference in Zubly's emphasis on freedom and Witherspoon's emphasis on justice. While one might expect Witherspoon, the Patriot, to seek freedom more than the Loyalist, Zubly is the one to emphasize the importance of liberty in the Christian life. On the other hand, Witherspoon calls for justice in his political sermons and essays. This difference between Zubly and Witherspoon points to the complexity of the interaction between evangelical thought and politics and should serve as a warning against simplistic categorization of people based on buzzwords instead of their underlying system of thought.

Both Zubly and Witherspoon show their underlying commitments to freedom and justice in their discussions of unlimited submission to the British government. While Zubly argues that teaching unlimited submission to the government is most harmful to the Christian religion, Witherspoon argues that teaching unlimited submission is most harmful to the relationship between the colonists and Britain. Zubly argues that those who force the doctrine of unlimited

submission on the American colonists through the Christian religion have “done that holy religion a great hurt.”²³ Zubly was concerned about unlimited submission’s damage to the sacred—the Christian faith. On the other hand, Witherspoon references unlimited submission during his explanation of why the American colonists have begun to unify against Britain, arguing that holding unlimited submission against the American colonists “has armed more men, and inspired more deadly rage, than could have been done by laying waste a whole province with fire and sword.”²⁴ His primary focus is on unlimited submission’s deleterious effect on the relationship between colonists and Britain—a secular concern.

By concerning himself with unlimited submission’s effect on the Christian religion, Zubly shows the high value that he places on freedom. He argues that enforcing unlimited submission turns kings into despots. If the British claim that the Christian religion gives kings this authority, then they are doing great harm to the faith that, Zubly argues, rescues freedom from the whims of despotism. On the other hand, Witherspoon’s concern for the relationship between the colonists and Britain is not primarily about unity, but rather about just representation. Witherspoon argues that the injustice of demanding unlimited submission inspired as much rage in the colonists as any number of violent actions would have. Witherspoon focuses on injustice and the rage it produces rather than freedom, because despotism is the unjust action of taking away the rightful liberties of the people.

Similarly, Zubly and Witherspoon show their bents towards seeking freedom or justice in what they speak about generally compared to what they speak about specifically. While Zubly praises Britain for repealing the Stamp Act, specifically, and giving the Americans freedom,

²³ Zubly, *Law of Liberty*, 36.

²⁴ Witherspoon, *Dominion of Providence*, 43.

Witherspoon is not concerned with one piece of legislation, but rather with freedom from Parliament's authority in general. Zubly writes that should the Stamp Act have remained a law, "the year 1765 must have been the fatal year from which the loss of American liberty must have been dated."²⁵ On the other hand, Witherspoon attempted to answer the question, "Does the legislative authority of the British Parliament extend over [the colonists]?"²⁶ Witherspoon's question indicates a more generalized approach to the topic of British legislation. Zubly does not seem as concerned as Witherspoon with the legislative system as a process. He argues that individual laws, like the Stamp Act, are oppressive and take away freedom, but he does not agree with Witherspoon that the legislative process needs a radical overhaul.

Perhaps the most explicit example of Witherspoon's bent towards justice and Zubly's bent towards freedom is in their discussions of the inseparability of true religion and civil liberty. Whereas Zubly thinks the sins of the colonists stop them from enjoying civil liberty, Witherspoon thinks the sins of unjust governments destroy civil liberty and lead to decreased piety among the oppressed. Zubly wrote, "How insignificant will our struggle for liberty appear, while we deliberately give up ourselves to be slaves unto lust?"²⁷ He also wrote, "if we will be truly free we must become truly good."²⁸ On the other hand, Witherspoon wrote, "God grant that in America true religion and civil liberty may be inseparable, and that the unjust attempts to destroy the one, may in the issue tend to the support and establishment of both."²⁹ Zubly has a generally positive view of the British government, particularly King George III. Thus, he thinks

²⁵ Zubly, *Stamp-Act Repealed*, 23.

²⁶ Witherspoon, *Considerations*, 1.

²⁷ Zubly, *Stamp-Act Repealed*, 27.

²⁸ Zubly, *Stamp-Act Repealed*, 28.

²⁹ Witherspoon, *Dominion of Providence*, 60.

that if the colonists just acted piously, engaging in true religion, the king would notice and grant them their civil liberties, because he is reasonable. However, Witherspoon sees this process as reversed. He has a generally negative view of both the king and Parliament, thinking that they unjustly hold back the civil liberties of the colonists. He ends his sermon with a prayer that Britain's attempts to destroy the liberty of the colonists would lead to the establishment of both piety—true religion—and civil liberty.

Similarly, Zubly and Witherspoon define the connection between religion and liberty differently. While Zubly argues that true liberty and true religion are indistinguishable, Witherspoon argues that liberty and true religion are inseparable but distinct. Zubly wrote, "This, my hearers, is the true idea of liberty, to be freed from every hurtful constraint, and to be able to do all that tends to make us truly happy, or else to be free indeed is neither more nor less than to be heartily engaged for him whose service is perfect freedom."³⁰ On the other hand, Witherspoon wrote, "God grant that in America true religion and civil liberty may be inseparable, and that the unjust attempts to destroy the one, may in the issue tend to the support and establishment of both," clearly distinguishing between liberty and true religion.³¹

Another way that Zubly and Witherspoon differ in their connection between piety and God's pleasure is in their discussions of having God on one's side in the conflict. While Witherspoon considers the possibility that God could help the British, Zubly never considers this a possibility. In his sermon, Zubly places special emphasis on the Americans' standing with God, because he argues that "without him and his help [they] can never prosper."³² Witherspoon,

³⁰ Zubly, *Stamp-Act Repealed*, 28.

³¹ Witherspoon, *Dominion of Providence*, 60.

³² Zubly, *Law of Liberty*, 44.

likewise, places special emphasis on the Americans' standing with God, because he argues that "Whoever hath his countenance and approbation, shall have the best at last."³³ Zubly only considers the possibility of God helping the Americans, but Witherspoon argues that God could help either side of the conflict.

This difference is unexpected considering Zubly ended up a Loyalist and Witherspoon was a Patriot. However, it speaks less to their political leanings and more to the different ways they link piety to God's good pleasure. Since Zubly thinks that the British are acting unjustly, he cannot imagine God acting on their behalf. However, since the colonists are actively destroying the unity of the colonies and their mother country, he also cannot imagine God offering his help to them. Zubly sees wickedness on both sides of the conflict such that he waits to declare his loyalty until the last moment. On the other hand, this is not a morally gray conflict for Witherspoon. Either the British are destroying freedom and morally ought to be stopped, or the colonists are incorrect and destroying peace and unity and, thus, are in the wrong. Either way, God will help the righteous cause.

Similarly, only Witherspoon argues that having God on your side in the conflict is sufficient for victory, while Zubly argues that having God on your side is necessary, but not necessarily sufficient, for victory. He says that without God's help the Americans "can never prosper," while Witherspoon says that "Whoever hath [God's] countenance and approbation, shall have the best at last."³⁴ According to Zubly, God's favor is a necessary condition of truly prospering in the conflict. However, Witherspoon argued that having God's favor in the conflict would guarantee victory.

³³ Witherspoon, *Dominion of Providence*, 39.

³⁴ Zubly, *Law of Liberty*, 44; Witherspoon, *Dominion of Providence*, 39.

Zubly and Witherspoon seem to deal differently with the reality that righteous people often suffer. For Zubly, the righteous suffer and sometimes lose in conflicts, because righteousness does not guarantee that God will give you victory. Righteousness acts as a sort of prerequisite for gaining God's help. However, Witherspoon thinks that the righteous suffer and often lose in conflicts, because even the most righteous people are still stained by sin and rightly incur the judgement of God. While the colonists should strive above all to have upright character throughout the conflict, even their best efforts will not ultimately earn them the help of God. God's help is an act of his free grace. Witherspoon is more in line with historic Reformed doctrine on this point than Zubly, which may help explain why almost all Presbyterians joined the Patriots during the Revolutionary War. Even though Zubly would undoubtedly agree that even our best works are tainted by sin and need the grace of God to become acceptable, he does not apply this doctrine to the question of whose side God will help in the conflict. Zubly's depiction of God aiding a side in the conflict is devoid of grace, because he views God as punishing both sides for their sins.

Witherspoon and Zubly make this argument about God's help in the conflict with different levels of forcefulness. Whereas Witherspoon makes the more forceful argument that if the Americans' cause is just and their conduct is pure, then God will plead their cause, Zubly makes the softer argument that impious conduct during the conflict would incur the displeasure of God. Witherspoon says "as a matter rather of conjecture than certainty" that "if [the Americans] conduct is prudent, [they] need not fear the multitude of opposing hosts," because then God will "plead [the American cause] as his own."³⁵ This is an argument that God is always active in fighting on behalf of the righteous cause in a conflict. On the other hand, Zubly says

³⁵ Witherspoon, *Dominion of Providence*, 39.

that the Americans must be careful to “avoid every thing that might make [them] incur the displeasure of God.”³⁶ This is an argument that God fights against wickedness, not necessarily that he fights on behalf of the most righteous cause in a conflict. Again, this difference in how God provides help in conflicts emphasizes the complications of Zubly’s morally gray approach to the revolution. Since he thinks that both the British and the colonists acted wickedly, he argues that God will oppose them both.

Zubly and Witherspoon show their underlying political leaning in their understanding of divine providence. While Zubly sees divine providence as putting a stop to war between Britain and the colonies, Witherspoon sees divine providence as aiding the colonies’ side in the conflict. Zubly compares Britain and the colonies to the divided kingdom of Israel under Rehoboam. He writes that “the shedding of blood was at that time prevented, and a stop put to a cruel and intestine war by an immediate interposition of divine providence.”³⁷ On the other hand, Witherspoon writes that “It would be a criminal inattention not to observe the singular interposition of providence hitherto, in behalf of the American colonies.”³⁸ Zubly sees the conflict as morally gray while Witherspoon sees the colonists’ cause as the side of justice and righteousness unequivocally. Zubly can celebrate the goodness of divine providence in ending the unjust Stamp Act and bringing peace while still seeing the colonists as guilty of insubordination and stirring up conflict. On the other hand, Witherspoon calls out the sins of the colonists as they relate to colonial unity, and he thinks that God will ultimately put a stop to British injustice.

³⁶ Zubly, *Law of Liberty*, 45.

³⁷ Zubly, *Stamp-Act Repealed*, 15.

³⁸ Witherspoon, *Dominion of Providence*, 34.

Zubly and Witherspoon also link the concept of piety with God's pleasure when they discuss divine mercy. While Zubly views mercy as contingent on righteous conduct, Witherspoon views mercy as inevitable for God's people. Zubly wrote that the reason the congregation had assembled in a worship service was to give thanks to God "that mercy and truth may be the blessing of our days, and of our whole nation, and that our civil and religious liberties may be preserved inviolable till time shall be no more."³⁹ He also wrote, "O! let us not sin away our mercies!"⁴⁰ On the other hand, Witherspoon wrote that "those for whom God hath designs of the greatest mercy, are first brought to the trial, that they may enjoy in due time, the salutary effect of the unpalatable medicine."⁴¹

Zubly takes a different stance than the majority of reformed theologians on this point. While mercy is defined as not meting out a deserved punishment, this does not mean that mercy and punishment are opposites. As Witherspoon points out, God often uses punishment as a sort of nasty medicine that leads to greater grace in the future. God punishes those that he loves. Again, this difference could help explain why Zubly diverged from the vast majority of Presbyterians by remaining loyal to the British crown. While Witherspoon and other Presbyterians considered suffering at the hands of the British to be purgative, a part of their process of sanctification, Zubly considered the suffering a sign of God's ultimate displeasure with the colonists for rebelling. Zubly's heterodox theology on this point leads him to exhort his congregation to a different type of Christian living: Loyalism.

³⁹ Zubly, *Stamp-Act Repealed*, 20.

⁴⁰ Zubly, *Stamp-Act Repealed*, 27.

⁴¹ Witherspoon, *Dominion of Providence*, 19.

Zubly's and Witherspoon's opposing ways of linking piety to God's pleasure show differences in doctrine, or at least the application of doctrine to life, leading the two ministers to opposite sides of the Revolutionary War. Even subtle difference in how they applied enlightened evangelical thought led to radically different conclusions. Witherspoon consistently applies Reformed thought to the political situation, while Zubly comes to conclusions that are inconsistent with his Reformed faith. Zubly's view of mercy as a reward for righteous living goes against the historic Reformed stance of divine punishment as God's method of sanctifying his people, and his argument that God only fights against wickedness, not for any side in a conflict, introduces a heterodox view of God's grace, explaining why almost all Presbyterians joined Witherspoon on the Patriot side of the Revolution.

Enlightened Royalism and Radical Whiggism
Two Paths to Political Modernity

After the outbreak of the Revolutionary War, Witherspoon became a Patriot, and Zubly aligned himself with the Loyalists. However, knowing their sides during the war provides little help for understanding their pre-Revolutionary political leanings. While Witherspoon consistently acted in line with radical Whig beliefs, Zubly changed throughout the pre-Revolutionary era and, in many ways, defied simple categorization. Scholars argue that using the categories of “Patriot” and “Loyalist” before the Revolutionary War is anachronistic, so they propose alternative categories: “radical Whigs” and “friends of government.”⁴²

Zubly shares views with both the Whigs and the friends of government. On the one hand, Zubly emphasized the importance of freedom from tyrannical governments and the necessity of colonial political representation in a way that aligned with the radical Whigs. On the other hand, Zubly also believed, like the friends of government, that freedom is best protected by the institution of the monarchy. Colonists merely needed to bear the temporary injustice of British policies until they were repealed through conventional, constitutional means. Thus, Zubly had a royalist bent that was foundational to his view of the role of Parliament, or any representative body.

In this section, I will argue that Zubly’s political leanings are best defined as a form of enlightened royalism. While this may make Zubly seem like a staunch traditionalist when compared to a radical Whig like Witherspoon, Zubly’s enlightened royalism was actually an alternative path to political modernity, not a cry for a return to an idealized past. Thus, Zubly was

⁴² Nicolson, “Governor Francis Bernard, the Massachusetts Friends of Government, and the Advent of the Revolution,” 28.

not opposed to political “progress,” but, rather, defined progress in terms of enlightened royalism rather than Whiggism. Zubly’s position must be distinguished from enlightened absolutism. Zubly supported Parliament, but he often complained that the British Parliament was corrupt. However, Parliament’s authority was unclear, leading to the complexity and complications of his political thought.

Unlike the friends of government, both Zubly and Witherspoon thought the British Parliament was intentionally undermining their liberties, not merely passing unfavorable tax laws. According to Colin Nicolson, the friends of government “admitted that the colonists had grievances over taxation, but they could see no conspiracy afoot to undermine their liberties.”⁴³ Both Zubly and Witherspoon agreed with the friends of government that the taxes levied by the British Parliament were unjust and oppressive. However, Zubly had a far more skeptical view of Parliament than the friends of government, thinking that they legislated with complete selfishness and disregard for the freedom of the colonists.

Both Witherspoon and Zubly discussed the motivations of Parliament in their political sermons, and their respective perceptions of Parliament give insight into their underlying political leanings. While Witherspoon portrays Parliament as ignorant and not as bad as their actions make them seem, Zubly portrays Parliament as completely selfish deceivers of King George III. When speaking about Parliament, Witherspoon says that “their actions have probably been worse than their intentions.”⁴⁴ He thinks that they are acting selfishly but do not realize the effect that their legislation is having on the colonies. Surprisingly, the future Loyalist Zubly delivered a harsher indictment of Parliament than Witherspoon. Zubly portrays Parliament as

⁴³ Nicolson, “Governor Francis Bernard, the Massachusetts Friends of Government, and the Advent of the Revolution,” 32.

⁴⁴ Witherspoon, *Dominion of Providence*, 41.

consciously selfish, deceiving the king for their personal benefit. He claims that “all our present distress is owing to evil counsellors.”⁴⁵ According to Zubly, Parliament is the villain, not the king who is merely being deceived.

In the early stages of the Revolutionary War, when Zubly and Witherspoon were not yet publicly opposed, differences in how they saw the king and Parliament were apparent. While it may seem Whiggish of Zubly to take such a pessimistic view of Parliament, it is actually Zubly’s royalist leanings that lead him to blame Parliament for all the ills befalling the colonists. Zubly sees George III’s Parliamentary advisors as wicked men attempting to mislead the king. Since Zubly has a royalist bent, it makes sense for him to place the blame for tyranny and oppression on parliamentary advisors rather than the crown. On the other hand, Witherspoon does not feel the need to completely villainize Parliament. For him, it is enough that they are ignorant. They do not have to actively try to mislead the king to earn his disdain. Since all legislatures act in a self-interested manner, proportional representation of the governed is important to balance the self-interested motives of each representative.

In addition to viewing counsellors’ bad advice to George III as a conspiracy to take away the colonists’ freedoms, Zubly also subscribed to a conspiracy theory regarding Parliament’s motives, separating him even further from the friends of government. Whereas Witherspoon accuses Parliament of corruption generally by referencing the selfishness of human nature, Zubly accuses Parliament of corruption specifically by trying to get a pretender on the throne. Unlike Witherspoon, Zubly gives a specific instance of what he believes to be the corruption of Parliament. He references a rumor that he admits may be “very groundless” as a reason for Parliament’s corruption; he views Parliament’s “present measures as a deep-laid plan to bring in

⁴⁵ Zubly, *Law of Liberty*, 47.

the Pretender.”⁴⁶ In a footnote, he mentions that plunging the colonies into a civil war with Britain would pave the way for a pretender to take the throne. On the other hand, Witherspoon never references such a bizarre theory. However, he provides his own explanation for the corruption of Parliament: selfish human nature. Witherspoon argues that because the representatives are men, they are “liable to all the selfish bias inseparable from human nature.”⁴⁷ This conspiracy theory that Zubly promotes seems to be a form of royalist propaganda. By accusing Parliament of trying to get a pretender on the throne, Zubly was able to both show his loyalty to the king and demand an end to the corrupt legislation of Parliament.

Witherspoon and Zubly also display their political leanings by who they choose to exhort in their sermons. Whereas Zubly exhorts subjects to fulfill their duties to the magistrate, Witherspoon routinely pushes both magistrates and subjects to fulfill their God-given duties. Zubly wants his fellow Americans to “carry ourselves worthy of the character of good subjects and Christians.”⁴⁸ On the other hand, Witherspoon, when addressing social class relations in a 1776 sermon, exhorts the common people to do their work with excellence and soldiers to act with upright conduct, but he also explains that “Magistrates . . . are called to use their authority and influence for the glory of God and the good of others.”⁴⁹ This exhortation to magistrates and societal elites is noticeably missing from Zubly’s discussion of class relations. This difference in who Zubly and Witherspoon address shows where the two men think the majority of the fault lies in the conflict. Zubly thinks the American subjects might start shirking their God-given

⁴⁶ Zubly, *Law of Liberty*, 47.

⁴⁷ Witherspoon, *Dominion of Providence*, 41.

⁴⁸ Zubly, *Law of Liberty*, 21-22.

⁴⁹ Witherspoon, *Dominion of Providence*, 44-45.

responsibilities as subjects of the king, while Witherspoon thinks that magistrates, both American and British, have been abusing their power for their own benefit. Zubly's royalist bent is displayed in his exhortation to the colonists to be good subjects to the king even in the face of unjust and oppressive parliamentary legislation.

Zubly and Witherspoon also show their views of Parliament and the king in their comparisons of the colonists to slaves of Britain. While Zubly speaks of the Americans as slaves in the third person, Witherspoon speaks of the Americans as slaves in the first person. Zubly appealed to the king, saying, "My Lord, the Americans are no idiots, and they appear determined not to be slaves."⁵⁰ On the other hand, Witherspoon wrote, "By what title do they claim to be our masters?"⁵¹ While it may seem like Zubly, as a Loyalist, wanted to distance himself from the Patriots calling for freedom and an end to laws binding in all cases whatsoever, he makes it clear in other places (even within the same sermon) that he is upset with the actions of Parliament and the king. However, he likely spoke in the third person out of respect for King George III. Though he was delivering a sermon, this appeal was addressed directly to the king. On the other hand, Witherspoon was addressing the British public because of Parliament's tyranny.

Similarly, Zubly and Witherspoon show their bent towards freedom or justice in their discussion of the Declaratory Act of 1766, setting forth Parliament's claim to enact laws for the colonists from thousands of miles away. While Zubly mentions the distance between the government of Britain and America to emphasize the restrictions on the colonists' liberty, Witherspoon mentions the distance between Britain and America to emphasize these laws' injustice. Zubly wrote, "is it possible that those, who at three thousand miles distance can be

⁵⁰ Zubly, *Law of Liberty*, 8.

⁵¹ Witherspoon, *Considerations*, 16.

bound in all cases, may be said to have any liberty at all?”⁵² He used the distance between America and Britain to emphasize how despotic the laws are. On the other hand, Witherspoon used the distance between America and Britain to make a different point. He wrote, “such is their distance from us, that a wise and prudent administration of our affairs is as impossible as the claim of authority is unjust.”⁵³

If the king is ultimately the source of authority, as Zubly believes, then the impracticality of governing subjects from across the ocean is not a problem that needs to be addressed by radical changes in the legislative process. However, the king exercising absolute authority over people 3,000 miles away emphasizes his despotism. And despotism is the great threat posed by monarchical governments. On the other hand, Witherspoon, as a Whig, is deeply concerned with the practicality of government. Legislatures 3,000 miles away cannot write just laws that benefit the colonists. Parliament’s claim to authority over an unrepresented people across an ocean is both impossible to administrate and completely unjust. According to Zubly, the despotism of George III and Parliament claiming to create laws binding in all cases whatsoever is wrong, but not necessarily unjust since the king acts on divine authority. However, Witherspoon thinks that the Declaratory Act is unjust, because it tramples the people’s natural right to liberty.

Zubly and Witherspoon both argue from their understanding of the natural order that Parliament does not have the authority to tax the colonists. However, they ask different questions to make their arguments. Whereas Zubly asks whether the British Parliament can tax the colonists without their consent, Witherspoon asks whether the authority of Parliament extends over the colonists. Zubly asks, “Whether the Parliament of Great Britain have any power or

⁵² Zubly, *Law of Liberty*, 8.

⁵³ Witherspoon, *Dominion of Providence*, 42.

authority to tax the Americans without their consent?”⁵⁴ On the other hand, Witherspoon asks, “Does the legislative authority of the British Parliament extend over [the colonists]?”⁵⁵ This is the question that guides his inquiry in his political essay on the legislative authority of the British Parliament.

While these may seem like different wordings of the same question, they are different in at least one important way. Witherspoon is certain that Parliament cannot tax the Americans without their consent, since the authority of the legislature is derived from the people. However, Witherspoon’s question of whether the authority of Parliament extends over the colonists is different. It leaves room for a discussion of the laws of nature as opposed to merely a discussion of divine right of kings. For Zubly, the two opposing answers are that kings have a divine right to exercise arbitrary power, and that kings are limited to the powers expressly given to them in the constitution. He thinks that kings are limited to their constitutional powers. However, Witherspoon disregards the divine right of kings argument completely and argues that even constitutions are subject to the laws of nature and ought not be followed if they violate natural rights.

Witherspoon and Zubly have differing explanations for why the colonies became unified that emphasizes their disagreement on how they perceive Britain. Whereas Witherspoon refers to the legislation as the cruelty that unified the colonies, Zubly refers to Britain’s violent enforcement of the legislation as the unifying factor for the colonies. Writing just after the start of the conflict, Zubly says the physical violence of Britain is what unified the colonies to resist.

⁵⁴ Zubly, *Law of Liberty*, 52.

⁵⁵ Witherspoon, *Considerations*, 1.

He employs a metaphor, saying that “blood and sand will make a firm cementation.”⁵⁶ He also adds that “the violence of these present measures” led to the creation of a spirited but undisciplined continental army to defend the continent’s interests.⁵⁷ On the other hand, Witherspoon, writing almost one year into the war, says that Britain has “uniformly called those acts Lenity, which filled this whole continent with resentment and horror.”⁵⁸

There are two reasons why Zubly considered the violence of Britain to be the unifying factor while Witherspoon considered British legislation the unifying factor. First, Zubly delivered this sermon just two months after the battle of Lexington and Concord. Britain’s violence was fixed in the minds of all colonists during this time. Second, Zubly sees the conflict between the colonists and Britain primarily as a conflict of interest. He is angered that Britain is choosing to solve it forcefully. However, Witherspoon sees the conflict primarily as an ideological clash between radical Whigs demanding legislative representation and the British government. Thus, he focuses on the unjust legislation of the British Parliament.

The two sides of a war typically define the conflict differently, and the American Revolutionary War is no exception. While Witherspoon viewed the conflict as a revolution, Zubly saw it as a civil war. Both Zubly and Witherspoon show how they define the conflict in their discussions of the cause of colonial unification. Whereas Zubly claims that Britain’s actions caused colonial unity, Witherspoon ascribes the agency to the colonists. Both Zubly and Witherspoon view the actions of Britain as essential to the formation of a colonial union. However, Zubly ascribes the agency to the British. He wrote, “the cruelty and violence of

⁵⁶ Zubly, *Law of Liberty*, 13.

⁵⁷ Zubly, *Law of Liberty*, 13.

⁵⁸ Witherspoon, *Dominion of Providence*, 43.

administration has effectually brought to pass in a day” the creation of a continental army.⁵⁹ On the other hand, Witherspoon acknowledges that the actions of the British forced the Americans to unify, but he still ascribes agency to the Americans, not just the British. Witherspoon wrote that the British “forced us into union.”⁶⁰ While the British forced their hand, the colonists still did the unifying.

As the Revolutionary War broke out in 1775, Witherspoon and Zubly displayed their political leanings through their exhortations related to unity amidst class conflict. Whereas Zubly views a harmonious relationship between societal superiors and inferiors as the key to peace between Britain and the colonies, Witherspoon views the relationship between societal superiors and inferiors only as the key to colonial unity. Zubly wrote that “there is a rule given to magistrates and subjects, which, if carefully attended to, would secure the dignity and safety of both.”⁶¹ Zubly clearly had in mind a peaceful union between the colonists and Britain. Witherspoon, on the other hand, wrote a caution “against the usual causes of division,” claiming that “persons of every rank” must consider how their self-interested actions do “injury to the common cause.”⁶² In this case, Witherspoon clearly had in mind colonial unity, not unity between Britain and the colonists like Zubly. At this point in 1775 for Zubly and 1776 for Witherspoon, it seems like Zubly still had faith that the Americans and the British could remain unified while Witherspoon no longer viewed this as an option. For Zubly, speaking just months before declaring himself a Loyalist, unity meant restoring peace between Britain and the

⁵⁹ Zubly, *Law of Liberty*, 13.

⁶⁰ Witherspoon, *Dominion of Providence*, 43.

⁶¹ Zubly, *Law of Liberty*, 21.

⁶² Witherspoon, *Dominion of Providence*, 43.

colonies. However, for Witherspoon, who was a staunch Patriot by this time, unity meant restoring peace within the colonies.

Zubly and Witherspoon also display their differing views on the conflict in their discussions on the dangers of political factions. While Zubly thinks conflicting interests and factions are bad, because they impinge on the power of the sovereign and, thus, harm the public good, Witherspoon thinks conflicting interests and factions are bad, because they hinder the pursuit of the common cause. Zubly wrote that “jarring interests and different factions divide the state and impose upon the sovereign.”⁶³ On the other hand, Witherspoon wrote that “If local provincial pride and jealousy arise, and you allow yourselves to speak with contempt of the courage, character, manners, or even language of particular places, you are doing a greater injury to the common cause, than you are aware of.”⁶⁴ One of Zubly’s concerns is that competing interests coalesce into factions that undermine the authority of the monarchy. Thus, looking out for the interest of the king is essential to Zubly’s conception of the public good. However, Witherspoon thinks that an educated public can look out for their own good without a paternal king directing them. Witherspoon aligns himself with Enlightenment philosophers who think a free people can better pursue their own good than a people bound to the restrictive laws of a monarch that is supposed to help them make good choices. People have an ethical intuition that fills them with a natural sympathy for those that are suffering. They do not need a paternal government to fill the role that their conscience already fills.

Again, Zubly’s and Witherspoon’s differing views of the conflict are displayed in their biblical comparisons. While Zubly compares the colonists’ political situation to the history of

⁶³ Zubly, *Stamp-Act Repealed*, 14.

⁶⁴ Witherspoon, *Dominion of Providence*, 47.

Israel as a divided kingdom, Witherspoon compares the colonists' political situation to the time of the prophets. Zubly opens *The Law of Liberty* by drawing a parallel between the divided kingdom of Israel and the relationship between Britain and the colonies: "There was a time when there was no king in Israel, and every man did what was good in his own eyes. The consequence was a civil war in the nation, issuing in the ruin of one of the tribes, and a considerable loss to all the rest."⁶⁵ On the other hand, early in *The Dominion of Providence*, Witherspoon draws a parallel between the time of the prophets in Israel and the current political situation in the colonies: "But as the truth, with respect to God's moral government, is the same and unchangeable; as the issue, in the case of Senacherib's invasion, did but lead the prophet to acknowledge it; our duty and interest conspire in calling upon us to improve it."⁶⁶ Zubly's divided kingdom parallel faults both the colonists and the British for engaging in divisive behavior. However, Witherspoon faults both the colonists for disobeying God and the British for being oppressive. This leads to opposing conclusions for how to solve the problem. Zubly thinks that the problem can be solved by being united under one monarch, as Israel during the time of the united kingdom. On the other hand, Witherspoon thinks that the only solution is for the colonists to repent of their sins and turn to God and for the British to repent of their oppression. However, if the British will not end their oppression, they will eventually be destroyed as the prophet foretold.

How Zubly and Witherspoon viewed the conflict between Britain and the colonies shows their underlying political beliefs. Zubly's view of the conflict as a civil war between Britain and her colonies points to his eventual declaration of loyalty to the crown during the Revolutionary

⁶⁵ Zubly, *Law of Liberty*, 19.

⁶⁶ Witherspoon, *Dominion of Providence*, 5.

War, while Witherspoon viewing the conflict as a revolution aligned him with the radical Whigs. Believing that the conflict between Britain and the colonies was a civil war led Zubly to believe that there was supposed to be unity between Britain and the colonies. A conflict cannot be a civil war if it is fought between two wholly separated groups. On the other hand, Witherspoon viewing the conflict as a revolution, implies that he perceived no such necessary union between Britain and the colonies. Injustice had corroded that unity long before the outbreak of the war.

Witherspoon and Zubly also show their political leanings in their differing attitudes towards the British people. Whereas Zubly thinks that Loyalists and Britain have taught the doctrine of unlimited submission in a duplicitous and deceptive manner, Witherspoon thinks that Loyalists and Britain have taught unlimited submission with open disdain for the American colonists and the Christian religion. Zubly thinks that Loyalists and the British teach unlimited submission “under the pretence of friendship and defence” of the Christian faith.⁶⁷ Witherspoon claims one British subject expressed “ineffable disdain” for the colonists and the Christian faith when he said that “he would not hearken to America, till she was at his feet.”⁶⁸ While Zubly sees the British as manipulative liars, Witherspoon sees them as directly confrontational. If the British people showed an “ineffable disdain” for the Christian religion and the colonies, as Witherspoon argued, then Britain is the aggressor in the conflict, not the colonists. However, manipulative liars are certainly evil, but they are not necessarily aggressors in conflict. In fact, they lie and manipulate hoping to avoid conflict. Therefore, Zubly sees the British people as morally bankrupt, but not necessarily the aggressors in the conflict, complicating his political view on the justification for the Revolution.

⁶⁷ Zubly, *Law of Liberty*, 36.

⁶⁸ Witherspoon, *Dominion of Providence*, 43.

Witherspoon and Zubly also display their differing attitudes towards the British people in their discussions of the crown demanding the unlimited obedience of the colonists. While Zubly thinks the reason some of the British call for unlimited obedience is ignorance, Witherspoon thinks the calls of the British people for unlimited obedience are motivated by selfishness. Zubly writes that “those which make this charge [that Christianity permits despotism], and those who make occasion for it, were alike ignorant of the spirit and temper of Christianity.”⁶⁹ On the other hand, Witherspoon asks of the British who called for unlimited obedience, especially members of Parliament, “By what title do they claim to be our masters?” He was very concerned that the colonists were being “deprived of [their] properties.”⁷⁰ This difference between Witherspoon’s and Zubly’s views of the British people might seem trivial, but with a little speculation, it becomes significant. If ignorance is the reason that some people call for unlimited obedience to despotism, then the solution to the conflict between the colonists and Britain is simple: learn the truth. Thus, Zubly sees the problem of the conflict between the British and the colonists as surface level and easily reversible. On the other hand, if members of Parliament are motivated to call for unlimited obedience because of their selfishness, as Witherspoon believes, then the problem was deep, and the entire British system of government needed an overhaul.

Similarly, Witherspoon and Zubly also display their differing attitudes towards the British people in their comparisons of the relationship between colonists and Britain to the relationship between slaves and their master. While Zubly considers the colonists to be slaves to Parliament, Witherspoon considers the colonists to be slaves to all British people. Zubly wrote, “What can, say they, an emperor of Morocco pretend more of his slaves than to bind them in all

⁶⁹ Zubly, *Law of Liberty*, 36.

⁷⁰ Witherspoon, *Considerations*, 16.

cases whatsoever?”⁷¹ Zubly discusses the slavery of the colonists in light of Parliament claiming to have authority to write laws that are binding in all cases whatsoever. On the other hand, Witherspoon wrote, “What act of ours has rendered us subject to those, to whom we were formerly equal?”⁷² In this excerpt, Witherspoon is referring to the British people who were formerly equals with the colonists. After all, the colonists are British subjects. However, Witherspoon argues that the colonists had become subjects of the British people and been given an inferior status. By making laws binding in all cases whatsoever, Zubly sees Parliament and the king as overstepping their authority as rulers, but Witherspoon also sees the British people as a whole as tyrannical, because the legislatures act on the authority of the people.

⁷¹ Zubly, *Law of Liberty*, 7.

⁷² Witherspoon, *Considerations*, 16.

Early Indicators of Proto-Loyalist and Proto-Patriot Leanings

Witherspoon and Zubly often took similar stances on political issues before the outbreak of the Revolutionary War, but Zubly's actions before the war still hint at his future Loyalism. Zubly's treatment of the Declaratory Act of 1766 displays his unique reasoning when compared to a radical Whig and proto-Patriot like Witherspoon. While Zubly considers laws binding in all cases whatsoever to be unjust on the basis of despotism by Parliament, Witherspoon considers Parliament's claim to bind the colonists in all cases whatsoever to be unjust on the basis that the Americans have no say in the creation of the law. Zubly wrote that "To bind them in all cases whatsoever, my Lord, the Americans look upon this as the language of despotism in its utmost perfection."⁷³ On the other hand, Witherspoon wrote, "I call this claim unjust of making laws to bind us in all cases whatsoever, because they are separated from us, independent of us, and have an interest in opposing us."⁷⁴ While injustice is a comparative term that describes an unfair situation, despotism describes a person abusing power to oppress others, a specific form of injustice.

Surprisingly, Zubly blames the king for the tyranny of laws that bind the colonists in all cases whatsoever. It seems like Zubly, as a developing Loyalist, would want to blame Parliament for the tyranny, not the king. However, Zubly blames the king, because his view of legal justice as a royalist differs from Witherspoon's as a Whig. For Zubly, the great enemy of justice is despotism—an abuse of the king's authority. However, for Witherspoon, any law made independently from those it affects is unjust. In other words, both Zubly and Witherspoon acknowledge the injustice of the Declaratory Act, but Zubly, as a royalist, identifies despotism as

⁷³ Zubly, *Law of Liberty*, 7.

⁷⁴ Witherspoon, *Dominion of Providence*, 41.

the problem, while Witherspoon's Whiggish bent leads him to identify the colonies' lack of legislative representation as the source of injustice.

Similarly, both Witherspoon and Zubly hint at their future political allegiance in their attitudes towards the monarchy. While Zubly portrays King George III as misguided by bad advice from Parliament, Witherspoon portrays the king as a contributor to the oppression of the colonies. Zubly portrays King George III very sympathetically as being misguided and used by his parliamentary counsellors. He says that his listeners should pray "that the wicked being removed from before the king, his throne may be established in righteousness."⁷⁵ On the other hand, Witherspoon portrays King George III as an active contributor to the oppression of the colonies. By enforcing the laws of Parliament on the colonies, Witherspoon argues that George III was perpetrating the injustice of "making laws to bind us in all cases whatsoever."⁷⁶ While the king was not making those laws himself, he was approving them and enforcing them on the colonists. Witherspoon never directly attacks the king as harshly as he does Parliament, but his condemnation of his actions is nevertheless evident.

Even before Zubly and Witherspoon were publicly opposed to one another, their different political leanings show in how they portrayed King George III. Early in the Revolution, Zubly continued to support King George III and gave his conduct the benefit of the doubt, choosing instead to blame his actions on Parliament. Witherspoon gave no such defense of the king. Additionally, this difference shows that Zubly not only respected the monarchy as an institution, but he also respected George III as a king. He thought that George III would do the right thing if he only knew what was going on in the colonies—if he only knew that Parliament was taking

⁷⁵ Zubly, *Law of Liberty*, 47.

⁷⁶ Witherspoon, *Dominion of Providence*, 41.

advantage of him. Of course, when George III never changed his mind on his treatment of the colonies, this placed Zubly in a difficult political situation, forcing him to choose between the monarchy that he believed to be a legitimate authority, yet misguided, and the rebels whose authority he considered illegitimate.

Witherspoon and Zubly also show their underlying political leanings in their use of the common analogy of Britain and the colonies as a mother and her children. While Zubly uses the analogy of Britain and America as parent and child to call the colonists to obey Britain, Witherspoon uses the analogy to call Britain to act with milder treatment towards the colonists. Zubly wrote that “We have seen our mother-country act the part of a tender parent; let us never fail to act the part of truly dutiful children.”⁷⁷ On the other hand, Witherspoon wrote that Britain was acting the part of a stepmother that being “rendered miserable by her own conduct, she shall see their affections alienated, and herself deprived of those advantages, which a milder treatment would have ensured her.”⁷⁸ In Zubly’s response to the repeal of the Stamp Act, we see an early form of his Loyalism that is eager to find ways to praise Britain—and especially the king. He sees Britain as filling the role of a loving parent. Any colonist that does not act the role of a dutiful child is out of line. However, writing eight years later, Witherspoon sees Britain as playing the role of a domineering parent. While he does not outright reject the analogy, as one might expect of a Patriot (who would want to be considered the child of fellow citizens that are supposed to be equal?), he does turn the analogy against the British, claiming Britain is like a wicked stepmother that deprives her children.

⁷⁷ Zubly, *Stamp-Act Repealed*, 23.

⁷⁸ Witherspoon, *Considerations*, 1.

Both Witherspoon and Zubly also show their underlying political beliefs when they broach the topic of the spirituality of suffering British oppression. While Witherspoon argues that God's punishment of sin perfects the grace of his people, Zubly argues that God's punishment of sin stops his mercy from flowing to his people. Witherspoon wrote, "Therefore [the judgements of God] are certainly for the correction of sin, or for the trial, illustration, and perfecting of the grace and virtue of his own people."⁷⁹ On the other hand, Zubly wrote that "Nothing but mercy would always attend man, had not man turned away from the love of his maker. Sin only makes a separation between us and our God, and when the cause of his displeasure is removed, the streams of his kindness follow their natural course, and flow down upon man."⁸⁰ He also wrote, "O! let us not sin away our mercies."⁸¹ Zubly imagines a road to heaven in which suffering only comes as a direct punishment of sin. However, Witherspoon imagines the road to heaven like John Bunyan in *The Pilgrim's Progress*: filled with trials and suffering that lead to sanctification. Witherspoon shows his underlying Patriotism in likening the suffering of the colonists to purgatorial fires preparing the colonists to enjoy God's mercies. He likens suffering for the sake of righteousness to Christ suffering on the cross, indicating his view that God is on the side of the colonists. However, Zubly praises Britain during a time of celebration when people are more willing to move on from past hostilities, indicating his desire for unity and his proto-Loyalist leaning.

⁷⁹ Witherspoon, *Dominion of Providence*, 18-19.

⁸⁰ Zubly, *Stamp-Act Repealed*, 18.

⁸¹ Zubly, *Stamp-Act Repealed*, 27.

God as the Source of Political Authority

Both Witherspoon and Zubly explicitly discuss the origins of political authority. Whereas Zubly sees authority for lawmaking as coming from God down to the king and men, Witherspoon sees it as coming from the people to their legislators. Zubly wrote, “Your Lordship believes a Supreme Ruler of the earth, and that the small and great must stand before him at last.”⁸² Authority is given to rulers from God, and God keeps the authority of kings in check. Rulers will give an account for how they used their authority and be judged accordingly. On the other hand, Witherspoon complains that Parliament is “separated from us, independent from us, and have an interest in opposing us.”⁸³ Witherspoon thinks that a legislative body that is separate from the people it governs cannot have authority. According to Witherspoon, the people have received authority from God to govern themselves, but Zubly views the monarch as the one who receives authority to govern from God. By viewing authority as coming down hierarchically from God to the king to the people, Zubly aligns himself with the Tories of the 17th century, but by viewing authority as flowing from God to the people to their representatives, Witherspoon aligns himself with the Whigs in both the 18th century and 17th century sense of the term.

Zubly and Witherspoon also show their opposing conceptions of the natural hierarchy by rejecting the idea of unlimited sovereignty on different grounds. While Zubly argues against a divine right of kings to govern unjustly, Witherspoon argues against unlimited authority of the House of Commons over the colonists. Zubly wrote that proponents of unlimited sovereignty “have ascribed a divine right of kings to govern wrong.”⁸⁴ His concern throughout this

⁸² Zubly, *Law of Liberty*, 8.

⁸³ Witherspoon, *Dominion of Providence*, 41.

⁸⁴ Zubly, *Law of Liberty*, 36.

discussion is the king, not Parliament, and he vehemently opposes any argument that the authority of a monarch extends into permitting unjust actions. On the other hand, Witherspoon disputes the “uncontrolled authority of the House of Commons” over the colonists.⁸⁵ He thinks that this is unjust and unnatural, because the authority of the House of Commons resides in the people that give the representatives their authority, and no colonists are represented in the assembly. Notably absent is any discussion of the divine right of kings to govern, or even any mention of the king at all.

Zubly delivered his sermon, *The Law of Liberty*, during the height of tension between the colonies and Britain, but his royalist bent shone through in his justifications for his otherwise orthodox Whiggish beliefs. While he disagrees that the divine right of kings gives them the authority to govern unjustly, he does not outright deny the divine right of kings to govern. Even if he did deny the divine right of kings, he clearly still sees authority to govern as coming from God to a king, like a monarchist. However, Witherspoon sees the authority to govern as coming from God to the people who are governed, who then vest their authority in representatives. This is a republican conception of government, not a monarchist conception of government.

Zubly’s view of King George III was not stagnant. While Zubly saw King George III as an affectionate father to his people in 1766, by the outbreak of the Revolution in 1775 he saw the king as a great monarch that lacked the affection of a father. In a 1766 sermon celebrating the repeal of the Stamp Act, Zubly refers to King George III as “the father of his people.”⁸⁶ On the other hand, in his 1775 sermon, *The Law of Liberty*, Zubly encourages the colonists to not be hasty to sever ties with the crown, because King George III has “the greatness of a monarch” to

⁸⁵ Witherspoon, *Considerations*, 16.

⁸⁶ Zubly, *Stamp-Act Repealed*, 22.

which he just needed to “superadd . . . the tenderness of a father.”⁸⁷ Zubly wrote these two sermons with different purposes in mind, which led him to present different views of George III. In the *The Stamp-Act Repealed*, Zubly is praising the king for hearing the colonists and thanking God in the form of a sermon. However, by 1775 the colonists’ requests are no longer being listened to, so Zubly resorts to the argument that “the king can do no wrong” under the law.⁸⁸ His hope, then, is that the king will act like a loving father again. Zubly’s view of King George III became increasingly bleaker as the Revolution progressed, though he continued to be deferential to his authority as the monarch instituted by God.

⁸⁷ Zubly, *Law of Liberty*, 46.

⁸⁸ Zubly, *Law of Liberty*, 46.

Conclusion

While Witherspoon's political leanings align closely with the radical Whiggism of most other Patriot founding fathers, Zubly's politics are best described as a form of enlightened royalism. Even though Zubly was a Presbyterian, he did not have a Whiggish bent, as Miller claims. Rather, Zubly desired a constitutional monarchy led by an enlightened king that granted religious and civil freedom to his people, which indicates that he had a bent towards enlightened Royalism. However, Zubly's thought was not traditional or backwards in comparison to Witherspoon. Instead, both men envisioned a politically modern nation, but their visions differed.

Similarly, both Witherspoon and Zubly integrated their Enlightenment thought and influences with the underlying Reformed and evangelical faith, making them both enlightened evangelicals. However, Zubly's integration of Reformed piety and the enlightenment concept of freedom fails to do justice to the historic Reformed doctrines of sanctification and God's mercy. On the other hand, while scholars often accuse Witherspoon of committing to his Scottish Enlightenment idea of ethical sensibility and moral intuition at the expense of his Reformed faith, this apparent conflict is due to a common misunderstanding of Reformed doctrine, not inconsistency in Witherspoon's thought. Thus, Witherspoon's and Zubly's opposing political leanings flowed out of their differing application of enlightened evangelical thought to the political realm.

In an age in which the church is increasingly polarized along political lines, we can learn from the wisdom and mistakes of Witherspoon and Zubly, both of whom pastored their congregations through times of far-reaching division and political turmoil. First, both men desired to remain faithful to their evangelical faith. Accusing "the other side" of selling out their

faith with underlying political motives rarely leads to a fruitful discussion. Instead, we would be wise to abstain from commenting on someone's motives unless the circumstances clearly warrant such a discussion. Nonetheless, I have argued that Zubly contradicted his Reformed faith at times to make a political point, albeit unintentionally. Thus, second, we should intently watch ourselves to ensure that we remain faithful to our confession. Inconsistencies and errors will naturally find their way into our systems of thought, especially during passionate political debates. Believers would be wise to constantly be reforming their own thought and lives to the standard of Scripture and ought to reform themselves before attempting to reform others. Third, and finally, Witherspoon and Zubly show that politics and church life are inseparable. It is impossible to examine the political leanings of Witherspoon and Zubly without also examining their underlying theological and philosophical convictions. Therefore, we would be wise to stop pretending there is such a thing as apolitical theology or an apolitical sermon. In the same way that everyone is a theologian, whether he realizes it or not, every theologian is also a political theorist, whether he realizes it or not. Supposedly apolitical abstractions from theologians and ministers are dangerously unclear and ought to be avoided.

During the American Revolution, both Witherspoon and Zubly took public stances on political issues rather than shying away from the conflict. Their enlightened evangelical process of reasoning proves interesting in the broader scope of early American history, because Witherspoon and Zubly show continuities and discontinuities between the thought of the Great Awakening and later Revolutionary thought. Further inquiry into Witherspoon's connection to the Great Awakening as president of the College of New Jersey, a New Light school, could provide more insight into this connection between the Great Awakening and the American Revolution. While Enlightenment thought during the American Revolution has historically

received the most attention from scholars, perhaps a renewed emphasis on evangelical thought during the Revolution would better explain the consciousness of the American people.

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