

*Appendix W: Did Calvin Found America?  
What Were The Religious Scruples of the  
Founding Fathers?*

**Introduction**

Those who believe that there is no free-will, such as Calvinists, have never promoted that there are God-given liberties that no human government can infringe. There are, however, many Calvinists who fantasize that they should be given the lion's share credit for the American Revolution. These claims are ridiculous.

In 1776, true Calvinists could not support any kind of revolt from the King of England's rule in the colonies. Calvin insisted that a Christian owed unjust rulers a duty of obedience unless the ruler sought to prevent the true worship of God. (Calvin's *Institutes* 4.20.30-1.)<sup>1</sup> Because in the colonies no such prohibition was present, true Calvinists could not support any kind of revolt.

John Zubly (1724-1781) was a Calvinist preacher and delegate from Georgia in the Continental Congress. Based upon Calvinist doctrine, he resisted any kind of independence from Britain.<sup>2</sup> His reasoning was heeded by the majority of Calvinists. Despite the presence in the Colonies of significant numbers in the Calvinist denominations (*e.g.*, Puritan, Presbyterian and Congregational), they are virtually invisible among the signers of the Declaration of Independence in 1776, the Constitution of 1789, and the First Congress.<sup>3</sup>

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1. This flows logically from Calvin's belief that God is sovereign over evil, and directs it. (See page 461 *et seq.*) Thus, to seek to overthrow an unjust ruler is to contravene the sovereign *will* of God.

2. "John Joachim Zubly," *Wikipedia*.

3. See "Statistical Studies of Founders' Faith" on page 4 *et seq.*

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## Calvinist Fantasies About A Calvinist-Driven American Revolution

Despite the statistical evidence, Loraine Boettner in his *Calvinism in History: Calvinism in America*<sup>4</sup> wishes to give the lion's share of responsibility for the American Revolution to Calvinists. He, in fact, says it was a "Presbyterian" revolution. However, this is a clearly exaggerated analysis. Most of the 'proof' is based on loose-statements by British enemies of the young colonies. They liked to blame Calvinists precisely because of the sour-reputation of Calvinists and their reputation as dissenters in England to the Crown.

By asserting the Revolutionists were Calvinists, the British authorities could besmirch our Revolution with the bad taint of Calvinism and make it also appear it was an extension of the domestic opponents of the Crown in England. Boettner then relies upon historians who then cite these weak second-hand claims to weave a story that is wholly unrealistic. Yet, based on such sketchy evidence, Boettner makes the following extraordinarily baseless claim: "History is eloquent in declaring that American democracy was born of Christianity and *that that Christianity was Calvinism*." Then Boettner quotes the most preposterous claim of all by Ranke, a scholar, who said: "John Calvin was the virtual founder of America."<sup>5</sup>

### Reality: Calvinism Inspires Tyrannical Behavior

One of the most important lessons of the Servetus Affair, and the aftermath at Geneva, is about the origin of tyrannical behavior. *Those who believe in there being no free will, whether Calvinists or materialists, will have no reason to resist making themselves tyrants.* Because Calvin-

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4. <http://graceonlinelibrary.org/articles/full.asp?id=70%7C%7C868> (accessed 6/8/08)

5. Quoted without citation in Egbert Watson Smith, *The Creed of Presbyterians* (Baker & Taylor Co., 1901) at 119.

ism denies free will exists in man at all, true Calvinists can never imagine that a tyranny infringes any God-given inalienable right to freedom of conscience or thought. This is precisely because without a belief in a free-will, then how could Calvinists *believe a right* to free-expression exists? A right to freedom of religion exists? But if you deny free-will in man, then you would behave like Calvin did—as a tyrant, or you would suggest what Fisher Ames—the lone Calvinist in the early Congress—did in 1804—a resort to tyranny, as discussed below.

As a result, it should not surprise us to find that except for a very small number, none of the Founding Fathers of the U.S.A. were known Calvinists.

A website eager to find Calvinists among the Founding Fathers concedes that there is scant evidence of their presence:

Despite the prevalence of Calvinism among Colonials, **most** Founding Fathers were apparently not identified primarily by the label ‘Calvinist.’ Among all of the people who were signers of the Declaration of Independence, signers of the U.S. Constitution, and members of the very first U.S. Congress and Senate, there is **only one man** whose religious affiliation is identified as ‘Calvinist:’ **Fisher Ames**.<sup>6</sup>

We have a lot to say about Fisher Ames in a short while.<sup>7</sup> We will prove that Ames as the lone open Calvinist in the early Congress made it clear that he did not share in any of the American values that shaped the United States Constitution. In 1804, Ames advocated repealing almost every fundamental liberty of the young nation. He felt it was an experiment that had run its course. The republic was teetering

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6. “Famous Calvinists,” [http://www.adherents.com/largecom/fam\\_calvin.html](http://www.adherents.com/largecom/fam_calvin.html) (accessed 6/5/08).

7. See “Ames’ Calvinist Spirit At Odds With Madison’s Constitution” on page 8.

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upon collapse unless tyrannical measures identical to those employed in the Geneva Republic in Calvin's day were quickly put in place.

### Statistical Studies of Founders' Faith

If one examines those who signed the original Constitution, and judge among those whose religious affiliations are known,<sup>8</sup> only five were Presbyterian (Calvinist) and one was Congregationalist (Calvinist in that era). And there was only one Lutheran. The remaining 80% all belonged to denominations that believed in free will, and hence the sanctity of freedom of conscience.

If we move past the Declaration of Independence and

**TABLE 1. Founding Fathers of Denominations Believing in Free Will**

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Denomination	Number
Episcopalian	17
Quaker	3
Anglican	2
Methodist	2
Roman Catholic	1
Total	25/31 = 80%

the Constitution to the first elected congress, then the numbers improve to 48. This means 29% of the first congress belonged to Calvinist denominations.<sup>9</sup> Yet, this leaves a significant 71% belonging to Christian denominations which believed in free-will.

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8. <http://www.bizforum.org/FFR.htm> (accessed 6/8/08).

9. [http://www.adherents.com/largecom/fam\\_calvin.html](http://www.adherents.com/largecom/fam_calvin.html) (accessed 6/8/08).

This is not intended to deprecate the many Presbyterians/Calvinists who participated in valiant efforts as soldiers and even commanders in our Revolutionary War. But this evidence proves *the spiritual leadership for the revolution came from Christians of a different stripe*.

Rather, what is more fair to say is that the Calvinists in America who desired to free the U.S. from Britain were numerous although a minority within the Calvinist churches. They joined the American Revolution because their motives aligned at significant points with other Christians.

For example, Calvinists had as much interest as anyone in preventing the Anglican church becoming the official church in the colonies where religious liberty reigned. Yet, Calvinists, unlike other Christians, were dreaming of establishing localized Genevas where religion was forced, mandatory, and rigorously enforced by the judiciary, *e.g.*, as witnessed at Salem under Winthrop beginning in 1629, etc.<sup>10</sup>

Thus, the Calvinists of America who supported the revolution did not aspire to a freedom of religion *for all citizens*. They did not share the spirit which animated the overwhelming majority of Christians who were leading the American Revolution. These other Christians wanted everyone to enjoy a freedom of religion even from an ‘enlightened’ new Geneva in America.

Consequently, the predominating Christian spirit in the Revolution came from Christians who believed in human free will. They wanted freedom from a Calvinist marriage of the church to the state as much as from any other kind of marriage of church-and-state.

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10. “John Calvin’s system was the archetype of Winthrop’s. In youth, Winthrop studied carefully the works of John Calvin.” John A. Taylor, *British Monarchy, English Church Establishment, and Civil Liberty* (Greenwood Publishing, 1993) at 34.

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### *Proof From Madison Contrasted to Ames*

The difference between Calvinist Christians and the type of Christian leading the American Revolution is demonstrable by comparing the views of the lone self-avowed Calvinist in the early Congress — Fisher Ames — to the views of James Madison. As you may know, Madison was the actual writer/drafter of our Constitution and Bill of Rights. He is sometimes called the *Father of the Constitution*.

First, we will start with Madison. He became President in 1809. He was of the stripe of man who regarded the Christian religion as having been debased when it ever had been entwined with the civil arm to persecute heretics.

In 1784, Madison wrote in his *Memorial and Remonstrance against Religious Assessments* his rationale for rejecting laws intended to establish the Christian religion over other religions. In this speech, he declaimed ***against the church-state bond that persecuted heretics in ages past*** which resulted in “*spiritual tyranny*”:

During almost fifteen centuries has the legal establishment of Christianity been on trial. What have been its fruits? More or less in all places, pride and indolence in the Clergy, ignorance and servility in the laity; in both, superstition, bigotry and **persecution**.

What influence, in fact, have ecclesiastical establishments had on society? In some instances they have been seen to erect a ***spiritual tyranny on the ruins of the civil authority***;<sup>11</sup> on many instances they have been seen ***upholding the thrones of political tyranny***; in ***no instance have they been the guardians of the liberties of the people***. Rulers who wish to subvert the public liberty may have found an

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11. It seems most likely that Madison here is specifically referring to Calvin's role in the Servetus Affair.

established clergy convenient auxiliaries. A just government, instituted to secure and perpetuate it, needs them not.<sup>12</sup>

Such a government will be best supported by protecting every citizen in the enjoyment of his religion with the same equal hand which protects his person and his property, — by neither invading the equal rights of any sect, nor suffering any sect to invade those of another.

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Torrents of **blood** have spilled in the Old World in consequence of vain attempts of the **secular arm to extinguish religious discord** by prescribing all differences in religious opinion. Time has at length revealed the true remedy. Every relaxation of narrow and rigorous policy, wherever it has been tried, has been found to assuage the disease.<sup>13</sup>

The original purpose of the Founding Fathers in the First Amendment is thus clear. Among other purposes, it was to guard the state from ever engaging in a Calvinist-scheme of controlling the religion of man by persecuting heresy using the civil arm of the state. It is a lesson lost on some prominent Christian voices today like Pat Robertson.<sup>14</sup>

Instead, Madison wanted a religious liberty which was *at total odds* with Calvinist doctrine. It was this spirit at total odds with Calvinist doctrine which was the fundamental driving force of the Revolution. The American Revolution was thus not principally made by those who shared Calvin's

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12. William Cabell Rives, *History of the Life and Times of James Madison* (1859) at 637, top para. and bottom para. However, Calvinists persist in seeing in Madison "echoes of Calvin." But the idea of checks-and-balances because of human proclivity to evil is based on history, and not a religious doctrine of *human* depravity.

13. William Cabell Rives, *History of the Life and Times of James Madison* (1859) at 638.

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values, as Boettner claimed. It was made primarily by the followers of Christ who saw the crimes of Calvin and the church over centuries, and never wanted those kind of injustices to ever be repeated again on the face of this earth. They wanted religious liberty for everyone.

### **Ames' Calvinist Spirit At Odds With Madison's Constitution**

Fisher Ames, the lone self-professed Calvinist in Congress, in 1804 was the first member of Congress who sought to undo the civil liberties against religious establishment. He grounded this on Calvinist doctrine. This demonstrates two spirits within Christian denominations were at odds with each other. There was the Christian spirit of men like Madison who wanted religious toleration of all. And then there was the Calvinist spirit of men like Ames who lost patience very quickly with the experiment, and suggested its repeal.

This is set forth with subtlety in Ames' 1804 work entitled *The Dangers of American Liberty*.

Ames began this piece, like Calvin did of Geneva when he subverted it. Ames smeared the entire nation he lived in as populated by libertines. Ames argued that the country was suffering from a "licentiousness fatal to Liberty."

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14. While I strongly admire the spiritual work of Pat Robertson, I find it troubling he says the "separation of church and state" is a "lie of the left," and Christians must "work together .... [to win] back control of the institutions that have been taken from them over the past 70 years." (Pat Roberston, *Pat Robertson Perspective* (Fall 1991).) Since 70 years ago, there was no official religion in the USA, I therefore doubt Pat means what this quote sounds like. But Pat is wrong factually. Our founders did understand the First Amendment to create a wall of separation. How that was originally meant is different than how recently applied, and if this mistake were corrected, Pat I would imagine would have no problem in saying he too believes in separation of church and state. Yet, the quote above remains troubling. Due to the attack on religion that 'separation of church and state' has been employed to perform, one sees that the Christian reaction is to seek defense in *rejoining* the state to the church. Hence, the current wrong done to religious observation has led to overreaction, and a retrograde intention to undermine a foundational principle of our government.



As a result of such decline, Ames claimed there has arisen an “hostility to our religious institutions.”<sup>15</sup> Then Ames says the cure is to reverse the course whereby our “religious institutions” have been “*abandoned by our laws*.” But religion, he said, is the support of all governments. What should the government do now that it can see that religion institutions are teetering? Ames said with the government taking no proactive steps, the only basis to religious institutions is mere *habit*. Ames says the only reason why religious institutions have not yet collapsed was due to the “tenaciousness of ...even a degenerate people” to their “habits.”<sup>16</sup>

Hence, in point one, Ames is arguing in a round-about manner for the state-establishment of religion, just as at Geneva. It is the only way the laws no longer abandon the cause of religion, and the force of law can restore the languishing, almost dead state of religion as Ames saw it.

Second, Ames will give us a further step to stop this decline. Speaking just like Calvin, Ames says we must prefer in the appointment of judges men who “profess the best moral and *religious* principles....” (*Id.* at 356.) In other words, legal acumen is not vital. Instead, because if point one is established (*i.e.*, state support for religious institutions is necessary), now the judge himself must play a role in enforcing morals and religious values. Hence, Ames says we need judges so trained in religious and morals to restrain the “licentiousness” all about us. Thus, Ames argued, just like Calvin would, that everyone around them is a Libertine, and

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15. Ames, “Fisher Ames 1758-1808: The Dangers of American Liberty,” in Charles S. Hyneman, *American Political Writing During the Founding Era: 1760-1805* (1983) vol. 2; *Works of Fisher Ames* (Little Brown, 1854) at 345, 356.

Ames is an excellent writer, filled with brilliant wit. When Fisher Ames talks about the dangers of democracy, as distinct from a republican form of government, he is excellent. Yet, he saw the USA as overcome by “democratic licentiousness” (*Id.*, at 348), and that some of the experiment had to be reversed.

16. *Works of Fisher Ames* (Little Brown, 1854) at 356.

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the only solution is to empower judges to enforce morals and religion. To this end, the church would act as watchdogs of religious and moral principles to feed fresh charges to the judges on a regular basis.

Third, the parallel to Calvin's doctrine continues as Ames takes aim at the press writers. Ames clearly expresses that such men deserve to die for the words they utter. Rather than the Press serving as a tool to fight tyranny, Ames says the "press has been the base and venal instrument of the very men whom it *ought to gibbet* [*i.e.*, hang] to universal *abhorrence*." (*Id.*, at 357.) Ames means the press writers should be hanged for the things they say. Ames would bring back Calvin's persecution of Servetus-like writers as an everyday occurrence had he the chance.

Fourth and finally, Calvin said that Scripture supports that obedience should only be given "one man" to "whose will all others are subjected." (*Institutes* 4.7.) However, also Calvin did say that judging solely by human experience that aristocracy combined with democracy is the best form of government. (*Institutes* 4.8.) That is, government works best when the aristocrats hold the right to vote.

What would Ames say about what change he would like to see in the fundamental shape of our country?

Ames said the right to vote improperly belongs now to immoral corrupt hands who cannot fathom the information necessary to make any informed decision. "It is in vain, it is indeed childish to say, that an enlightened people will understand their own affairs." (*Works of Fisher Ames, supra*, at 364.) "How are these millions of students to have access to the means of information?" (*Id.*, at 364.)

Hence, Ames leaves us to imply only one solution: the right to vote should be restricted to only an informed elite who can vote and elect from their own elite members, *i.e.*, an aristocracy.

Thus, Ames, as the lone open Calvinist in the early Congress, reminds us what Calvinists truly believed back then. They shared no agenda in common with the majority on

issues of free-will, freedom of speech, freedom of the press, freedom of religion, and the right of universal suffrage (of minimally-propertied men). Ames shows us the heart of the Calvinists would have been, had they been the leaders of the Revolution, to restore the tyrannical regime at Geneva under Calvin. In fact, it can be truly said that no principles of liberty in any government was more antithetical to Calvinist political values than the original United States of America and its Constitution.

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*Servetus' Mention in Legal Literature*

Of interest in legal history is the discussion of the Servetus Affair in *one* legal decision. In *Ramsey v. Hicks*, 44 Ind. App. 490, 525 (Ind. Ct. App. 1909), the court rejected using the courts to resolve a schism in a church. One side begged the court to use its power to heal the division. To this invitation, the court cited the “curling thread of white smoke” upon which went the “soul of Servetus...to God.” Here is this witty opinion that enforces a separation of the courts from the church, and thus truly reflects the meaning of the phrase *separation of church and state*:

“The counsel say: ‘The tendency in the Christian church is confessedly toward unification, and this unification is regarded as the wise and Christian cause which should obtain through Christendom. Have the courts no duty to assist in the great work?’ There has been sounded throughout the case a tone not unfamiliar in history. Unification has been the tendency, as counsel say. Philip of Spain sought it, and the courts of his time had a duty laid upon them. The judgments of the *inquisition* were formed to ‘assist in the great work.’ Haughty priest and zealous ruler, bearing fagot and sword, have ridden fast and far. ***On yonder curling thread***”

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*of white smoke the soul of Servetus went to God.* The courts do have a duty to perform, and so long as that duty is regarded the most humble dweller in the hills may worship in his own way, in his own house, according to the dictates of his own conscience, secure and unafraid. Petition overruled.”