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Dans Revue française d’études américaines 2010/3 (n° 125), pages 13 à 26

Éditions Belin

ISSN 0397-7870
ISBN 9782701157658
DOI 10.3917/rfea.125.0013

Article disponible en ligne à l’adresse
https://www.cairn.info/revue-francaise-d-etudes-americaines-2010-3-page-13.htm

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“Religion Governed by Terror”: A Deist Critique of Fearful Christianity in the Early American Republic

Kirsten Fischer

Evangelical Protestantism grew exponentially in the early American Republic, with Baptist and Methodist sects spearheading the most popular religious revivals. The evangelical conversion experience invoked powerful emotions: an overwhelming sensation of one’s own sinfulness, followed by recognition of human helplessness and utter dependence on God’s mercy for salvation. Whether that divine mercy would be forthcoming was unclear—certainly it would be unmerited—and fear of God’s judgment therefore made sense, as did fear of temptation into greater sin and trepidation regarding one’s...
ultimate fate after death. Although the sacrifice and resurrection of Jesus Christ offered the possibility for salvation, full confidence in redemption was misplaced, for no one could ever fully overcome the human penchant for sin. In this evangelical context, fear was both appropriate and rational. It offered a useful counterweight to sinful pride and might serve as a catalyst in the process of conversion. Fear had a positive role to play in creating the humility that would hopefully precede the experience of a saving grace.

Outsiders to the revivalist movements had different responses to the fear stoked by evangelical Protestantism. The farther away a person stood from the tenets of orthodox Calvinism, the stronger the distaste for the emotional turbulence associated with evangelical conversion. The most distant of all were the deists, for whom fear played no constructive role whatsoever in religious experience. That is because the “natural religion” of the deists posited a benevolent but distant Supreme Being, one who had endowed human beings with reason, compassion, and an inner moral compass—everything they needed to improve the human condition, enjoy the bounties of nature, and achieve happiness. This deity did not disrupt the laws of nature with miracles or engage in acts of revelation. The Bible was a book like any other, written by humans and subject to criticism for its inconsistencies and improbabilities. Deists expressed skepticism if not outright disbelief regarding the divinity of Jesus and the notion of atonement and salvation. Whether Jesus was divine or not, by what notion of justice could his sacrifice ever make up for the sins of others? Even more importantly, why should one assume that human nature was inherently bad? In the deist scenario, religious fears about sin and salvation were unwarranted. Worse: fear could inhibit rational thought and action, getting in the way of achieving humanity’s fullest potential.

Vastly different assessments of the value and function of religiously-inspired fear shaped the disagreements over religion in the early United States. This essay explores how one prominent American freethinker critiqued the role of fear in evangelical Christianity. Elihu Palmer (1764-1806) was a former Presbyterian minister who became a strong advocate for deism in the early American Republic. In the 1790s Palmer traveled throughout the United States giving lectures and founding deist societies. In 1801 Palmer expressed his views in a 200-page book, Principles of Nature: or, A Development of the Moral Causes of Happiness and Misery Among the Human Species. In the last few years of his life he published a newspaper that featured essays by Thomas Paine, Palmer himself, local freethinkers writing under pseudonyms, and the serialized reprint of Rousseau’s “Creed of a Savoyard Priest.” Together, Palmer and Paine provided the main impetus behind efforts to popularize deism in the United States.

While Palmer had no doubt about what he meant by “deism,” modern-day scholars find the term so capacious as to be nearly without meaning.
Deism was not a system of faith as much as an attitude of skepticism and defiance toward religious establishments. Its adherents disavowed sectarianism of all kinds, endorsed only the most basic statements of faith, such as that there is a God who should be worshipped, and they never established themselves institutionally as a church. No deist doctrine appeared, and people who identified themselves as deists held widely differing views about the nature and activity of what they variously called the Supreme Being, First Cause, Creator of the Universe, Nature’s God, the God of Nature, Divine Providence, Great Principle, or Grand Architect—terms meant to evoke a deity different from the biblical God. Individualism was certainly part of the allure of deism. “My own mind is my own church,” insisted Thomas Paine. “I am of a sect by myself, as far as I know,” claimed Thomas Jefferson. American freethinkers like Jefferson, Paine, James Madison, Ethan Allen, Elihu Palmer, Benjamin Franklin, and the poet Philip Freneau each had distinctive religious understandings that changed over their lifetimes. But if these men did not fit neatly into a single intellectual category called “deism,” they did share skepticism about revealed religion. They questioned theological doctrines, relied on reason to find answers to metaphysical questions, and expressed considerable aversion toward any religious authority. Together, they created an intellectual atmosphere of free-thought in which they were peers, if not always friendly companions.5

Deists were opposed by Christians who themselves also held a broad range of views, doctrinally speaking, and disagreed with one another heartily over them, but who affirmed the divinity of Jesus and accepted the Bible as divinely inspired. The immense alarm with which Christian ministers responded to the appearance of deist thought in America would make it appear that deism had become widely popular. In fact, it seems to have inspired relatively few. Numbers are hard to come by since deist societies did not keep extensive membership records or meeting minutes. In America, most of the activity centered in Philadelphia and New York, where working men and mechanics apparently attended society meetings alongside educated professionals. Deists published a few newspapers between 1800 and 1805 that suffered chronic underfunding, and by 1815 the deist societies had dissolved. On the whole, it was a movement made famous by its enemies, who rightly saw that deist ideas posed a serious intellectual challenge to orthodoxy, and who feared deism might gain broad appeal in a revolutionary and irreverent age.6

In his day, Elihu Palmer proved an outspoken opponent of the Christian faith. He logically rejected all revealed religions as equally false, but the presence of a clear Christian majority in the United States led Palmer to focus his attacks on the New Testament and its clerical advocates. Throughout his critique, Palmer relies on a rhetorical sleight of hand: he makes orthodox Calvinism stand in for all Christianity. He writes in general terms about
“Christianity” when really he is describing a particular Protestant strand, namely Calvinism with its doctrinal focus on complete human depravity and utter dependence on God for salvation. Palmer purposefully overlooks liberal versions of Christianity such as the mainline Congregationalists in New England and the Anglicans in the South whose “rational religion” combined belief in the Bible and its miracles with the use of reason to understand Scripture. These believers expressed considerable optimism about the possibilities for human self-improvement, moral conduct, and earthly happiness. In their assessment of human potential, deists and liberal Christians had more in common than Palmer ever allowed. But Palmer chose instead to describe (without specifying) the Calvinist focus on innate human sinfulness and the terrifying prospect of eternal damnation, implying with his general language about “Christianity” that such views were central to any form of Christian belief.7

Palmer’s skewed image of Christianity-cum-Calvinism had a clear purpose: depictions of “Christianity” as a terrifying, even terrorizing religion would expose it as harmful and false. Like Paine’s Age of Reason, Palmer’s writing would instantly reveal to its readers the spurious scare tactics upon which all Christianity was presumably built, helping to sweep away those superstitions forever. For that reason, Palmer harped on the emotionally draining messages of original sin that Calvinist evangelicals spread throughout the early Republic. But Palmer never recognized—or never accepted—the reasons why fear remained important, even valuable, to the evangelical experience. An analysis of Palmer’s critique reveals a fundamental incomprehension of the positive role of fear in evangelical piety. This misunderstanding hindered Palmer from addressing believers more effectively and points to a larger—and still on-going—disagreement in America about the value of fearful emotions in religious experience.8

Born in 1764 as the eighth child of a Connecticut farming couple, Palmer attended Dartmouth College and then commenced his career as a Presbyterian minister, preaching briefly in Massachusetts before moving to Long Island. Palmer soon gained notoriety for his unconventional sermons. On one Thanksgiving Day, for example, Palmer avoided the usual talk of original sin and instead “exhorted his hearers to spend the day joyfully in innocent festivity, and to render themselves as happy as possible.” Listeners repeatedly chided him for his unorthodox sermons, but he continued to focus on moral precepts and avoided talking about Biblical miracles and the divinity of Christ. In private conversations Palmer emphatically rejected original sin and expressed skepticism about various other points of Christian doctrine. His congregation noticed. After only half a year in the pulpit, Palmer lost his position and moved to Philadelphia in 1789, where he and his wife began raising a family. Palmer continued to preach, this time as a guest minister to various Baptist
congregations, but by then he had become thoroughly “disgusted” with preaching to listeners who expected a Calvinist message.9

Seeking like-minded companions, Palmer joined the Universal Society in 1791. Founded the previous year by John Fitch, steamboat inventor and freethinker, this club of some 30 members met weekly for skeptical discussion of life’s larger questions. What is the human condition, and is salvation necessary? Is there an afterlife? Can religion be made useful to society, and if so, what must be its principles? The Universal Society rejected the Calvinist tenets of original sin, predestination, and eternal damnation, but they kept their discussions to themselves so as not to disturb their more orthodox neighbors.10

Such compromises did not satisfy Palmer for long. That same year, in 1791, he advertised in Philadelphia’s National Gazette his upcoming sermon against the divinity of Christ. The announcement caused a quite a stir and alienated the more cautious members of the Universal Society. Palmer never got to make his Socinian speech about the humanity of Jesus. As a sympathetic friend recounted later, “an immense mob assembled at an early hour before the Universalist Church, which Mr. Palmer was unable to enter.” Feeling himself to be in personal danger from the crowd, Palmer fled the city, “somewhat,” his supporter recounted, “in the stile of the ancient apostles upon similar occasions.” Palmer retreated with his family to western Pennsylvania where he began studying law in preparation for a new career.11

Upon his return to Philadelphia in the spring of 1793, Palmer passed the bar and began practicing law. But his animosity had not subsided, and on the Fourth of July he delivered an oration that denounced “priestcraft”—with which Palmer meant the work of any Christian clergy—as antithetical to “reason and liberty.”12 A month later, yellow fever struck the city, killing several thousand people. Palmer’s wife was among the dead, and he himself was permanently blinded by the disease. Twenty-nine years old and once more without a profession, Palmer sent his three children to live on his father’s farm in Connecticut. He then turned south, travelling to Augusta, Georgia, where he spent a year giving public lectures on the merits of deism and the flaws of the Christian faith. By 1796, Palmer had made New York City his home base and had helped found the New York Deistical Society and the Society of Theophilanthropists. Palmer received invitations to speak in Baltimore, Newburgh, and Philadelphia, and wherever he went, he encouraged freethinkers to establish deist societies of their own.

In 1800, Palmer helped found America’s first deist newspaper, The Temple of Reason, edited by Denis Driscol, an Irish immigrant and former priest turned deist. The newspaper blasted away at Christianity, pronouncing divine revelation absurdly implausible, the Biblical miracles ludicrous, and the Christian clergy self-servingly obscurantist in their explanation of invented dogma. Only a natural religion based on reason and an ethics based on human
nature made sense and was worthy of contemplation. The paper also reprinted excerpts from French *philosophes* such as Voltaire, Rousseau, Volney, and Condorcet. Subscribers included artisans as well as mid-level professionals, but chronically late subscription payments shut down *The Temple of Reason* after one year. Palmer’s second newspaper, *Prospect, Or View of the Moral World*, debuted in 1803, the same year Palmer married Mary Powell, the owner of the boardinghouse in which he lived. Mary, herself a convert to deism, helped Palmer edit the newspaper. The *Prospect* appeared irregularly for two years, gaining readers in New York and Pennsylvania. Then it, too, folded.13

Of more lasting success was the publication of Palmer’s book, *Principles of Nature*. Palmer published the first edition in 1801, apparently using his own newspaper press to produce the book. He published a second, revised edition the following year, and a third edition, identical to the second, in 1806. (The third edition is the source of the quotes that follow.) Later that year, the 42-year-old Palmer died unexpectedly of pleurisy while on a speaking engagement in Philadelphia. His book continued to find readers, however. Two London publishers produced editions in 1819, with a reprint in 1823. George H. Evans published editions in New York and New Jersey in 1830 and 1840, respectively. The final edition of 1841 appeared in London.14

The book offers extensive insight into Palmer’s beliefs. *Principles of Nature* makes no claim to originality, and Palmer freely cites some of the sources of his ideas. He praises John Toland and Anthony Collins among the English deists, La Mettrie and D’Holbach among the French materialists, and—repeatedly—the Count de Volney’s *Ruins: Or Meditation on the Revolutions of Empires*. Palmer culled ideas from the radical Enlightenment and combined them into his own manifesto. He hoped to help the general public cast off the superstitions of revealed religion, and one part of that project involved demonstrating the chilling effect that Christian belief had on its adherents.15

Palmer’s discussion of Christian fears can be divided into three parts: fear of God, of the devil, and of death. He also discusses the debilitating *effects* of religiously-induced fear, arguing that the psychological results of clerical fearmongering were as detrimental as they were purposefully induced. Palmer accuses the clergy of stoking anxiety for their own selfish purposes; a quest for power, not for piety, motivated the talk of a fearsome God and a God-fearing people. As noted earlier, Palmer’s language is general—he speaks generically of “Christianity,”—while his targeted examples are often sectarian and specifically Calvinist.

An example of this is the tyrannical God Palmer ascribes to all Christian believers. Like many deists before him, Palmer charged Christianity with presenting a God who is partial, merciful only to those of orthodox faith who believe very particular things about Jesus, his birth, death, resurrection, and the
possibility of salvation. To all others, Palmer claimed, whether they have heard of the Bible or not, this God offers only eternal damnation. "This terrible representation of the divinity," Palmer wrote, serves only the "purposes of systematic terror": it threatens "the partial distribution of favours, and the dreadful torture of the human race under the name of divine vengeance." How did the clergy invent such a barbarous divinity? They projected human malice and "the savage cruelty of man" onto their "imaginary God, and he appeared in turn the object of terror to every living mortal" (186-187). Such a malicious deity was a human fabrication and not worthy of worship, Palmer insisted. In this rendering God was nothing but a "capricious tyrant, who deserves neither gratitude nor admiration" (192).

The fear of God was misplaced because no such cruel deity exists. Instead, Palmer described an immutable God, "an eternal being, whose perfections guarantee the existence and harmony of the universe" (85). Palmer’s Supreme Being is not synonymous with nature, but it has the same orderly character. A god deserving of the name must be "uniform, consistent and perfect, just and equitable, and in perfect coincidence with the immortal laws of the moral and physical world" (136). This God does not intervene in world history with miracles meant to shock people, does not share the human emotions of jealousy, wrath, or lust for vengeance, demands no blood sacrifice, and damns no one to hell. Divine power is visible in the laws of nature and in the generous bounty of the world that makes life on earth possible. One need not fear the source of such even-keeled benevolence. In fact, fear of such a generous deity was a mistaken response, ungrateful and misguided.

Not a wrathful God but Christian religion itself is the source of fear, Palmer announced. But this was only to be expected from a religion so focused on the Devil. As Palmer put it: "The Christian world worships three infinite Gods, and one omniscient and omnipresent Devil." This comment was meant to provoke, and Palmer’s footnote adds that some readers objected to this claim. He retorted that whether the devil is an object of worship or only of fear, he certainly plays a big role in Christian belief. This is in keeping, Palmer continued, with the general fearfulness that characterizes Christianity. In Palmer’s words: "The worship of God consists in a very high degree, in the sentiment of fear." He recalled the Christian claims that "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, fear God and keep his commandments, etc." Palmer added that "Christian believers are also most terribly afraid of the Devil" (90-91). Given the high value placed on fear in the Christian religion, the devil is useful as a stoker of terror, should the divine Judge prove not dreadful enough. Satan and his minions are ever ready to lead believers into temptation. Believing in the devil makes fear a mental habit, one the clergy find appropriate to the human propensity for sin.

Palmer’s most scathing comments pertain to fears about death and the afterlife. Although Palmer as usual does not point explicitly to Calvinism, he
has Calvinist views in mind when he rebukes “the fear of an eternal hell, as the certain and inevitable lot of nine tenths of the human race” (120). Palmer charges church authorities with cynical manipulation: they have “awakened all the fears of weak and ignorant mortals, and taken special care to convert this to its own profit and advantage. Death, which is as natural as life, has been converted into a fruitful source of revenue […] It is not sufficient that man is everywhere subjected to […] pain, sickness, and inevitable calamities of every sort, without being alarmed by the terrors which superstition has connected with his ultimate dissolution” (203).

Palmer’s views of death were decidedly different, because he did not believe in an afterlife at all. (In this regard, he differed from most of his deist peers, who believed in the soul’s immortality and hoped to be reunited with loved ones in the afterlife.) Palmer rejected anything metaphysical, including heaven and hell, ghosts, spirits, or souls. He believed that consciousness lasted only as long as the temporary physical form to which it was bound, ceasing to exist with the death and recomposition of the corporeal being that housed it. But this image was no cause for sadness, for “Death is as natural and as necessary as life.” Palmer embraced death as an intrinsic part of the grand cycle of life, by which all existing things constantly change form, growing, decaying, and dying, only to be reformed into something new. Death was essential to “the uniform harmony and preservation of the great fabric of the universe.” No one was exempt from this general law, and why should one wish to be? Death was nothing to fear; it was simply “a change in the mode of existence,” a transition from one physical form to another (206).17

Palmer believed full acceptance of human mortality would lead to greater contentment. Understanding “the just and eternal order of organized existence […] ought to be the highest consolation of a reflecting mind” (207). Individual death might be hard to accept, but the eternity of matter, or what Palmer called the “constancy of existence” should provide “sufficient consolation to timid minds,” especially to those who feared the end of the world (125-126). Contrary to Biblical teaching, no Armageddon was in the offing. Everything will go on forever according to immutable natural law. Reality is already perfect, and acceptance of this reality could only be to the good. Death had lost its sting, not by being overcome in some metaphysical heaven, but by being accepted as part of nature’s perfection.

Palmer deplored the corrosive emotional effects of religiously-induced fear. In a religion in which God was “an object of terror and dismay,” the effects of religious contemplation were necessarily debilitating. “[M]an,” he wrote, “amidst the reveries of supernatural theology, becomes either feeble or foolish, his power relaxed, his energy is gone, and he sinks beneath the system of fear.” Palmer believed these to be the “fatal effects of all theology, but more particularly of that which is denominated Christian” (90). Rational inquiry
offers the way out of frightened paralysis, but religion had forced intelligence underground: “under the influence of clerical authority, independent reflection was effectually suppressed, and fear had destroyed all scientific efforts […]. In short, religion governed by terror, and the mind of man painfully submitted to its destructive influence” (117-118).

Palmer fought back against fear. Rather than emphasize human inadequacy and complete dependence on an inscrutable God, Palmer insisted on the “solemn truth that the powers of man are competent to provide for his happiness; they are equal to the exigencies of existence. It is superstition that has made him a fool, it is religious tyranny that has enslaved his mind, perverted his faculties, and tarnished the glory of his intellectual energies” (159-160). Banishing this false religion would revive proper optimism about the human capacity for self-improvement and happiness. Fear was anathema to this vision of hope and change.

Palmer’s own assumptions about fear made it impossible for him to grasp the positive value of fear for the orthodox Calvinists he assailed. For them, fear is not an end in itself; it is useful because it helps keep people humble. Grace comes only to the humble, to those who put their faith in God. Jonathan Edwards, the influential minister from Massachusetts who did so much to promote the Great Awakening, explained the sweetness that overcame him when he realized his complete and utter dependence on God. Relief and comfort came with the insight that he himself could do nothing to effect his own salvation—it was all in God’s hands. This insight became possible only when Edwards stopped trying to achieve salvation through his own efforts. His utter dejection about his ability to influence his own fate led to the humility that opened him up to the experience of grace. For Edwards and other ministers, fear is the precursur, the enabler of humility. The fire and brimstone sermons were not meant to leave listeners in a state of terror, but to open them to the power and glory of God’s saving love.18

Where evangelicals like Edwards saw a necessary humility, deists like Palmer saw unwarranted humiliation. This humiliation was not a useful thing, in Palmer’s view. It led to helpless paralysis and the inability to use human capacities for improvement of the human condition here and now. But this only pointed out another difference of opinion. Evangelical Christians remained focused on the after-life, because the eternal fate that awaited immortal souls mattered much more than the brief time lived on earth. By contrast, Palmer was concerned only with this life as experienced in embodied form. This life should ideally hold as much contentment as possible, and fear could only hinder that goal. Both Palmer and his opponents agreed on the debilitating effects of fear, but they gave different value to those effects because of their respective understanding of life, death, and the ultimate fate of humankind.

Freeteachers like Palmer could be said to fear nothing but fear itself. Fear was the problem, and religions that exacerbated the feeling should be
discredited as false. Dread makes humans into abject, cowering creatures rather than the upright rational beings they were meant to be. Reason alone could combat superstition and liberate people from frightening religious phantoms.

Many Christians, and especially Calvinists, saw fear differently. Fear was the appropriate, indeed reasonable, response to innate human depravity, the complete dependence on a mysterious and unknowable God, and the uncertainty of one’s fate in the afterlife. Fear was only natural and right, and it had the additional effect of encouraging moral conduct in the face of the human tendency to sin. It was rational to fear judgment day and a fate of eternal damnation, as the chances of redemption were slight indeed. From this orthodox perspective, Palmer was dangerous in his brash disavowal of fear. He offered the frightening prospect of a fearless deism based entirely on error, namely on the wrongly confident assessment of human powers. Christian critics of deism disliked its overweening pride and narcissism, its obliviousness to the fallen condition of humanity and the likelihood of hell. In its propensity to foster self-love among individuals, in its temptation to a self-satisfied complacency, this dangerous deism offered only falsehoods and false hopes, making it terrifying in its own right.19

Eighteenth-century disagreements about the usefulness of religious fear reveal a vast difference in opinion about human nature. Some saw sinful pride where others saw optimistic self-reliance; some saw helpful humility where others saw harmful humiliation. Fear accordingly appeared either appropriate and useful, or misplaced and debilitating. The chasm in perspective on the social and religious uses of fear would not be bridged in the eighteenth century, and these strikingly different views persist in America to the present day. Current evangelical movements in the United States carry on a long-standing tradition when they announce the terrors of the pending apocalypse and the strife and suffering that will accompany the end times. Fear continues to serve as a powerful motivation in certain religious communities, even as outsiders express doubt about fear’s potential to achieve positive social change.20 Such disagreements trace their roots to the Enlightenment-era. If history is any indication, modern-day polemics on either side will do nothing to resolve the conflicting assessments of the value of fear to religious experience.

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**NOTES**


4. Herrick, for example, says “[t]he actual religious convictions of the Deists are so varied and complex as to raise questions about the descriptive usefulness of the term Deist, and controversy surrounds the theological commitments of even individual Deists” (*The Radical Rhetoric of the English Deists,* 23-24).


8. For a modern-day version of Palmer’s concerns, see Bivins, *Religion of Fear*. For the lament that rationalized religion has made an omnipotent and mysterious God seem insipid and tame, see Turner, *Without God, Without Creed* and Herrick, *The Making of the New Spirituality*.


12. See *Extracts from an Oration, delivered at Federal Point, near Philadelphia, on the Fourth of July, 1793, by Elihu Palmer, citizen of Philadelphia*.

13. See Koch, chapter 3. On Driscoll’s collaboration with Palmer, see Durey, *Transatlantic Radicals and the Early American Republic*, 195-97. John Fellows said Mrs. Palmer, “now dead, was a woman of good sense, and fine moral feelings, and possessed as strong an interest as her husband in promoting the cause of truth.” Fellows in *Posthumous Pieces*, 3-4. Most American newspapers published before 1820 did not last more than three years. See Pasley, “The Tyranny of Printers,” 52.


15. I am currently at work on a book that will show how Palmer brought the most radical ideas of the European Enlightenment to an American audience in the early Republic. Scholars, following Henry May, have generally viewed the American Enlightenment as a moderate affair. And Palmer’s advocacy of deism has distracted scholars from the more radical religious views he also espoused. In his book, *Principles of Nature*, Palmer champions a materialist cosmology according to which all things in the universe are made of fundamentally the same stuff. Following Spinoza, and drawing heavily on French materialists, Palmer advocated a pantheism that dispensed with a transcendent deity, immortal souls, or an afterlife. His ideas are akin to those described in Jacob, *The Radical Enlightenment*; Israel, *Radical Enlightenment*; and Reill, *Vitalizing Nature in the Enlightenment*. For a helpful discussion of pantheism, see Levine, *Pantheism: A Non-Theistic Concept of Deity*. For the purposes of this essay on Palmer’s critique of Christian fear-mongering, it is not relevant whether Palmer allied himself more closely with deism or with pantheism. He seems to have embraced both without an apparent sense of paradox.

16. The so-called “scandal of particularity”—that the Bible and the path to salvation were offered only to a chosen few—is nicely described in McDermott, *Jonathan Edwards Confronts the Gods*, chapter 1.

17. Palmer’s discussion of death showcases a pantheist cosmology that required neither a transcendent deity nor immortality of the human soul. While deists generally adhered to the notion of a transcendent creator-god and held out hope for an afterlife, Palmer’s understanding of the cosmos had taken on a decidedly Spinozist cast.


19. Critics of deism make their case in writing against Thomas Paine’s *Age of Reason*. See, for example, Bishop Richard Watson, *An Apology for the Bible*.

20. For a strong argument that evangelical fear-mongering obstructs democratic action, see Bivins, *Religion of Fear*. 4.