

Article

Religion, the Federalists, and American Nationalism

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Abstract: It may seem a truism to assert that the Federalist Party in the Early American Republic possessed a nationalist emphasis, but the question remains as to the character of their nationalism. This article draws on categories from the historian John D. Wilsey to determine how “open” or “closed” Federalist nationalism was. It looks to public utterances of Federalist leaders to find that they attempted to hold up the nation as an ideal, but that they avoided expansionistic tendencies in foreign affairs. This allows the article to posit Federalist nationalism as “open.” It then considers what role religion played in supporting this “open” Federalist nationalism. It finds that Federalist religious nationalism developed in three stages: “Republican,” “Federalist,” and “Voluntarist,” as Federalists responded to needs within, and changes to, the new nation. The article concludes that religion (predominantly Protestant Christianity) thus operated creatively in support of an “open” Federalist nationalism.

Keywords: Christian Nationalism; civil religion; politics; Federalist Party; voluntarism; Protestantism; United States; Early American Republic; religion in America; religion and politics

1. Introduction

It seems an obvious assertion that in the early American Republic, the Federalists were nationalists. Whether discussing the coalition that rallied in favor of ratifying the Constitution or the political movement and nascent political party in the 1790s and early nineteenth century, the Federalists argued for an American nationalism. In the ratification debate, they supported a Constitution that created a national government, over and against the Anti-Federalists who defended the Articles of Confederation and the looser cooperation of sovereign states. Further, in the ratification debates the Federalists ironically seized the semantic high-ground, as the term “federal” had traditionally referred to dispersed and divided sovereign power, but now became applied to a nationalist movement.

In the 1790s, the Federalists became “Friends of Government,” supporting the Washington and Adams administrations, in the face of challenges from Democratic-Republicans. Presidents Washington and Adams—with advice from nationalists such as Alexander Hamilton and John Jay—sought to build very real national political power [1]. Economically, Hamilton sought a national policy through assumption of state debts, a national bank, and federal encouragement of manufacturing [2]. Further, Henry Knox designed a small, but permanent, national army, and John Adams ordered construction of America’s first navy. In the face of this political nationalism, Thomas Jefferson, James Madison, and other Republicans (or Democratic-Republicans) feared the centralizing power of the national government and sought ways to curb it. For Jefferson and Madison, this could lead to states negating and nullifying federal laws, as expressed in the Virginia and Kentucky Resolutions [3,4].

In his classic work *Imagined Communities*, Benedict Anderson rightfully demonstrated that nations and nationalism are about more than just power—though they are about that. Instead, they are about creating a sense of community and belonging that stretches far beyond the bounds of lived experience [5]. In fact, historical research of the past two decades has documented that Federalists took

many steps to create a sense of nationalism in the new United States. The Revolution and its aftermath gave rise to public expressions of politics—parades, marches, and demonstrations helped Americans express their ideas about national issues, whether ratifying the Constitution or opposing French threats to American interests [6]. These celebrations could particularly be seen at times of national celebrations, whether for Washington’s birthday (particularly important for the Federalists) or for Independence Day [7,8]. Further, print culture helped to unite the country and give written expression to a sense of the nation. Printing, reading, and writing helped bind the nation together [9,10]. Federalists used newspapers to advance their perspective, as well as magazines like Joseph Dennie’s *Port Folio* [11]. In certain circumstances, even the spoken word could produce nationalistic sentiments [12].

Federalists sought a nationalism that was more robust than simply a vision of political unity. The Federalists realized that the Constitution had created “a roof without walls”—a political structure without a national identity, and they, therefore, worked to create a more extensive and well-developed national culture ([13], pp. 333–48). This cultural nationalism advanced on a number of fronts. Culture could mean literature and the culture of *belles lettres*, and the Federalists worked to craft reflective essays that could be read around the world [14,15]. The American language came under Federalist notice, as Noah Webster labored to create a national dictionary [16]. Law was necessary for national flourishing, an opinion shared not only by Chief Justice of the Supreme Court John Marshall but by many other Federalist jurists, like James Kent in New York or Theophilus Parsons in Massachusetts ([17], pp. 135–72; [18,19]). The art Americans produced and displayed carried national implications [20]. Even the topic of geography could take a nationalist turn, as the Federalist minister Jedidiah Morse demonstrated [21]. This article will suggest below that Federalists also deployed religion as another key component for creating a Federalist nationalism.

This overview has supported the initial claim that the Federalists were standing for nationalism in the new nation. The question remains, however—what *kind* of nationalists were the Federalists? Further, how was religion a part of Federalist nationalism, and how did it function to support a certain type of nationalism?

2. “Open” and “Closed” Nationalism

In assessing the Federalists, we first have to address the previous question of evaluating nationalism. For some writers on the topic, nationalism is problematic at best, and inherently evil at worst. Nationalism, it is true, does carry within itself a great capacity to do wrong—in previous centuries it has tended toward being exclusionary to minorities, oppressive to dissenters, and expansionistic both within its borders and beyond them. As a substitute type of religion—or perhaps a political commitment in the place of traditional religion—it finds ways to justify many wrongs. Thus, we have to admit that nationalism carries many implicit dangers. Without a doubt, the places where nationalism led Europe in World War I and World War II should give all scholars pause. If nationalism is dismissed out of hand, there is not much to say: nationalism’s builders should be condemned briskly.

It will prove more useful, however, to consider nationalism historically and contextually. Rather than rejecting it out of hand, the roles and purposes of specific nationalisms deserve consideration. It thus matters how and why nationalism was deployed. This approach allows us to consider the particularities of the different times and places in which nationalism has operated. It also allows a more nuanced and historically accurate picture of the interaction between the Federalist concerns for religion and nationalism.

In evaluating the Federalists, a helpful strategy comes from John D. Wilsey, in his book *American Exceptionalism and Civil Religion*. The category of “civil religion” is conceptually related to a religious nationalism, although the two are not the same thing—one might see civil religion as reversing the order of priority from a nationalism colored by religion to a religion centered on nationalism. Still, Wilsey provides tools and definitions which we can adapt to our goal of understanding Federalist nationalism. Particularly helpful is Wilsey’s ideas of “open” and “closed” versions of American

exceptionalism. Wilsey observes, “In short, when American exceptionalism calls for a God-ordained empire, then it leads to idolatry and injustice. When American exceptionalism points to moral and civil example, then it leads to compassion, justice and general human flourishing” ([22], p. 19). To Wilsey, an idolatrous empire is the direction of a “closed” type of exceptionalism, while a nation affirming a moral and civil example is an “open” type of exceptionalism. This “open” version “can serve as a beacon pointing to justice, natural rights and the ethical well-being of the nation and the world” ([22], p. 19). Wilsey goes on to provide other helpful contrasts—“The closed side is exclusive; the open side is inclusive. The closed side limits freedom to some; the open side expands it to all. The closed side is self-satisfied, because it is based on determinism. The open side is never satisfied, because it is reaching for an ideal based on natural law and rights theory as well as historical contingency” ([22], p. 19). In his work, Wilsey concludes by endorsing and even encouraging an “open” exceptionalism as healthy and as a pathway for civic engagement.

This article, then, must address the question of whether the Federalists’ view of nationalism was of more an “open” or “closed” variety. In taking on this question, Wilsey raises some important categories to consider, such as the place of the nation in the realm of ideals and ideas, the foreign policy of the nation (how imperial it is), and its treatment of minorities. With these questions in hand, we can turn to understand how the Federalists considered the nation in relation to other nations and how they defined a foreign policy toward the wider world. The best method for this investigation will be to consider the public expressions of leading Federalists, especially those made in prominent declarations. Once we understand the character of the Federalists’ nationalism, we can then understand how religion either supported or tempered it.

3. Federalists and the National Example

We can start by examining how Federalists viewed their nation in its symbolic and theoretical relation to the rest of the world. Here, Federalists emphasized the American example for other nations and stressed the importance of a healthy nationalism that could be communicated to the world. This impulse was on display as early as Alexander Hamilton’s fanfare to readers in his *Federalist Papers* essay #1:

The subject speaks its own importance; comprehending in its consequences nothing less than the existence of the UNION, the safety and welfare of the parts of which it is composed, the fate of an empire in many respects the most interesting in the world. It has been frequently remarked that it seems to have been reserved to the people of this country, by their conduct and example, to decide the important question, whether societies of men are really capable or not of establishing good government from reflection and choice, or whether they are forever destined to depend for their political constitutions on accident and force [23].

Was self-government possible? Could an America in a national union be a pattern for other nations? Hamilton suggested the American example would be determinative, a living commentary on whether “reflection and choice” could triumph over force in self-government, and the answer would be delivered on the world stage.

Additionally, during the debates over ratifying the Constitution, John Jay raised a similar point. For him, nothing less than a world-historical issue, “the cause of freedom” was in the balance. In his stand-alone essay, the *Address to the Citizens of the State of New York*, Jay pointed to the negative consequences that would follow failing to create a self-governing nation:

[I]f the event should prove, that the people of this country either cannot or will not govern themselves, who will hereafter be advocates for systems, which however charming in theory and prospect, are not reducible to practice[?] If the people of our nation, instead of consenting to be governed by laws of their own making and rulers of their own choosing, should let licentiousness, disorder and confusion reign over them, the minds of men

everywhere, will insensibly become alienated from republican forms, and prepared to prefer and acquiesce in Governments, which, though less friendly to liberty, afford more peace and security ([24], p. 19).

Americans could also offer a negative example, proving to the world that self-government was not possible. Observers would opt for “peace and security” over either “republican forms” or governments “friendly to liberty.” Again, the American example mattered, but because American nationalism was, itself, uncertain, it could hardly be guaranteed as a panacea to other nations. Instead, Americans had to prove by their example the value of republican self-government.

Once the Constitution was ratified, Federalists continued to emphasize the stakes of the national endeavor. In his First Inaugural Address, President Washington illustrated how he saw the Federalist endeavor. “[T]he preservation of the sacred fire of liberty, and the destiny of the Republican model of Government,” Washington insisted, “are justly considered as deeply, perhaps as finally staked, on the experiment entrusted to the hands of the American people” [25]. Phrases like this lent great moral weight to the journey upon which Washington and the new nation were embarking. The very “destiny” of republican self-government rested on American behavior. In this light, then, Federalists saw themselves as a model to other nations.

To serve as an example to other nations, the Federalists worked to cultivate patriotic nationalism. The Massachusetts Federalist Fisher Ames delineated this goal by asking, “What is Patriotism?” He answered, “It is an extended self-love, mingling with all the enjoyments of life . . . It is thus we obey the laws of society, because they are the laws of virtue. In their authority we see . . . the venerable image of our country’s honor. Every good citizen makes that honor his own . . . ” ([26], p. 1170). Thus, the creation of nationalism would be an on-going project for Federalist leaders, and it sparked the varied endeavors identified in the introductions. Still, the pursuit was a valuable one to the Federalists, and its value would be expressed in a two-fold way: through the flourishing of the American people—with every man sitting under his own vine and fig tree (Micah 4:4)—and through the example it offered to other nations.

4. Federalists and Foreign Policy

Another way of assessing Federalist nationalism would be to observe their actual foreign policy. Although not in a position to function in a markedly expansionist way, still, the Federalists sought a different strategy out of both principle and prudence, one of neutrality. Instead of advocating for further conquest beyond the lands granted the country in the Treaty of Paris (1783), the Federalists sought positive relations with other nations, desiring to earn their good opinion and a proper reputation for the new nation. Generally, Federalist diplomacy aimed for peaceful cooperation and encouraging international trade. When confronted with the French Revolution and the brewing European war between France and England, Federalists under President Washington pursued a policy of armed neutrality. This course would prepare to defend the nation while doing everything in their power to avoid war. A strong example of this general impulse came with Washington’s appointing John Jay as a special diplomat to Great Britain to avert war in 1794–1795. The result—Jay’s Treaty—sought to create the best possible resolution of national differences, even as it passed silently over irreconcilable points. A Federalist attitude of cooperation was evident in Jay’s strategy—to work out points open to multiple interpretation, a joint commission from both nations would work collaboratively to resolve difficulties [27].

President Washington reemphasized these commitments in his “Farewell Address,” his political benediction. Washington instructed his countrymen and successors, “Observe good faith and justice towards all Nations. Cultivate peace and harmony with all. It is our true policy to steer clear of permanent alliances with any portion of the foreign world; so far, I mean, as we are now at liberty to do it . . . Harmony, liberal intercourse with all nations, are recommended by policy, humanity, and interest” [28]. Positive and forthright interactions with other nations were justified by both good policy and humanitarian principle. Similarly, American diplomacy would work to uphold its

national commitments made via treaty. In discussing his policy of neutrality, Washington insisted that it arose from both “duty and interest” for the American nation and that, once made, Washington was committed to following it with “moderation, perseverance, and firmness” [28]. This strategy of armed neutrality actively avoided foreign intervention. It did not set the country on a policy of advancing ideals of democracy and representative government by force of arms. If anything, it sought national defense as a means of protecting “the sacred fire of liberty” Washington had praised in his First Inaugural Address ([29], pp. 56–92).

Two decades later, this Federalist approach to foreign policy was re-echoed by Secretary of State John Quincy Adams. In his foreign policy, Adams was not only the biological heir of the Federalist John Adams but the ideological one, as well. John Quincy Adams sought to improve diplomatic relations through formal treaties that could be agreed upon and kept. He, thus, pursued the Transcontinental Treaty with Spain (also known as the Adams-Onís Treaty, 1819). More importantly, he directed American foreign policy when confronted with multiple revolutions in Latin America. In a famous public speech, he laid out a policy entirely consistent with Federalist approaches of earlier years. He began by placing American activities within the framework of relations with other nations:

America, with the same voice which spoke herself into existence as a nation, proclaimed to mankind the inextinguishable rights of human nature, and the only lawful foundations of government. America, in the assembly of nations, since her admission among them, has invariably, though often fruitlessly, held forth to them the hand of honest friendship, of equal freedom, of generous reciprocity. She has uniformly spoken among them, though often to heedless and often to disdainful ears, the language of equal liberty, of equal justice, and of equal rights. She has, in the lapse of nearly half a century, without a single exception, respected the independence of other nations while asserting and maintaining her own. She has abstained from interference in the concerns of others, even when conflict has been for principles to which she clings, as to the last vital drop that visits the heart [30].

In this statement, Adams reiterates American desire for self-defense while holding up American self-government (founded on “the rights of human nature”) in the international arena. While defending her own rights, though, Adams points out how America has “abstained from interference” in other countries’ affairs. While loving principles, American foreign policy has been non-interventionist [31].

From this general principle, Adams went on to advance a specific application in his day. As much as Americans advocated for independence and self-government, they should not attempt to advance them abroad. He memorably asserted, “Wherever the standard of freedom and independence has been or shall be unfurled, there will her heart, her benedictions, and her prayers be. But she goes not abroad in search of monsters to destroy. She is the well-wisher to the freedom and independence of all. She is the champion and vindicator only of her own” [30]. While there would be plenty of monsters to combat, Adams drew the line between cheering for principles and actively fighting for them abroad. Adams advocated for this because of the danger posed by engaging in global battles: “The fundamental maxims of her policy would insensibly change from liberty to force. . . . She might become the dictatress of the world. She would be no longer the ruler of her own spirit” [30]. Respect for other nations’ self-determination meant the United States had to refrain from an interventionist, expansionist policy. It served the world best by setting a principled example.

5. “Open” Federalist Nationalism

With these articulations of Federalist nationalism, I assert that the Federalist perspective, following Wilsey, was an “open” nationalism. It held up American ideals for the rest of the world, and it worked to make the nation an example to other nations. In its foreign policy, it sought constructive engagement with other nations and worked to maintain treaty obligations. In this view of mutual international cooperation, Federalists prioritized opening up trade and settling differences through compromise and collaborative commissions. Put together, this “open” nationalism offered a welcoming stance that

sought to advance ideals through persuasion, not force. In the process, it posited a national community that, while still recognizing inequalities, could bring individuals together into a national identity.

In this “open” nationalism, Federalists created spaces for minority groups. Although not all Federalists were opposed to slavery, many leaders of the anti-slavery cause were Federalists or the sons of Federalists. For example, many of the members of the New York Manumission Society were Federalists, an effort typified by John Jay and his family [32]. Meanwhile, in New England, many religious Federalists were at the forefront of opposing slavery [33–35]. Further, the Federalists recognized a political role for women—even though those same women would be subject to a Democratic-Republican “backlash” to expel them from politics [36,37]. Federalists even conceptualized a place for Native Americans in the new republic [38]. Although Federalist ideals were still imperfectly held and practiced, they at least embodied an attempt at an “open” nationalism in the early republic.

This Federalist “open” nationalism developed through bringing multiple streams of thought and belief together. It harmonized beliefs rooted in both “reason” and “revelation.” Put another way, it brought together Jewish and Christian concepts inspired by the Scriptures while also being informed by less religious descriptions of politics ([22], pp. 39–58). Following moderate elements of “enlightened” thinking in the era, Federalists described universal principles that could speak to humans across times and cultures. Such principles were rooted in a description of humans as carrying rights rooted in nature, but a nature designed by a Creator ([39], pp. 4–10, 131–46). Such a combination was evident even in the Declaration of Independence’s claim that “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights” [40]. A belief in Rights rooted in Creation allowed for open engagement and cross-cultural application. It also enabled cooperation between classical political theory, moderate forms of enlightened political thought, and traditional Christianity. Although these streams of thought did not always align fully, they did provide enough common ground to support an “open” nationalism.

6. Religion and Federalist Nationalism

If the Federalists drew on religious beliefs to nurture an “open” nationalism, the next logical step would be to inquire what role religion played in developing that vision of nationalism. I describe this process at much greater length in the monograph *Patriotism and Piety: Federalist Politics and Religious Struggle in the New American Nation* [41].¹ For our purposes, the significant point is that religious outlooks evolved as Federalists’ relationship to the new nation evolved. As Federalists worked to construct the nation, religion served a “republican” purpose. At this point, religious belief (usually, Protestant belief) was seen as naturally supporting the national, republican project. In the partisan battles of the 1790s and early 1800s, many Federalists turned to a “combative” stance. This “fighting” religious Federalism perceived that there was no guaranteed tie between the nation and Christian belief. Instead, a great deal of activity was required to preserve the religious element within the nation, and this was tied to active opposition to religious and political enemies, both foreign and domestic. Finally, as Federalists lost power, religious Federalists offered a “Voluntarist” formula for participating in the nation. This strategy aimed to preserve the nation through voluntary activity in the realm of civil society, rather than through politics. Further, it tended to make use of the nation, while simultaneously looking beyond the nation. That is, it helpfully relativized the nation and re-centered religious Federalists on distinctively Christian themes.

In the first, “republican,” stage, Christian Federalists saw religion as endemic to the nation, bound up in the national project. In this language, Federalists perceived Providence itself working to create the American nation [42]. Several examples could be offered. For instance, Episcopal Federalist and First Chief Justice of the Supreme Court John Jay argued for a providential nationalism. This theme was

¹ Note: Material from this section is drawn from the longer work.

prominent in the Grand Jury Charge he offered during his first year riding circuit. Here, Jay opened with his belief in the Providential origins of the national government and the responsibilities incumbent on his hearers to preserve it:

Providence has been pleased to bless the people of this country with more perfect opportunities of choosing and more effectual means of establishing their own government, than any other nation has hitherto enjoyed; and for the use we may make of these opportunities and these means, we shall be highly responsible to that Providence, as well as to mankind in general, and to our own posterity in particular ([43], p. 4).

Providential help implied a duty to that Providence, to posterity, and to the whole world, which would be watching the practice of republican government. Such a challenge laid the groundwork for Jay's description of the jury's duties as an expression of republican service. Jay called for his hearers to evince republican virtue through conscientious participation. Service was the appropriate response to a providentially-approved national government, because "our individual prosperity depends on our national prosperity; and how greatly our national prosperity depends on a well-organized, vigorous government, ruling by wise and equal laws, faithfully executed" ([43], pp. 13–14). The jury's service would, in a localized way, conduce to the good of the nation ([41], pp. 32–35).

Similarly, the New Jersey Presbyterian Federalist and U.S. Representative Elias Boudinot described a happy union of national and religious concerns. In a 1793 speech to the Society of the Cincinnati, Boudinot readily combined religious and political themes ([44], p. 10). In the new nation, he claimed, Christianity could endorse the republic and support it. The meeting of the Society of the Cincinnati itself illustrated this, with prayers offered and religious songs sung. In Boudinot's oration, religious and political ideas were intermixed. The dead soldiers being remembered were "martyrs to liberty," while independence from Great Britain was a "miraculous deliverance from a second Egypt"—another house of bondage. Boudinot even compared the fourth of July celebration to the annual Jewish Passover ([44], pp. 5, 7). Boudinot asserted the role of "Providence," "Divine Providence," and "a divine over-ruling hand" in bringing about American independence ([44], pp. 7, 9). Within the nation, Boudinot saw Christianity as inspiring patriotism. It challenged Americans not to be "careless, indolent, or inattentive in the exercise of any right of citizenship" ([44], p. 13). Further, it inspired the morality and virtue necessary in a republic, as a bulwark against the decay of republics: "if the moral character of a people once degenerate, their political character must soon follow" ([44], p. 14). Christian Americans could gladly support the republic and benefit from the liberty it protected ([41], pp. 99–101).

This cooperation was finally and famously evident in President Washington's "Farewell Address." In this address, Washington asserted:

Of all the dispositions and habits which lead to political prosperity, religion and morality are indispensable supports. In vain would that man claim the tribute of patriotism, who should labor to subvert these great pillars of human happiness, these firmest props of the duties of men and citizens. . . . And let us with caution indulge the supposition that morality can be maintained without religion. Whatever may be conceded to the influence of refined education on minds of peculiar structure, reason and experience both forbid us to expect that national morality can prevail in exclusion of religious principle [28].

With news of the French Revolution arriving in America, Washington offered a defense of the need for religion and morality in the nation. Washington even insisted that morality was impossible without religion. It should be noted that Washington's "religion" was more vague than that of many Federalists—indeed it lacked the Christian specificity favored by many Protestant Federalists like Boudinot and Jay. Still, it suggests how even Washington viewed the necessity of public religiosity in the American republic. Thus, up to the mid-1790s, Federalists saw an easy agreement between the national identity and their religious commitments.

In the “combative” phase of Federalist religious nationalism, Federalists deployed religious beliefs to support the nation and actively fight off perceived threats. These threats came from external and internal enemies. The external threat came from the French Revolution. In particular, Federalists opposed French “Jacobins,” whose beliefs were dangerous on both a religious level—supporting religious infidelity and unbelief—and a political level, encouraging national destabilization. Fear only increased as conflict grew between the United States and France in 1797–1798. Internally, Federalists grew concerned about Democratic-Republicans. When these political enemies championed the French Revolution, they appeared as a dangerous fifth column within the United States. Further, when some of them openly questioned tenets of Christian belief, the identification with French Jacobins seemed easy.

An excellent example of a strong, religiously-combative stance comes from Timothy Dwight, the Congregationalist minister and president of Yale College. Dwight used a 4 July Oration in 1798 to deliver a distinctive theo-political message. Confronted with the Quasi-War of naval conflict with France, the diplomatic insult of the XYZ Affair, and the perceived danger of a French declaration of war, along with the inroads of dangerous theological beliefs, Dwight urged his hearers to fulfill their religious “Duty” in defending the republic. For Dwight, “Religion and Liberty are the two great objects of defensive war. Conjoined, they unite all feelings, and call forth all the energies, of man. . . . Religion and liberty are the meat and drink of the body politic. . . . Here, eminently, they are inseparable” ([45], p. 1380). A courageous, combative public faith could beat off the threats to the nation ([41], pp. 125–29).

Even President John Adams developed a distinctively combative tone as he addressed the nation and responded to messages sent to him in 1798, when fear of a French war was at its height. In his public declarations, Adams pointed out the danger of French utopianism and claimed religion as a necessary bulwark for America. Adams insisted that reform could not be accomplished by the destructive power of the French Revolution. Improvements “will not be accomplished by the abolition of Christianity and the introduction of Grecian mythology, or the worship of modern heroes or heroines, by erecting statues of idolatry to reason or virtue, to beauty or to taste.” Indeed, the French Revolution only demonstrated “the present reign of pretended philosophy in France” ([46]). Against this challenge, Adams also saw Christianity as a social and political good. Moreover, public morality and virtue, as bulwarks of the republic, could not be supported without religion. As Adams told the students of Princeton, “You may find that the moral principles, sanctified and sanctioned by religion, are the only bond of union, the only ground of confidence of the people in one another, of the people in the government, and the government in the people” ([47], p. 206). Finally, Adams insisted that free American government depended on the religious character of the nation. In a statement that would be quoted repeatedly in American history, Adams declared, “Our Constitution was made only for a moral and religious people. It is wholly inadequate to the government of any other” [48]. Thus, Adams joined Dwight in advocating for a combative Federalist mix of religious and political concerns ([41], pp. 125–29).

After the election of 1800, and increasingly as the nineteenth century wore on, Federalists confronted new questions about how they might support the nation when, electorally, the nation seemed to be rejecting their perspective [49,50]. Federalists, thus, faced the challenge of working for the nation, preserving the ideals of the nation, even if they seemed increasingly not to be the majority views. Just as New England felt marginalized in the nation, so religious Federalists felt disenfranchised from the wider society [51,52]. Federalists creatively responded to this dilemma by choosing to build the nation through voluntary societies in the cultural and religious realm, rather than in the political realm where they were having declining success. The voluntarist strategy would model and create a firmer national identity and foster national cooperation ([53]; [54], pp. 234–45, 452–58). Many of these societies were explicitly religious, with one of the best examples being the American Bible Society (ABS) [55]. In this society, with Federalist Elias Boudinot as its first president and William Jay (son of John Jay) as the drafter of its constitution, the organization was created as a Christian, nationalist endeavor. The ABS Constitution followed Federalist inspiration. It created a national superstructure

of leadership with local auxiliaries [56]. The Society could, thus, possess, simultaneously, national direction and national identity, while drawing on local, grassroots activity.

One irony of this Voluntarist endeavor is that it ultimately led religious Federalists to look beyond the nation. In the process of establishing and building these voluntarist endeavors, they were forced to clarify that their ultimate loyalty was to a trans-national Christian identity. For Timothy Dwight, this led to a redoubling of efforts at ministerial training at Yale [57]. American missionaries wrestled with this dilemma of Christian and American identity on foreign fields [58]. The minimizing of nationalism can even be seen within the American Bible Society. Both Elias Boudinot and John Jay—the Society’s first two presidents—ended up delivering messages that looked beyond the American nation. For Boudinot, the value of the ABS lay in its contribution to God’s providential plan. “This then is the great object we have in view and which we would draw the attention of this Audience on this important day;” he declared, “for by disseminating the Bible, without Note or Comment, throughout the known World, we are bringing about the great, the eventful period” [59]. Boudinot hoped for Christ’s return as a result of the work of the ABS ([41], pp. 111–15). Similarly, Jay in his presidential addresses only mentioned the United States once, and then in regard to the missions societies. “We have reason to rejoice,” he observed, “that such institutions have been so greatly multiplied and cherished in the United States; especially as a kind Providence has blessed us, not only with peace and plenty, but also with the full and secure enjoyment of our civil and religious rights and privileges” [60]. This national situation opened the door to inter-denominational, and even international, Christian cooperation. Boudinot, Jay, and the ABS looked beyond the nation to other, greater, more spiritual goals.

7. Conclusions

In conclusion, then, we can describe the Federalist project as one that pushed not just for nationalism, but for an “open” nationalism. That “open” nationalism held, as a significant component, the importance of public religiosity. Further, Federalist religion, which was mostly Protestant Christianity, could support that “open” nationalist project.

As the country developed, this religion operated in various keys. It began in a “republican” key, where religion supported a Federalist nationalism without much conflict. In the second stage, a “combative” key, Federalists rallied to support a nation they felt was threatened in the 1790s. After 1800, Federalists supported a “Voluntarist” agenda which hoped for a voluntary remnant to support the nation. This fragmented, often sectional, nationalism would keep the nation on course, whether the nation realized it or not. It also looked beyond the nation to trans-national Christian endeavors.

In these ways, Federalist nationalism evinces a contrast with the competing nationalism on display in this period, that favored by the Democratic-Republicans, the followers of Thomas Jefferson, and then Andrew Jackson. This Democratic-Republican nationalism was of a more “closed” character. Although it favored enhanced equality of opportunity for those within the group—specifically adult, white males—it marginalized and minimized minority groups. It sought territorial conquest in the War of 1812 [61,62]. Later in the nineteenth century, the same attitude produced the attitude of Manifest Destiny and promoted the dispossession of Indian tribes from their lands [63,64]. The political battles of the early republic were, thus, not only about policy, they were about competing visions of nationalism, rival metaphysical notions of what the new nation should become.

The Federalist attempt to build an “open” nationalism informed by Christianity also speaks to on-going debates about religion and national identity. The Federalists are one part of a larger story documented throughout this volume of *Religions*. Further, they make their own contribution to present debates about the religious component of American nationalism. Their story acknowledges the constructed nature of that nationalism and that it developed historically ([65], pp. 3–56). Indeed, they were some of the first who set out to construct that national identity. On the other hand, their words and actions demonstrate the very real presence of religious motivation in both the creation of the nation and its early development. Thus, those who see public religiosity as an important component

of American nationalism can find very real evidence among the Federalists. Such evidence would counter those who depict the idea of a religious founding primarily as an “invention” or a “myth” ([66], pp. 1–20). A historically nuanced view can recognize the significant influence of Christianity in the formation of American nationalism without describing it as the sole or even central element.

Thus, religion in the new nation for Federalists supported an “open” nationalism that pointed optimistically to what the nation could become. The fact that the nation of citizens, electorally, did not accept this vision suggests one cause for the problems which the nation developed after the Federalists. The Federalist view of an “open,” religiously-inspired nationalism was a path largely not taken, and historians’ appreciation of this fact leads to an understanding of the developments of “closed” nationalism in the early republic as nothing less than tragic.

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