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Religion and the Founding of the American Republic Religion and the New Republic



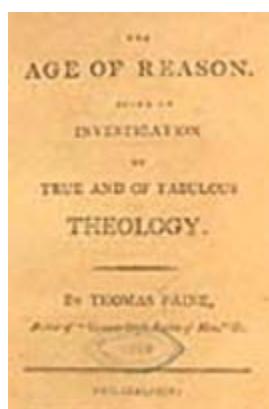
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The religion of the new American republic was evangelicalism, which, between 1800 and the Civil War, was the "grand absorbing theme" of American religious life. During some years in the first half of the nineteenth century, revivals (through which evangelicalism found expression) occurred so often that religious publications that specialized in tracking them lost count. In 1827, for example, one journal exulted that "revivals, we rejoice to say, are becoming too numerous in our country to admit of being generally mentioned in our Record." During the years between the inaugurations of Thomas Jefferson and Abraham Lincoln, historians see "evangelicalism emerging as a kind of national church or national religion." The leaders and ordinary members of the "evangelical empire" of the nineteenth century were American patriots who subscribed to the views of the Founders that religion was a "necessary spring" for republican government; they believed, as a preacher in 1826 asserted, that there was "an association between Religion and Patriotism." Converting their fellow citizens to Christianity was, for them, an act that simultaneously saved souls and saved the republic. The American Home Missionary Society assured its supporters in 1826 that "we are doing the work of patriotism no less than Christianity." With the disappearance of efforts by government to create morality in the body politic (symbolized by the termination in 1833 of Massachusetts's tax support for churches) evangelical, benevolent societies assumed that role, bringing about what today might be called the privatization of the responsibility for forming a virtuous citizenry.

The Atheist's Bible

Pious Americans were shocked by Thomas Paine's *The Age of Reason*, part of which was written during the great pamphleteer's imprisonment in Paris during the French Revolution. Although denounced as the "atheist's bible," Paine's work was actually an exposition of a radical kind of deism and made an attempt at critical biblical scholarship that anticipated modern efforts. Paine created a scandal by his sardonic and irreverent tone. Assertions that the virgin birth was "blasphemously obscene" and other similarly provocative observations convinced many readers that the treatise was the entering wedge in the United States of French revolutionary "infidelity."



[Enlarge](#)

The Age of Reason. Being an Investigation of True and Fabulous Theology. Thomas Paine. Philadelphia: Printed and sold by the Booksellers, 1794. [Rare Book and Special Collections Division, Library of Congress \(181\)](#)

Bookmark this item: //www.loc.gov/exhibits/religion/rel07.html#obj181

Paine Rebuked

Even before the publication of the *Age of Reason*, Thomas Paine was hated and feared for his political and religious radicalism by conservatives in England, where he had periodically lived since 1787. Paine fled to France in December 1792 to avoid trial for treason. In this cartoon, Paine sleeps on a straw pillow wrapped in an American flag, inscribed "Vive L' America." In his pocket is a copy of *Common Sense*. On the headboard are his two "Guardian Angels": Charles James Fox and Joseph Priestley. An imp drops a French Revolutionary song as he flees through a window, draped in curtains decorated with the fleur-de-lis. Confronting Paine are the spirits of three judges who will try him. The presiding judge declares that Paine will die like a dog on the gallows.



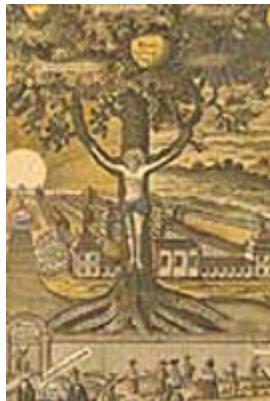
[Enlarge](#)

Tom Paine's Nightly Pest. Engraving by James Gillray. London: published by H. Humphrey, 1792. [Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress \(182\)](#)

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The Tree of Life

The evangelical spirit was embodied in men like John Hagerty (b. 1747), a Methodist preacher who established himself as a Baltimore printer-publisher specializing in evangelical works. Hagerty in 1791 published prints depicting a *Tree of Life*, a *Tree of Virtues* and a *Tree of Vices*, motifs used in religious art for centuries. The Tree of Life brings forth, under the redemptive rays of God as Father, Spirit and Word, twelve fruits of salvation for those seeking entry into the New Jerusalem. A large crowd strolls by the narrow gate of salvation along the Broad Way to the Devil and "babylon Mother of Harlots" beckon. The secure sinners are stigmatized with labels indicating: "pride," "chambering & wantonness," "quack," "usury," and "extortion."



[Enlarge](#)

The Tree of Life. Hand-colored engraving. Baltimore: printed for John Hagerty, 1791. Maryland Historical Society Library, Baltimore, Maryland (183)

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The Camp Meeting

In 1800 major revivals that eventually reached into almost every corner of the land began at opposite ends of the country: the decorous Second Great Awakening in New England and the exuberant Great Revival in Kentucky. The principal religious innovation produced by the Kentucky revivals was the camp meeting. The revivals were organized by Presbyterian ministers, who modeled them after the extended outdoor "communion seasons," used by the Presbyterian Church in Scotland, which frequently produced emotional, demonstrative displays of religious conviction. In Kentucky the pioneers loaded their families and provisions into their wagons and drove to the Presbyterian meetings, where they pitched tents and settled in for several days. When assembled in a field or at the edge of a forest for a prolonged religious meeting, the participants transformed the site into a camp meeting. The religious revivals that swept the Kentucky camp meetings were so intense and created such gusts of emotion that their original sponsors, the Presbyterians, as well the Baptists, soon repudiated them. The Methodists, however, adopted and eventually domesticated camp meetings and introduced them into the eastern United States, where for decades they were one of the evangelical signatures of the denomination.

Outdoor Communion

The Kentucky revivals originated with Presbyterians and emerged from marathon outdoor "communion seasons," which were a feature of Presbyterian practice in Scotland.



[Enlarge](#)

Sacramental Scene in a Western Forest. Lithograph by P.S. Duval, ca. 1801, from Joseph Smith, *Old Redstone*. Copyprint. Philadelphia: 1854. [General Collections](#), Library of Congress (184)

Bookmark this item: //www.loc.gov/exhibits/religion/rel07.html#obj184

Camp Meeting Plan

This sketch, by Benjamin Latrobe, shows the layout of an 1809 Methodist camp meeting in Fairfax County, Virginia. Note that the men's seats were separated from the women's and the "negro tents" from the whites.' This is an example of the racial segregation that prompted black Methodists to withdraw from the denomination a few years later and form their own independent Methodist church. To accommodate the powerful, at times uncontrollable, emotions generated at a camp meeting, Latrobe indicated that, at the right of the main camp, the organizers had erected "a boarded enclosure filled with straw, into which the converted were thrown that they might kick about without injuring themselves."



[Enlarge](#)

Plan of the Camp, August 8, 1809. Journal of Benjamin Latrobe, August 23, 1806- August 8, 1809. Sketch by Benjamin Henry Latrobe. Latrobe Papers, Manuscript Department, Maryland Historical Society, Baltimore (185)

Bookmark this item: //www.loc.gov/exhibits/religion/rel07.html#obj185

Religious Revival in America

In 1839 J. Maze Burbank exhibited at the Royal Society in London this watercolor of "a camp meeting, or religious revival in America, from a sketch taken on the spot." It is not known where, when, or under whose auspices the revival painted by Burbank occurred.

1 of 2



[Enlarge](#)

Religious Camp Meeting. Watercolor by J. Maze Bu

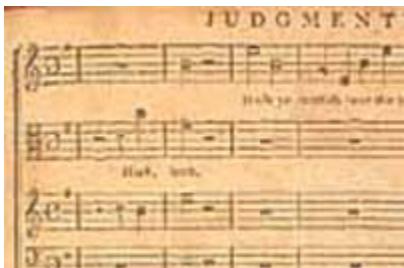


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Revival Hymnals

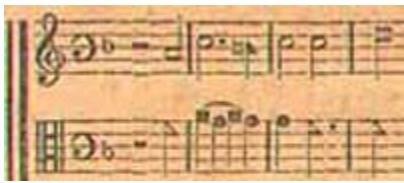
Both of these books contain hymns that would have been sung at nineteenth century revivals.

1 of 2



[Enlarge](#)

Samuel Wakefield, The Christian's Harp . . . suited



Bookmark this item: [/www.loc.gov/exhibits/religion/rel07.html#obj188](https://www.loc.gov/exhibits/religion/rel07.html#obj188)

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The Emergence of the African American Church

Scholars disagree about the extent of the native African content of black Christianity as it emerged in eighteenth-century America, but there is no dispute that the Christianity of the black population was grounded in evangelicism. The Second Great Awakening has been called the "central and defining event in the development of Afro-Christianity." During these revivals Baptists and Methodists converted large numbers of blacks. However, many were disappointed at the treatment they received from their fellow believers and at the backsliding in the commitment to abolish slavery that many white Baptists and Methodists had advocated immediately after the American Revolution. When their discontent could not be contained, forceful black leaders followed what was becoming an American habit-forming new denominations. In 1787 Richard Allen (1760-1831) and his colleagues in Philadelphia

broke away from the Methodist Church and in 1815 founded the African Methodist Episcopal (A. M. E.) Church, which, along with independent black Baptist congregations, flourished as the century progressed. By 1846, the A. M. E. Church, which began with 8 clergy and 5 churches, had grown to 176 clergy, 296 churches, and 17,375 members.

Bishops of the African Methodist Episcopal Church

In the center is Richard Allen, founder of the African Methodist Episcopal Church, surrounded by ten bishops of the church. At the upper left and right corners are pictures of Wilberforce University and Payne Institute; other scenes in the life of the church are depicted, including the sending of missionaries to Haiti in 1824.



[Enlarge](#)

Bishops of the A.M.E. Church. Engraving by John H. W. Burley, Washington, D. C., 1876. Boston: J. H. Daniels, 1876. [Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress \(190\)](#)

Bookmark this item: //www.loc.gov/exhibits/religion/rel07.html#obj190

Woman Preacher of the A.M.E. Church

The black churches were graced by eloquent female preachers from their earliest days, although there was, as in the white churches, resistance in many quarters to the idea of women preaching the Gospel.



[Enlarge](#)

Mrs. Juliann Jane Tillman, Preacher of the A.M.E. Church. Engraving by P. S. Duval, after a painting by Alfred Hoffy, Philadelphia, 1844. [Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress \(191\)](#)

Bookmark this item: //www.loc.gov/exhibits/religion/rel07.html#obj191

Christian Charity

In the letter below, a Mississippi Baptist church informs a Virginia Baptist church that it has been approached by a slave, Charity, who has been sold from Virginia to Mississippi, but nevertheless wishes to let her old fellow church members in Virginia know that she is praying for them and especially for "all her old Mistress family." Charity also wants it known that "her most pious affections and prayers" are that her old mistress, Mary S. Garret (Garnett), "become prepared to meet her in heaven."

Dear Brother this
applied by a black so
she was a member of
Harris off with
was she was the first

[Enlarge](#)

Mt. Pisgah Baptist Church, Rankin City, Mississippi, to Upper King and Queen Baptist Church, Newtown, Virginia. [left page] - [right page] Manuscript letter, June 1837. Virginia Baptist Historical Society (192)

Bookmark this item: [/www.loc.gov/exhibits/religion/rel07.html#obj192](https://www.loc.gov/exhibits/religion/rel07.html#obj192)

Absalom Jones

Born a slave in Delaware, Absalom Jones (1746-1818), was a founding member of the African Episcopal Church of St. Thomas in Philadelphia, dedicated on July 17, 1794. A year later Jones was ordained as the first black Episcopal priest in the United States.

[Enlarge](#)

Absalom Jones. Oil on canvas on board by Raphaelle Peale, 1810. Delaware Art Museum, Wilmington. Gift of the Absalom Jones School (193)

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Congressional Assistance to Absalom Jones

In this receipt, Absalom Jones acknowledges receiving from Samuel Wetherill, a leader of the Free Quakers of Philadelphia, a donation of \$186, collected from members of the House and Senate, to assist in promoting the mission of Jones's "St. Thomas African Church in Philadelphia."



Receipt, signed by Absalom Jones, December 26, 1801. [Manuscript Division](#), Library of Congress (193a)

Bookmark this item: [/www.loc.gov/exhibits/religion/rel07.html#obj193a](https://www.loc.gov/exhibits/religion/rel07.html#obj193a)

Religious Exuberance

Emotional exuberance was characteristic of evangelical religion in both the white and black communities in the first half of the nineteenth century.

[Enlarge](#)

Negro Methodists Holding a Meeting in a Philadelphia Alley. Watercolor by John Lewis Krimmel. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Rogers Fund, 1942 (194)

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Jerking Exercise

Lorenzo Dow (1777-1834) was a spellbinding but eccentric traveling Methodist evangelist who could still stir a turbulent camp meeting with "the sound of his voice or at the sight of his fragile but awe-inspiring presence." Dow's audiences often exhibited unusual physical manifestations under the influence of his impassioned preaching.

[Enlarge](#)

Lorenzo Dow and the Jerking Exercise. Engraving by Lossing-Barrett, from Samuel G. Goodrich, *Recollections of a Lifetime.* Copyprint. New York: 1856. [General Collections](#), Library of Congress (195)

Bookmark this item: //www.loc.gov/exhibits/religion/rel07.html#obj195

The Shakers

The Shakers, or the United Society of Believers in Christ's Second Coming, were founded by "Mother Ann Lee, a stalwart in the 'Shaking Quakers' who migrated to America from England in 1774. American Shakers shared with the Quakers a devotion to simplicity in conduct and demeanor and to spiritual equality. They "acquired their nickname from their practice of whirling, trembling or shaking during religious services." The Shakers used dancing as a worship practice. They often danced in concentric circles and sometimes in the style shown here. Shaker emissaries from New York visited Kentucky in the early years of the nineteenth century to assess the revivals under way there and made a modest number of converts.

[Enlarge](#)

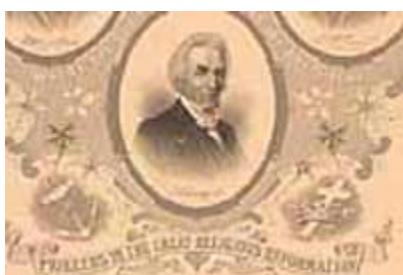
Shakers near Lebanon state of N York, their mode of worship. Stipple and line engraving, drawn from life. [Prints and Photographs](#)

[Division, Library of Congress \(196\)](#)

Bookmark this item: //www.loc.gov/exhibits/religion/rel07.html#obj196

Nineteenth Century Religious Leaders

Two of these pioneers, Barton Stone and Alexander Campbell, were Presbyterian ministers who, for different reasons, left the denomination and formed, in 1832, the Disciples of Christ. While an active Presbyterian minister, Stone organized the powerful Cane Ridge revival, near Lexington, Kentucky in the summer of 1801.

[Enlarge](#)

Pioneers in the Great Religious Reformation of the Nineteenth Century. Steel engraving by J. C. Buttre, after a drawing by J. D. C. McFarland, c. 1885. [Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress \(197\)](#)

Bookmark this item: //www.loc.gov/exhibits/religion/rel07.html#obj197

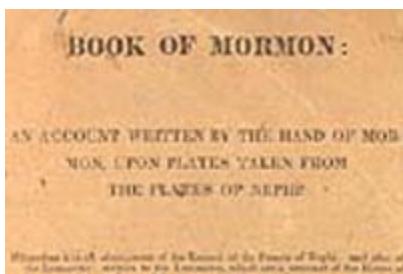
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The Mormons

Another distinctive religious group, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints or the Mormons, arose in the 1820s during the "Golden Day of Democratic Evangelicalism." The founder, Joseph Smith (1805-1844), and many of his earliest followers grew up in an area of western New York called the "Burned Over District," because it had been "scorched" by so many revivals. Smith had been "seared but not consumed" by the exuberant evangelicalism of the era. However the Mormon Church cannot be considered as the product of revivalism or as a splintering off from an existing Protestant denomination. It was *sui generis*, inspired by what Smith described as revelations on a series of gold plates, which he translated and published as the Book of Mormon in 1830. The new church conceived itself to be a restoration of primitive Christianity, which other existing churches were considered to have deserted. The Mormons subscribed to many orthodox Christian beliefs but professed distinctive doctrines based on post-biblical revelation. Persecuted from its inception, the Mormon Church moved from New York to Ohio to Missouri to Illinois, where it put down strong roots at Nauvoo. In 1844 the Nauvoo settlement was devastated by its neighbors, and Smith and his brother were murdered. This attack prompted the Mormons, under the leadership of Brigham Young, to migrate to Utah, where the first parties arrived in July 1847. The church today is a flourishing, worldwide denomination.

The Book of Mormon

The Book of Mormon, the fundamental testament of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, was published by Joseph Smith in 1830. According to a standard reference work, Smith translated it from "golden plates engraved in a language referred to as reformed Egyptian." The plates, which were seen and handled by 11 witnesses, deal chiefly with the inhabitants of the American continents spanning the period 600 B.C. to A.D. 421. The plates relate the sacred history of Israelites who, led by a divinely directed righteous man named Lehi, emigrated from Jerusalem to the New World, where Christ appeared and gave them his teachings. The record of their experiences, kept by various prophets, was compiled and abridged by the 5th century prophet Mormon. . . ."

[Enlarge](#)

Book of Mormon: An Account written by the Hand of Mormon, upon plates taken from the Plates of Nephi. Joseph Smith, Junior. Palmyra, N.Y.: E.B. Grandin, 1830. [Rare Book and Special Collections Division, Library of Congress \(198\)](#)

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The Murder of Joseph and Hiram Smith

The murder of Joseph Smith and his brother, Hiram, by a mob in Carthage, Illinois, prompted the Mormons, under the leadership of Brigham Young, to migrate in 1846-1847 to Utah, where they found a permanent home. Although accounts differ, Joseph Smith was apparently shot to death by a mob, one of whose members approached him with the intention, which was thwarted, of beheading him.



[Enlarge](#)

Martyrdom of Joseph and Hiram Smith in Carthage Jail, June 27, 1844. Tinted lithograph by Nagel & Weingaertner, after C. G. Crehen. New York: 1851. [Prints and Photographs Division](#), Library of Congress (199)

Bookmark this item: //www.loc.gov/exhibits/religion/rel07.html#obj199

Migration to Utah

This map shows the route of the migration of the Mormons from Illinois to Utah.



[Enlarge](#)

Route of the Mormon Pioneers from Nauvoo to Great Salt Lake, Feb'y 1846-July 1847. [left] - [right] Map, copyright by Millroy and Bates, 1899. Facsimile. [Geography and Map Division](#), Library of Congress (200)

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Benevolent Societies

Benevolent societies were a new and conspicuous feature of the American landscape during the first half of the nineteenth century. Originally devoted to the salvation of souls, although eventually to the eradication of every kind of social ill, benevolent societies were the direct result of the extraordinary energies generated by the evangelical movement--specifically, by the "activism" resulting from conversion. "The evidence of God's grace," the Presbyterian evangelist, Charles G. Finney insisted, "was a person's benevolence toward others." The evangelical establishment used this powerful network of voluntary, ecumenical benevolent societies to Christianize the nation. The earliest and most important of these organizations focused their efforts on the conversion of sinners to the new birth or to the creation of conditions (such as sobriety sought by temperance societies) in which conversions could occur. The six largest societies in 1826-1827 were all directly concerned with conversion: the American Education Society, the American Board of Foreign Missions, the American Bible Society, the American Sunday-School Union, the American Tract Society, and the American Home Missionary Society.

The Distribution of Religious Literature

The American Tract Society, founded in 1825, was one of the most influential of the scores of benevolent societies that flourished in the United States in the first decades of the nineteenth century. The Tract Society, through the efforts of thousands of families like the one shown here, flooded the nation with evangelical pamphlets, aimed at converting their recipients and eradicating social vices

like alcoholism and gambling that impeded conversion. In the first decade of its existence the American Tract Society is estimated to have distributed 35 million evangelical books and tracts.

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[Enlarge](#)

• *Family handing out tracts.* Woodcut by Anderson from



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Mission to Sailors

Missionary societies in nineteenth-century America left no stone unturned or no place unattended to convert their fellow Americans. This church was built by the Young Men's Church Missionary Society of New York to minister to visiting seamen. A floating church, built to a similar design, was moored on the Philadelphia waterfront.



[Enlarge](#)

The Floating Church of Our Saviour...For Seamen (Built New York Feb. 15th, 1844. . . .) Steel engraving. Copyprint. [Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress \(206\)](#)

Bookmark this item: //www.loc.gov/exhibits/religion/rel07.html#obj206

Missions to the Old Northwest

The evangelical community was extremely anxious about the supposedly deleterious moral impact of westward expansion. Consequently, strenuous efforts were made to send ministers to serve the mobile western populations. In this issue of the *Home Missionary*, the journal of the American Home Missionary Society, a map of the surveyed parts of Wisconsin was published with a letter from a "correspondent at Green Bay," who asserted, like the man from Macedonia, "that an immediate supply [of ministers] is demanded." The executive Committee of the Society decided "to make immediate and energetic efforts to supply Wisconsin with the preaching of the Gospel.



[Enlarge](#)

The surveyed part of Wisconsin. Map from The Home Missionary, volume XII, November 1839. New York: N. Currier, c. 1839. [General Collections, Library of Congress \(208\)](#)

Bookmark this item: //www.loc.gov/exhibits/religion/rel07.html#obj208

Missionaries' Reports

This table, compiled from data from the missionaries of the American Home Mission Society, reports on revivals in progress and other missionary activities under their auspices in 1841-1842.

653. Rev. Edwin J. Sherrill, Eaton, Can. N. H. S.	
654. Rev. John C. Sherwin, Cong. O.	
655. Rev. James H. Shields, Green C Do.	Brilliant
656. Rev. Oren Sikes, Meters N. W. P.	co., 3
657. Rev. C. D. Simpson, Ray C	

[Enlarge](#)

Missionary Table from The Seventeenth Report of the American Home Missionary Society. New York: William Osborn, 1842. [American Home Missionary Society Papers, Amistad Research Center, Tulane University, New Orleans \(207\)](#)

Bookmark this item: //www.loc.gov/exhibits/religion/rel07.html#obj207

Circuit Preaching

The Methodist Circuit rider, ministering to the most remote, inhospitable parts of the nation, was one of the most familiar symbols of the "evangelical empire" in the United States. The saddle bags, seen here, belonged to the Reverend Samuel E. Alford, who rode circuits in northwestern Virginia, eastern West Virginia, and western Maryland.

1 of 2



[Enlarge](#)

The Circuit Preacher. Engraving of a drawing by A.



Bookmark this item: //www.loc.gov/exhibits/religion/rel07.html#obj209

Religion Indispensable to Republican Government

Tocqueville's impression of American attitudes toward the relation of government and religion was formed on his tour of the United States in the early 1830s during the high tide of evangelicalism:

I do not know whether all Americans have a sincere faith in their religion; for who can read the human heart? but I am certain that they hold it to be indispensable to the maintenance of republican institutions. This opinion is not peculiar to a class of citizens or to a party, but it belongs to the whole nation and to every rank of society.

Religion in America takes the government of society, but it is regarded as the foremost of the institutions of that country; for if it does not contribute to freedom, it facilitates the exercise of it. Indeed, it is in this same [redacted]

[Enlarge](#)

Democracy in America. Alexis de Tocqueville, Translated by Henry Reeve. London: Saunders and Otley, 1835. [Rare Book and Special Collections Division](#), Library of Congress (211)

Bookmark this item: //www.loc.gov/exhibits/religion/rel07.html#obj211

A Thousand Years of Happiness

Time lines that traced sacred history from Adam and Eve to contemporary times were a popular form of religious art in earlier periods of American history. The one seen here, prepared by the well-known engraver, Amos Doolittle, states that in 1800 Americans entered a "fourth period" in which Satan would be bound for "1000 years" and the church would be in a "happy state."



[Enlarge](#)

The Epitome of Ecclesiastical History. Engraving by Amos Doolittle. New Haven: 1806. [Rare Book and Special Collections Division](#), Library of Congress (212)

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