RELIGIOUS RHETORIC OF NATIONAL SALVATION

Questions to Consider

1. *To what extent, if any, can one see the idea of American Exceptionalism in these items?*
2. *What does the use of religious language suggest about the audience reading these items?*

New York *Daily Advertiser*, 24 September 1787 (excerpts)

Let difficulties, if any unhappily arise, be no longer laid to *our charge*—and let us all, who are friends to order and good government, in the language of scriptural injunction, "*watch and pray." Watch, and, with open front*, manfully oppose every ambitious demagogue, however *high in office*, who may attempt to form combinations, with a wicked intent to destroy the labors of those distinguished worthies; and *pray the Governor of the world* to avert, and finally disappoint their nefarious purposes.—If the change, which genius and patriotism has presented to us, as the most advisable to be received, should be rejected, and if (which God avert) such evil-minded men should prevail, what is the alternative? Gorgon-headed anarchy, or a miserable aristocratic domination; all the wretchedness and wickedness of an aristocracy, without a single particle of its dignity. . . .

Foreign Spectator, Philadelphia *Independent Gazetteer*, 2 October 1787 (excerpts)

Divine Providence has placed the states together in this western hemisphere sequestered from a tumultuous world, to enjoy a felicity which nothing but their own perverseness can annoy—Their federal bond of union was wrought with toil and distress—by numberless endearing proofs of mutual fidelity in a severe trial of seven years—steeped in mingled tears and streams of blood—drawn close by many expiring heroes; let it then be kept sacred with a perpetual affection—may the sacrilegious hand wither, that would tear a thread of this precious bond, and annul the deed given by Heaven for the national happiness of millions. . . . I am confident that a great majority have sense and goodness enough to accept with joy *the only salvation from impending ruin.*

Ye votaries of religion, consider how necessary civil order is for the promotion of piety and every moral virtue? Ye teachers of whatever name, discharge conscientiously the sacred federal duty you owe to God and your country? let there not be one evil spirit of discord among you, who are *the messengers of peace:* exert all the influence of your office and characters for the good of a people that must be dear to you. . . . *Ye friends* of peace, who more peculiarly detest violence and bloodshed, reflect how necessary public tranquility is to you! how precarious your situation would be in that dreadful tumult, when the sword is the last arbiter of right, of property and life! rejoice in the security of a peaceful constitution. . . . Ye seats of industry, plenty and elegance! embrace with rapture a federal government; it is your only fortification—without it, you are not only an easy prey to every powerful invader, but may be sacked and burnt by rude and desperate banditties of American name. . . . Ye men of distinguished virtues and abilities, whom Heaven has made the natural guardians of your fellow citizens! exult in a constitution, by which superior merit alone will procure the sublime glory and happiness of making millions blessed, of exerting that patriotic affection which is the first in exalted minds. . . .

The People, *New Haven Gazette*, 11 October 1787 (excerpts)

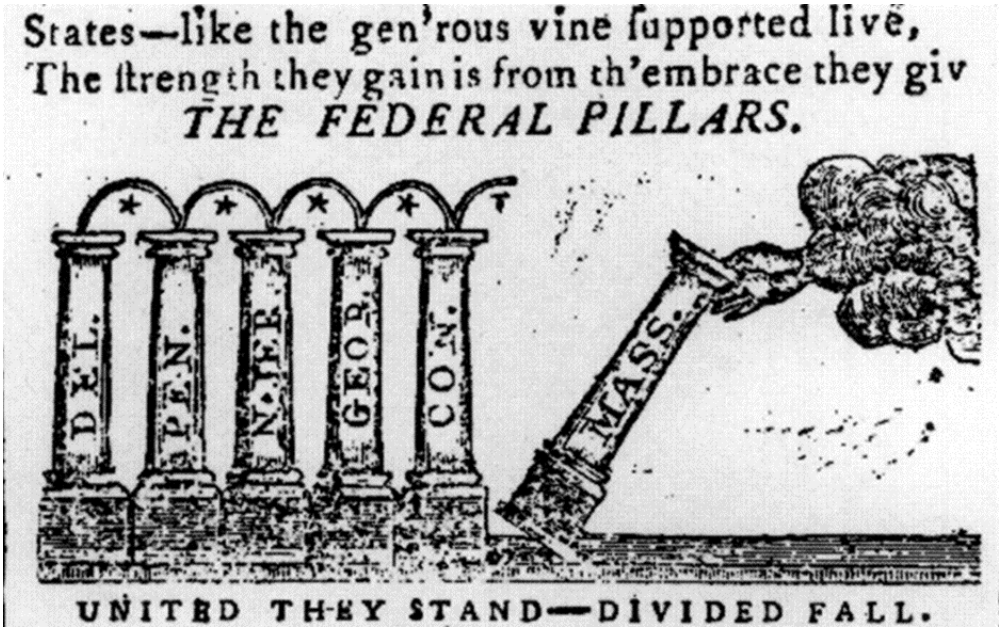
Your constituents will not wish to see their political interest more secure than they are confident they will be, when in oneness of sentiment and pursuit, they observe their rulers studying

those methods of national security which, according to the integrity of their hearts, appear to be the ordinance of Heaven. In this, they are willing to confide, trusting that the same power, which hath placed their feet upon dry land, will not suffer them to perish while following the pointings of His Providence. . . .

. . . If there are any such instances wherein the God of Heaven hath, either in a public or private capacity, crowned our pious endeavors and amply rewarded the confidence we placed in His supremacy, need we fear again to follow the same path which He hath thus sanctified with His blessing? Unless infinite wisdom errs, or under the same circumstances, follows different steps, or lastly, unless the arm of the Almighty is shortened that He cannot save, we may receive this method of instruction as an infallible guide. . . . Have we not encountered dangerous scenes, the issue of which our own wisdom could not fathom, but which, being recommended by those entrusted with our political concerns, we have encountered and, in a dependence on the divine blessing, have found our labor crowned with ample success? We trust there are none of you so ignorant of the movings of our political system, during the present Revolution, as to say *that we have never trusted Providence in the dark*. . . . The God of Heaven hath crowned our labors and rewarded our enterprise thus far. If Canaan's rest is to bound our march, shall we, who have done mighty deeds, be affrighted back because it is reported giants and Anakims dwell there? We choose not to stand aghast and be affrighted from our right because of ill reports. Are we, the people who have thrown down the walls of Jericho, to be afraid of giants? If such there are, they are but images of our own forming, and if, on nearer view, they prove too mighty, the same that made them can make them less. We have thrown down one mighty form of gigantic force; and it is a task too hard for man to say, when a creature of our own forming can arise to equal height. Tis children's play to be affrighted in the dark with images which imagination only paints.

Was there a voice from Heaven forbidding to go forward, well might we, trembling, retire; but when that voice, which has ever to us interpreted the will of Heaven, gently bids us go forward, may we not pursue?

***Massachusetts Centinel*, 16 January 1788**



RELIGIOUS RHETORIC OF NATIONAL DAMNATION

Winchester *Virginia Gazette*, 7 March 1788 (excerpts)

My dear Countrymen, I beg my intrusion upon your time and patience may be taken in good part, while you read a few sentiments, proceeding from the greatest anxiety of mind, respecting the Federal Constitution, which I have perused impartially, and from the examples of the introduction of the most arbitrary Forms of Government, we may venture to declare this plan to be replete with shackles for the free born sons of America.—Every intelligent person must know, that all the world is now groaning in a Hell of Slavery . . . whereby it becomes absolutely necessary to consider the way and means by which they were brought into that infernal state. Can we produce an instance of one nation that ever recovered from a cursed state of vassalage, to the enjoyment of the just and indubitable rights of mankind?

Are there none in trust that will postpone the adoption of this plan, while the people may reflect coolly upon a system of Government, lest they should subject themselves and millions yet unborn, to a state of political d——n?

Are there none in power, with influence sufficient to prevent the direful catastrophe? or, are the frowns and vengeance of Heaven to be thus poured upon us? nay, we may rather conclude, that it is a tryal of our patriotism, and if we tamely submit to the yoke, we justly merit all the evil consequences resulting therefrom: but, if there are too few in the laudable opposition, . . .

And did the Commonwealth of Rome ever recover their liberty from under the tyranny of Cæsar and his successors? no, notwithstanding the virtuous struggles of Cato and a few, they are ever since, through a variety of changes, broiling in a Hell of Slavery, without the least glimpse or hope of deliverance from so d—ble a state. . . .

. . . Pray give place one moment for a cool reflection, and consider, whether any man, or set of men, vested with unlimited power in any instance, who did not exercise it to the plague and torment of the people; to the destruction of every idea of common justice and humanity. . . .

These are hard sayings; disagreeable to despots and their sycophants; but, not so painful to the community as the excruciating pains of a Hell of Slavery; they are stubborn truths that never bend without violence. . . .

Cannot Congress rank with the Princes of the earth without stooping so low as to govern slaves? nay, they will exult in the government of freemen as the greatest honor under the Heavens. What can reflect greater infamy, than to rank with tyrants, those blood sucking cannibals, who prey insatiably and incessantly upon the vitals of their miserable, wretched, politically d—d subjects. . . .

Samuel, Boston *Independent Chronicle*, 10 January 1788 (excerpts)

In the same paragraph, in which the above oath is instituted, all religion is expressly rejected, from the Constitution. Was there ever any State or kingdom, that could subsist, without adopting some system of religion? Not so much as to own the being, and government of a Deity; or a any acknowledgment of him! or having any revelation from him! Should we adopt such a rejection of religion as this, the words of Samuel to Saul, will literally apply to us,—*Because thou hast rejected the word of the Lord, he hath also rejected thee from being king*. We may justly expect, that God will reject us, from that self government, we have obtained thro' his divine interposition: Or being able to keep up government and order among us; . . .

If civil rulers won't acknowledge God, he won't acknowledge them; and hey must perish from the way. And there can be no rational doubt, that the prevailing neglect of acknowledging God

in the time of the revolution, and since, is the cause of our having such convulsions as have been among us; we are perishing from the way. . . .