

Yale College as “a little temple:”
Timothy Dwight, the Revival of 1802,
and an Evolving Relationship between
Liberalism and Religion

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Introduction

On June 23, 1795, the Yale Corporation met to decide who would serve as the College's next President.¹ Its first choice, Reverend Timothy Dwight, Yale Class of 1769 and the current minister at Greenfield Hill, Connecticut, had recently shown disinterest in the position, claiming he “did not court the appointment.... [T]o build up a ruined college is a difficult task.”² Nevertheless, despite Dwight's disdain of the dilapidated buildings, low student and faculty population, and increased immorality among students, he accepted the Corporation's offer. In the College Chapel on September 8, 1795, surrounded by the Corporation and other distinguished clergymen, Dwight “exhibited his assent to the Confession of Faith and Rules of Ecclesiastical discipline agreed upon by the Churches of this State, A.D. 1708.”³ Newspapers from Massachusetts to South Carolina proclaimed the news that Dwight would be Yale's next President.⁴

About seven years later, in the spring of 1802, Yale College experienced another transitional event that profoundly changed the University. According to David D. Field, member and historian of the Yale Class of 1802, “a wonderful work of grace transpired in the College. On the Sabbath preceding our own graduation, twenty-five of our Class sat

¹ “Meeting of the President and Fellows of Yale College, in New Haven, on the 4th Tuesday of June 1795, in the College Library,” *A Book of Original Entries and Minutes at the Meetings of the Corporation and of their Committees, begun A.D. 1786*, Box 5, Reel 4, Yale University Corporation and Prudential Committee Minutes, Manuscripts and Archives, Sterling Memorial Library, Yale University; Yale Corporation to Timothy Dwight, 25 June 1795, Box 1, Folder 1, Dwight Family Papers, Manuscripts and Archives, Sterling Memorial Library, Yale University.

² Timothy Dwight to Jonathan Ingersoll, 24 June 1795, in Eben Edwards Beardsley, *The History of the Episcopal Church in Connecticut* (New York: Heard and Houghton, 1868), 2:212.

³ [Albany] *Albany Register*, October 2, 1795; John Pierce, *Diary Excerpt, describing the Inauguration of Timothy Dwight as President of Yale College*, 1795, Box 73, Yale Miscellaneous Manuscripts Collection, Manuscripts and Archives, Sterling Memorial Library, Yale University.

⁴ [Boston] *Massachusetts Mercury*, July 3, 1795; [Philadelphia] *Philadelphia Gazette*, July 1, 1795; [Charleston, SC] *Charleston City Gazette*, July 30, 1795.

down at the table of the Lord, and large numbers from the three under classes.”⁵ The Revival of 1802 prompted a religious explosion on campus, as College Church membership swelled and the students converted in startling numbers. Field reminisced, “This great Revival . . . gave to the College a higher religious character than it had sustained for a long time before, and one which by repeated Revivals since, it has preserved until the present time, now sixty years.”⁶ As Yale Professor Benjamin Silliman put it, Yale became “a little temple” where “prayer and praise seem to be the delight of the greater part of the students.”⁷

On the surface these two events appear indisputably related. President Dwight, the grandson of Jonathan Edwards and a man known for his strict Congregationalist orthodoxy, would naturally play a role in rooting out irreligion and immorality on campus, thereby fueling the Revival.⁸ However, the period directly following his arrival, from 1795 through 1801, actually saw continued irreligion and misbehavior among students. If Dwight’s influence was so pervasive, why did religiosity actually decline in the years following his appointment? And if Dwight’s attack on infidelity didn’t directly

⁵ David D. Field, *Brief Memoirs of the Members of the Class Graduated at Yale College in September 1802* (Printed for private distribution, 1863), 8.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 9.

⁷ Benjamin Silliman to Mary Silliman, 11 June 1802, in *Life of Benjamin Silliman*, ed. George P. Fisher (New York: Charles Scribner and Company, 1866), 1:83.

⁸ For major biographies of Dwight, see Charles Cuninghame, *Timothy Dwight, 1752-1817: A Biography* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1942); Kenneth Silverman, *Timothy Dwight* (New York: Twayne Publishers, Inc., 1969); John Fitzmier, *New England’s Moral Legislator: Timothy Dwight, 1752-1817* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1998). For books on Yale’s history, see Brooks Mather Kelly, *Yale: A History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974); James B. Reynolds, Samuel H. Fisher, and Henry B. Wright, eds., *Two Centuries of Christian Activity at Yale* (New York: G.P. Putnam’s Sons, 1901); Ralph Henry Gabriel, *Religion and Learning at Yale: The Church of Christ in the College and University, 1757-1957* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1958); Franklin Bowditch Dexter, *Biographical Sketches of the Graduates of Yale College, with Annals of the College History* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1885); James Luce Kingsley, *A Sketch of the History of Yale College in Connecticut* (Boston: Perkins, Marvin, & Co., 1835); Anson Phelps Stokes, *Memorials of Eminent Yale Men* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1914).

cause the Revival, what was the impetus for the upswing in religious fervency during the spring of 1802?⁹

Historians have often avoided such questions by assuming that Dwight's arrival swept in the revival. Lyman Beecher, Yale Class of 1797 and a junior when Dwight became President, launched what might now be called the "Beecher myth," arguing that Dwight came to Yale, initiated an attack on irreligion, and successfully engendered heightened religious sentiment on campus.¹⁰ Scholars follow Beecher's lead. Richard Lovelace argues that Dwight's destruction of "the arguments of the Enlightenment" was the main impetus for "a series of revival harvests."¹¹ James Bronson Reynolds writes that the "battle with infidelity and immorality at Yale had been won as early as 1796, and from that year till 1802 the majority of the students of Yale were earnest, persistent seekers after the truth."¹² Historian Charles Cuninghame, Dwight's most renowned biographer, poses the same argument, even suggesting that Dwight received divine intervention in defeating irreligion and instigating the Revival: "With God's help, he had won the victory."¹³ Some scholars go even further, claiming not only that Dwight started Yale's Revival in 1802, but also that the religious movement in New Haven fueled the entire Second Great Awakening in the United States.¹⁴ Others who cite the "Beecher

⁹ Dwight defined infidel as one denoting "immoral character, even in the mouths of those who profess peculiar attachment to the Scriptures;" infidels appeared under the "influence of the French revolution, which for a time threatened us with moral ruin." Timothy Dwight, *Travels in New England and New York* (New Haven: S. Converse, 1822), 4:264, 271. See also Herbert Baxter Adams, *Contributions to American Educational History* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1893), 136-138.

¹⁰ Lyman Beecher, *Autobiography, Correspondence, Etc. of Lyman Beecher, D.D.* (New York: Harper & Brothers, Publishers, 1864), 38-51. For Yale-oriented biographical details of Beecher, see Kelly, *Yale: A History*, 117.

¹¹ Richard Lovelace, *Dynamics of Spiritual Life: An Evangelical Theology of Renewal* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1979), 47.

¹² Reynolds et al., *Two Centuries*, 55.

¹³ Cuninghame, *Timothy Dwight*, 304.

¹⁴ See for example Sidney Mead, *Old Religion in a Brave New World: Reflections on the Relation between Christendom and the Republic* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977), 55; William Clebsch,

myth” note that Dwight’s Revival also prompted Yale students’ overall adoption of Federalist ideology.¹⁵

Of course, not all scholars support the myth. While most of these dissenting historians acknowledge that Dwight had some influence on the religious sentiment of students, they mostly consider external causes of the Revival.¹⁶ Edmund Morgan asserts that the rise in Yale’s church membership occurred “long *after* other Connecticut churches had begun to experience the great revival of that period,” and that the Second Great Awakening had actually struck Connecticut in 1799.¹⁷ Peter Marshall and David Manuel also attribute the Revival to the “outbreak of revivals in the East [of Connecticut] in 1802,” but in addition, acknowledge that “horrendous details of the French Reign of Terror” spreading to America also increased religious sentiment.¹⁸ Kenneth Silverman mentions an additional influence, pointing to the concurrent English religious

From Sacred to Profane in America: The Role of Religion in American History (New York: Harper & Row, 1968), 153; Charles Roy Keller, *The Second Great Awakening in Connecticut* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1942), 41-42; Stephen Marini, *Radical Sects of Revolutionary New England* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982), 37.

¹⁵ See for example David Robson, *Educating Republicans: The College in the Era of the American Revolution, 1750-1800* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1985), 151; Richard Purcell, *Connecticut in Transition: 1775-1818* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1963), 22-23; K. Alan Snyder, “Foundations of Liberty: The Christian Republicanism of Timothy Dwight and Jedidiah Morse,” *The New England Quarterly* 56, no. 3 (September 1983): 382.

¹⁶ In addition to examining outside factors, some historians simply argue that Dwight’s ideas met with rejection from his students. See Walter Volkmer, “Timothy Dwight and New England Federalism,” *The Connecticut Review* 3 (1970): 81.

¹⁷ Edmund S. Morgan, “Ezra Stiles and Timothy Dwight,” *Proceedings of the Massachusetts Historical Society* 72 (October 1957-December 1960): 109. See also Gabriel, *Religion and Learning at Yale*, 75; Perry Miller, *The Life of the Mind in America: From the Revolution to the Civil War* (New York: Harcourt Brace & Co., 1970), 4.

¹⁸ Peter Marshall and David Manuel, *From Sea to Shining Sea: 1787-1837* (Grand Rapids, MI: Revell, 1986), 113. The French Republic was often identified with irreligion, as the Civil Constitution of the French Clergy weakened the state’s Catholic Church. While Federalists originally supported the Revolution because it attacked the anti-Christ, Dwight later changed his rhetoric to emphasize that the Jacobins were attacking all Christians, describing the Revolutionaries as having “fought and butchered...*adherents of Jesus*.” With news of French violence, Americans often became more defensive about religion. Timothy Dwight, *A Discourse on Some Events of the Last Century, delivered in the Brick Church in New Haven* (New Haven: Printed by Ezra Read, 1801), 54-56, Early American Imprints no. 428. See also Dwight, *Travels*, 4:259-260, 267-279; Purcell, *Connecticut in Transition*, 12-16; Cuninghame, *Timothy Dwight*, 297.

movements, and arguing that Yale's "revivals were as much an English as an American phenomena."¹⁹ Others note that the Awakening was promulgated by Methodist and Baptist grassroots believers more than elite Congregational ministers like Dwight, arguing that it embraced so many different denominations that one minister from one congregation could never claim all, or even most, responsibility.²⁰

Yet in their description of Dwight and the Revival, none of these scholars examine the specifics of religiosity's *decline* immediately following his arrival, nor closely study the mechanics of what occurred on campus as religious fervency skyrocketed in 1802.²¹ And none discuss the Revival in the context of Dwight's evolving ideology – and the nation's changing politics – and how it might have affected his religious influence among liberal students.²² Indeed, Dwight and his Yalies encountered dramatic shifts in the nation's political and religious culture at the turn of the century. For example, Americans in 1800 experienced the first fiercely contested presidential election

¹⁹ Silverman, *Timothy Dwight*, 111.

²⁰ Fitzmier, *New England's Moral Legislator*, 102; Richard Birdsall, "The Second Great Awakening and the New England Social Order," *Church History* 39, no. 3 (September 1970): 345-364; Richard Shiels, "The Second Great Awakening in Connecticut: Critique of the Traditional Interpretation," *Church History* 49, no. 4 (December 1980): 401-415; Ann Lee Bressler, *The Universalist Movement in America, 1770-1880* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 31-32; David Kling, *A Field of Divine Wonders: The New Divinity and Village Revivals in Northwestern Connecticut, 1792-1822* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1993), 238.

²¹ Some historians writing of this time period at Yale do mention the decline in religious sentiment from 1795-1801, but they argue that the Revival was still a result of Dwight's attack on irreligion. They don't explain why it took seven years to accomplish or why the period of irreligion occurred. See Cuningham, *Timothy Dwight*, 302, 328-329; Kelley, *Yale: A History*, 117-123; Reynolds et al., *Two Centuries*, 51-66; C. A. Goodrich, "Narrative of Revivals of Religion in Yale College, from its Commencement to the Present Time," *Journal of the American Education Society* 10, no. 3 (February 1838): 70n; Iain Harnish Murray, *Revival and Revivalism: the Making and Marring of American Evangelicalism, 1750-1858* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1994), 133; Heman Humphrey, *Revival Sketches and Manual* (New York: American Tract Society, 1859), 197-199.

²² While some other scholars argue that Dwight's religion was "Republican" from the beginning, or that Yale as a whole was experiencing reform during the 1790's, none examine the specifics of Dwight's democratization as President. For Dwight's Republican religion, see Snyder, "Foundations of Liberty," 382-397; Marc L. Harris, "Revelation and the American Republic: Timothy Dwight's Civic Participation," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 54, no. 3 (July 1993): 458-459. For Yale's reform, see Linda Kerber, *Federalists in Dissent: Imagery and Ideology in Jeffersonian America* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1970), xii.

fueled by shrill charges and countercharges, and saw the victory of Republican Thomas Jefferson as an indication of America's rising tide of liberalism and its challenge to conservative, "Standing Order" Federalists.²³ They also witnessed debates over the nature of religion: Federalists attacked Jefferson's Deism, and Republicans challenged the clergy's authoritative power and ultimately championed a more democratic Christianity.²⁴

This generation of students also saw a Federalist response to the rise in liberalism and to the popularity of a more accepting, egalitarian faith. By liberalizing their religious rhetoric – focusing on morality over doctrine – and supporting progressive measures in education and science, the Federalists began democratizing their entire ideology.²⁵

²³ Kerber, *Federalists in Dissent*, ix; Richard Hofstadter, *The Idea of a Party System, 1780-1840* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1969), 118-121; John H. Aldrich and Ruth W. Grant, "The Antifederalists, the First Congress, and the First Parties," *The Journal of Politics* 55, no. 2 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, May 1993): 298-300; John E. Ferling, *Adams versus Jefferson: The Tumultuous Election of 1800* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 207-217. The term "liberalism" at the turn of the eighteenth century implied a belief in America's new representative government and the elective power of the people, representing the cultural trends that sought to move away from "Standing Order America." See Gordon Wood, "Ideology and the Origins of Liberal America," *The William and Mary Quarterly* 44, no. 3 (July 1987): 633. For characterization of Federalists as aristocrats who governed independently of the people, and therefore opposed "liberalism," see Richard Buel, Jr., *Securing the Revolution: Ideology in American Politics, 1789-1815* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1972), 185; Vernon L. Parrington, ed., *The Connecticut Wits* (Hamden, CT: Archon Books, 1963), xxxix-xl.

²⁴ During the election of 1800, Federalists incessantly warned the nation of the disastrous effects of an infidel in office. See Charles O. Lerche, "Jefferson and the Election of 1800: A Case Study in the Political Smear," *The William and Mary Quarterly* 5, no. 4 (October 1948): 474; Frank Lambert, "'God- and a Religious President...[or] Jefferson and No God: Campaigning for a Voter Imposed Religious Test in 1800,'" *Journal of Church and State* 39 (1997): 772. Some historians claim that the Republican Party's ability to assuage the public's fear of Jefferson's Deism, and instead promote freedom of religion, was one reason for his victory. On Republicans and religion, see Susan Dunn, *Jefferson's Second Revolution: The Election of 1800 and the Triumph of Republicanism* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2004), 84, 145; Robert M. S. McDonald, "Was There a Religious Revolution of 1800?," in *The Revolution of 1800: Democracy, Race, and the New Republic*, eds. James P. P. Horn, Jan Lewis, and Peter S. Onuf, 173-194 (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2002), 178-180, 185-187; Edward John Larson, *A Magnificent Catastrophe: The Tumultuous Election of 1800, America's First Presidential Campaign* (New York: Free Press, 2007), 164-190.

²⁵ The terms "democratization" and "liberalization" are meant to represent a shift away from traditionally conservative norms of the Federalist Party, especially their criticism of change and progress. For Federalists and a liberalization in ideology, see Kerber, *Federalists in Dissent*, chapters 3,4,6; David Hackett Fischer, *The Revolution of American Conservatism: The Federalist Party in the Age of Jeffersonian Democracy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1965), 91-109; James M. Banner, *To the Hartford Convention: The Federalists and the Emergence of Party Politics in Massachusetts, 1798-1815* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1970), 127-131, 268-269; Lance Banning, *The Jeffersonian Persuasion: Evolution of a Party Ideology* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1978), 14, 220; Robert E. Shalhope,

Dwight was part of this gradual change. His constant interaction with students and his control over their theological instruction made him an omnipresent influence on campus, causing the eventual evolution in his own ideology to impact student life substantially.

Thus, while many factors contributed to the Revival of 1802, one important impetus was the democratization of Dwight's conservative dogma, which fostered an atmosphere conducive to a radical rise in religious sentiment. Contrary to the "Beecher myth," Dwight's arrival and immediate attack on infidelity failed to spark the Revival. As evidenced by the irreligion and misbehavior on campus between 1795 and the Revival seven years later, his aggressive crusade against the Enlightenment and the French Revolution actually alienated his liberally minded students. However, those seven years also saw the gradual evolution of Dwight's conservative tenets, beginning with a modernization of student discipline and academics and ending with a softening of his religious rhetoric around 1800. The democratization of his ideology altered the relationship between faith and liberalism at Yale, encouraging students to embrace religious fervency, while also allowing them to maintain liberal, democratic ideals.

Connecticut and Yale at the Turn of the Century

When Dwight passed away in 1817, Gardiner Spring, Yale Class of 1805 and a freshman during the Revival, gave a funeral sermon that rendered Dwight the redeemer of Connecticut religion and education.²⁶ He wrote, "The influence of Dr. Dwight as the President of Yale College was felt through the land," and while the "city of New Haven [had] yet to learn how much the purity of her morals ... were owing to him," the State of

"Toward a Republican Synthesis: The Emergence of an Understanding of Republicanism in American Historiography," *William and Mary Quarterly* 29, no. 1 (January 1972): 49-50.

²⁶ Gardiner Spring, *Personal Reminiscences of Life and Times of Gardiner Spring* (New York: Charles Scribner & Co., 1866), 79-82.

Connecticut's "literary character ... revolved around him as the centre of that circle of intelligence and excellence."²⁷

Indeed, observers at the turn of the century and current historians alike depict Dwight as the leader of Connecticut's Standing Order, fervently defending the state's traditionally conservative political structure and Congregational Church.²⁸ Connecticut, the "Land of Steady Habits," was a Federalist stronghold; Republicans failed to gain seats to the Governor's Council or U.S. House of Representatives until 1818, well after Jefferson's election as President in 1800.²⁹ The state's conservative bent developed out of its political and social history; virtually self-governing since the seventeenth century, Connecticut didn't feel the need to draft a state constitution until 1818, giving its government a sense of continuity that lacked in other states. Furthermore, it was the most ethnically homogenous state in the nation, and it didn't have a backwoods area to foster unrest.³⁰ When Republicans managed to run candidates in the 1790's, as they did with Gideon Granger and Ephraim Kirby in 1796, they received only a handful of votes.³¹

²⁷ Gardiner Spring, *Oration in Commemoration of their Late President, Timothy Dwight, D.D. L.L.D.*, (New York: Dodge & Sayre, 1817), 25.

²⁸ Purcell, *Connecticut in Transition*, 15-16; Mark Garrett Longaker, "Timothy Dwight's Rhetorical Ideology of Taste in Federalist Connecticut," *Rhetorica: A Journal of the History of Rhetoric* 19, no. 1 (Winter 2001): 103. Historian Peter Briggs focuses on how Dwight exhibited leadership through his writings. See Peter M. Briggs, "Timothy Dwight 'Composes' a Landscape for New England," *American Quarterly* 40, no. 3 (September 1988): 359-361.

²⁹ David Daggett, a Federalist who served as Professor of Law at Yale and held every position in the state government except governor, wrote a treatise titled *Steady Habits Vindicated*. It championed a reliance on traditions and laws already in place, as opposed to experimentation. Its conclusion read, "Be not in haste to embrace novelties. Sober consideration is the daughter of wisdom." David Daggett, *Steady Habits Vindicated, or a Serious Remonstrance to the People of Connecticut, Against Changing the Government* (Hartford: Hudson & Goodwin, 1805), 16, Early American Imprints no. 8284. On Federalists remaining in power until 1818, see Andrew Siegel, "Steady Habits Under Siege: The Defense of Federalism in Jeffersonian Connecticut," in *Federalists Reconsidered*, eds. Doron Ben-Atar and Barbara B. Oberg, 199-224 (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1998), 200.

³⁰ Siegel, "Steady Habits," 199-200; Keller, *Second Great Awakening*, 5-6; Forrest McDonald and Ellen Shapiro McDonald, "The Ethnic Origin of the American People," *The William and Mary Quarterly* 37, no. 2 (April 1980): 187-199.

³¹ Siegel, "Steady Habits," 201-202; William F. Willingham, "Grass Root Politics in Windham, Connecticut during the Jeffersonian Era," *Journal of the Early Republic* 1, no. 2 (Summer 1981): 130-134.

However, this story changed in 1800, when Republicans placed two candidates on the list of nominees for Congress and received over a third of the vote. In New Haven, home of a commercial class largely aligned with Federalism, Republicans actually won votes from nearly 37% of freemen.³² Thus, although Federalists controlled the state government until 1818, the transformative year of 1800 marked a distinct shift in Connecticut politics.³³ The state now saw increased campaigning and propaganda from Republicans, such as Abraham Bishop, John C. Ogden, David Austin, and Ephraim Kirby, who sprang up to organize rallies and attack notable Federalists through the press.³⁴ This political transformation also affected citizens, as new uncertainty around elections increased their interest in voting; numbers at the polls skyrocketed from 4,000 in the 1790's to 22,000 in 1803.³⁵

Just as the political sphere transformed at the turn of the century, Connecticut's religious life also evolved. Congregationalism had always been the established state religion; its Church received tax funding, and its ministers opened every session of the state legislature, as well as Election Day ceremonies.³⁶ However, the eighteenth century witnessed shifts in religious practice that affected even Connecticut's clerical stronghold.

³² Siegel, "Steady Habits," 202; David Waldstreicher and Stephen Grossbart, "Abraham Bishop's Vocation; or, the Mediation of Jeffersonian Politics," *Journal of the Early Republic* 18, no. 4 (Winter 1998): 639; William L. Philie, *Change and Tradition: New Haven, Connecticut, 1780-1839* (Garland Publishers, 1990), 256-257; Noble E. Cunningham, *The Jeffersonian Republicans: The Formation of Party Organization, 1789-1801* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1957), 210.

³³ Although Republicans failed to win a statewide election in the next fifteen years, they often garnered 35-40% of the vote. See Siegel, "Steady Habits Under Siege," 202.

³⁴ David Waldstreicher and Stephen Grossbart discuss the Republican rallies and the resulting Federalist disparagement that electioneering had turned Jefferson's supporters into "jugglers" and "Players" on a stage. Waldstreicher and Grossbart, "Abraham Bishop's Vocation," 638-639. For further description of the Republican ceremonies, see Fischer, *The Revolution of American Conservatism*, 106-107; Norman L. Stamps, "Political Parties in Connecticut, 1789-1819," (Ph.D. diss., Yale University, 1950); Edmund B. Thomas, "Politics in the Land of Steady Habits: Connecticut's First Political Party System, 1789-1820," (Ph.D. diss., Clark University, 1972); Robert J. Imholt, "Timothy Dwight, Federalist Pope of Connecticut," *The New England Quarterly* 73, no. 3 (September 2000): 397-400.

³⁵ Siegel, "Steady Habits," 203; Waldstreicher and Grossbart, "Abraham Bishop's Vocation," 639-640.

³⁶ Siegel, "Steady Habits," 201; Keller, *Second Great Awakening*, 10.

First, the Great Awakening in 1720 – with its emphasis on individual religion – mitigated the importance of Congregationalist leaders.³⁷ The American Revolution added to the upset, with Dwight describing it as the “period Infidelity began to obtain, in this country, an extensive currency and reception.”³⁸ The French Revolution that began in 1789 was the culmination of these influences: even Connecticut citizens were reading the works of Enlightenment thinkers and writers, such as Thomas Paine and Voltaire, and “Jacobinism,” a term that came to imply French infidelity and irreligion, appeared in America.³⁹ And while the Second Great Awakening began reinstating religious fervency in the late 1790’s, the movement was largely democratic, with its first stirrings spawned through the grassroots efforts of local ministers, not fiery traveling preachers or a hierarchical clergy.⁴⁰

Amongst these shifting political and religious trends stood Yale College, founded in 1701 by eleven ministers wishing to offer higher education to Connecticut’s future

³⁷ The Great Awakening split the Congregationalist Church and created the new Methodist and Baptists denominations that would steal away some Congregationalist enthusiasts. Siegel, “Steady Habits,” 201; Frank Lambert, *Inventing the “Great Awakening”* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), 104-114; Leonard Labaree, “The Conservative Attitude Toward the Great Awakening,” *The William and Mary Quarterly* 1, no. 4 (October 1944): 349.

³⁸ Timothy Dwight, *Discourse*, 19. See also Dwight, *Travels*, 4:259-260; Thomas S. Kidd, *God of Liberty: A Religious History of the American Revolution* (New York: Basic Books, 2011), 194. Prior to the American Revolution, the French and Indian War, starting in 1754, allowed Europeans to spread their deistic beliefs to the United States. See Purcell, *Connecticut in Transition*, 7-8; Keller, *Second Great Awakening*, 27; Robert Mathisen, *Critical Issues in American Religious History* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2006), 207; Herbert Montfort Morais, *Deism in Eighteenth Century America* (New York: Russell & Russell, 1960), 71.

³⁹ Purcell, *Connecticut in Transition*, 13; James Roger Sharp, *American Politics in the Early Republic: The New Nation in Crisis* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), 73-74; Steven Watts, “Ministers, Misanthropes, and Mandarins: The Federalists and the Culture of Capitalism,” in *Federalists Reconsidered*, eds. Doron Ben-Atar and Barbara B. Oberg, 157-176 (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1998), 164. For Dwight’s rhetoric on the French Revolution, see footnote 16.

⁴⁰ Reynolds et al., *Two Centuries*, 288; Donald Charles Swift, *Religion and the American Experience: A Social and Cultural History, 1765-1997* (New York: M.E. Sharpe, Inc., 1998), 75. For information on the migration of the Revival to the Western frontiers, see Lovelace, *Dynamics of Spiritual Life*, 46-48; Barry Hankins, *The Second Great Awakening and the Transcendentalists* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2004), 136-141, 153-156, 184.

theologians.⁴¹ For most of the century, Congregationalism ruled the College; in fact, President Ezra Stiles noted in 1774 that 131 out of the 158 Congregational ministers in Connecticut were Yale graduates.⁴² President Thomas Clap, who administered Yale from 1745-1766, zealously enforced the Congregationalist faith. He not only disallowed the Great Awakening's George Whitfield from entering the Church of New Haven, forcing him to preach on the Green, but he also counteracted irreligion by forbidding heretical texts in the library.⁴³ Clap later founded Yale's Church of Christ to pull Separatists back under his influence after the First Great Awakening.⁴⁴

Ezra Stiles, President from 1778-1795, attempted to continue Clap's policy in the face of rising deism and irreligion in the second half of the century, but he was too scholarly and philosophical to impact the student body with his rhetoric or instruction.⁴⁵ Instead, infidelity infected Yale, and the students became readers of Thomas Paine, supporters of the French Revolution, and doubters of established religion. By the time Dwight ascended the Presidency in 1795, the *Laws of Yale College* even had punishments for denial of Scripture and propagation of heresy, listing them ahead of blasphemy, robbery, fornication, theft, and other misbehavior.⁴⁶

Given the College's state, Dwight ascended the Presidency with a mission to root out growing irreligion and return Yale to its previous Congregationalist grandeur. By

⁴¹ Edwin Oviatt, *The Beginnings of Yale, 1701-1726* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1916), 156-161.

⁴² Ezra Stiles, *The Literary Diary of Ezra Stiles, President of Yale College*, ed. Franklin Bowditch Dexter (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1901), 2:415. See also Siegel, "Steady Habits," 201; Purcell, *Connecticut in Transition*, 18.

⁴³ Purcell, *Connecticut in Transition*, 19; Dexter, *Biographical Sketches*, 1:771-772; Kingsley, *History of Yale College*, 13-14; Stokes, *Eminent Yale Men*, 1:36-37; Williston Walker, *The Creeds and Platforms of Congregationalism* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1893), 497.

⁴⁴ Reynolds et al., *Two Centuries*, 32-34; George P. Fisher, *Discourse, Commemorative of the History of the Church of Christ in Yale College, during the First Century of its Existence* (New Haven: Thomas H. Pease, 1858), 8-10.

⁴⁵ Reynolds et al., *Two Centuries*, 45-46; Stokes, *Eminent Yale Men*, 1: 52, 303-307.

⁴⁶ *Laws of Yale College, in New Haven, in Connecticut, enacted by the President and Fellows* (New Haven: T. & S. Green, 1795), Ch. 8, Art. 1-2, Early American Imprints no. 29931.

1795 he had served as tutor at Yale College for six years, chaplain in the Revolutionary Army, and minister at Greenfield Hill, Connecticut.⁴⁷ He had also received national attention for his poems, *Conquest of Canaan*, *Triumph of Infidelity*, and *Greenfield Hill*, establishing himself as a staunch Federalist who would aggressively defend Connecticut's Standing Order.⁴⁸ His arrival at Yale meant a clash of his conservative dogma with students' controversial beliefs, and – at least at first – no clear winner in the contest.

Dwight's "Attack on Infidelity" – According to His Students

Most scholarship about Dwight's influence on campus draws on accounts from some of his foremost students and contemporaries, most famously Lyman Beecher, Yale Class of 1797 and a junior when Dwight was inducted as President in September 1795. Other accounts include those by Benjamin Silliman, Roger Minot Sherman, Gardiner Spring, and Heman Humphrey.⁴⁹ Whether students, tutors, or professors under Dwight, these men were all adoring supporters. Not surprisingly, they all insisted that Dwight immediately augmented religious sentiment among students and ushered in the 1802 Revival.

⁴⁷ Kelley, *Yale: A History*, 115; Cuninghame, *Timothy Dwight*, 33-87, 104-137.

⁴⁸ Longaker, "Timothy Dwight's Rhetorical Ideology," 93-124; Peter K. Kafer, "The Making of Timothy Dwight: A Connecticut Morality Tale," *The William and Mary Quarterly* 47, no. 2 (April 1990): 189, 208-209; Emory Elliot, *Revolutionary Writers: Literature and Authority in the New Republic, 1725-1810* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), 55-56; William C. Dowling, *Poetry and Ideology in Revolutionary Connecticut* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1990), 8-11, 14-17. The most well known account of Dwight's writings is Leon Howard, *Connecticut Wits* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1943).

⁴⁹ Historian John Fitzmier discusses Beecher's "mythic account of Timothy Dwight's Yale revival" and claims it has "cast a long shadow on the historiography of American religion." He calls it "one of the most commonly used prologues to the story of the Second Great Awakening" that has "assumed the stature of a 'classic text.'" Fitzmier cites historians who take Beecher's account as fact, such as Charles Roy Keller, Charles Cuninghame, William Clebsch, and Perry Miller. He also identifies scholars who argue that the account is a mere case of extreme filiopietism, including Edmund Morgan, Richard Birdsall, Richard Shiels, and David Kling. See Fitzmier, *New England's Moral Legislator*, 101.

Lyman Beecher, who went on to study theology with Dwight for a year after graduation and subsequently assumed the ministry of the Presbyterian Church in East Hampton, Long Island, had an obvious bias when chronicling the achievements of his intellectual and religious mentor.⁵⁰ Beecher first recounted the “Age of Infidelity,” or what he termed the “Tom Paine School,” that prevailed at Yale upon Dwight’s arrival:

Before [Dwight] came, college was in a most ungodly state. The college church was almost extinct. Most of the students were skeptical, and rowdies were plenty. Wine and liquors were kept in many rooms; intemperance, profanity, gambling, and licentiousness were common ... the class before me were infidels, and called each other Voltaire, Rousseau, D’Alembert.⁵¹

Beecher recounted that these students also had disdain for the faculty: one of his stories described how former President Ezra Stiles could not quiet the students in the chapel when a foreign dignitary was visiting prayers, even after striking his cane against the stage so forcefully that it broke to splinters. Beecher remembered that students thought Stiles was “of the old regime – the last of that age,” and the faculty was “afraid of discussion.”⁵² For a college founded to educate future ministers, morality on campus was surely lacking.

Beecher then proclaimed that Dwight’s arrival immediately reversed this wave of infidelity. When the disbelieving students handed Dwight a list of subjects for class disputations, “to their surprise he selected this: ‘Is the Bible the Word of God?’ and told them to do their best.” After listening to their arguments, Dwight “preached incessantly

⁵⁰ Jonathan A. Wright, *Shapers of the Great Debate on the Freedom of Religion: A Biographical Dictionary* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2005), 113-114.

⁵¹ Beecher, *Autobiography*, 43. Beecher actually admitted that he too played a few games of cards before Dwight’s arrival.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 40, 43.

for six months on the subject, and all infidelity skulked and hid its head.”⁵³ In the middle of his junior year, Beecher himself was “awakened,” with “no guidance but the sermons of Dr. Dwight.”⁵⁴ His own conversion and extreme admiration of Dwight – he even blazoned, “Oh, how I loved him!” – led Beecher to spread widely the idea that Dwight’s “Attack on Infidelity” had immediately routed out irreligion.⁵⁵

Benjamin Silliman, Yale Class of 1796, Tutor from 1799-1802, and Professor of Chemistry and Natural History from 1802-1853, also reminisced about Dwight’s successful attack on irreligion in the years immediately following 1795.⁵⁶ Just like Beecher, he had ample reason to be biased, as he had joined the College Church under Dwight on September 5, 1802, during the Revival.⁵⁷ In addition, Silliman held the President in high esteem because Dwight had trained and given him the new office of Professor of Chemistry and Natural History, despite Silliman’s young age of twenty-three.⁵⁸

Silliman’s sermon at Dwight’s funeral in 1817 was typical of his appraisal of Dwight’s religious impact at Yale. Like Beecher, Silliman began his remembrance by asserting, “immediately preceding the presidency of Dr. Dwight, the college church, among the students, was almost extinct,” and “soon after [Dwight’s] accession, it dwindled to a single person.”⁵⁹ According to Silliman, “infidelity was too much in

⁵³ Ibid., 43.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 44-47.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 44.

⁵⁶ Chandos Michael Brown, *Benjamin Silliman: A Life in the Young Republic* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), xiii-xiv.

⁵⁷ Fisher, *Life of Benjamin Silliman*, 83, 87-88. As an early eulogist put it, Silliman had “sympathy with the great revival” and “bowed to the yoke of Christ” instead of rejecting it like “an infidel philosopher.” Rev. Dr. John Marsh to J. P. Fisher, 2 March 1864, in Fisher, *Life of Benjamin Silliman*, 48.

⁵⁸ Cuninghame, *Timothy Dwight*, 197-201.

⁵⁹ Benjamin Silliman, *A Sketch in the Life and Character of President Dwight* (New Haven: Maltby, Goldsmith, & Co., 1817), 19.

fashion, and too much in credit, both in this college, and, in this country.”⁶⁰ Silliman recounted that Dwight immediately “assailed infidelity, with his mighty prowess” to such an extent that he often lost sight of his accustomed kindness.⁶¹ Dwight’s intense attack bore fruit: “his ministration was blessed, by repeated seasons, of increased attention to religion, of reformation in life, and manners among the students, and of open profession, by great numbers of hopefully pious youth.”⁶² Silliman declared that by 1802, Dwight’s aggressive message had produced a college church population that “embraced one fourth, sometimes one third of the students,” with 200 persons admitting communion during the course of his administration.⁶³

Other contemporaries also championed Dwight’s immediate effects on religious sentiment, including Roger Minot Sherman, Gardiner Spring, and Heman Humphrey. Sherman graduated at the end of Stiles’ administration, served as a Tutor during Dwight’s first years, and ultimately became Judge of the Supreme Court of Connecticut.⁶⁴ He recounted his memories of Dwight in 1844, writing, “At the time [Dwight] became President, infidelity, the offspring of the French School, was extensively prevalent among the undergraduates, and throughout the State.” However, after Dwight determined “to meet the prevailing errors of the day ... the religion of the Pilgrims, which was fearfully threatened with extermination, regained its respectability and influence. The character of the College was restored.”⁶⁵

⁶⁰ Ibid., 18.

⁶¹ Ibid., 19.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ “Death of Hon. Roger M. Sherman,” [Albany] *Albany Journal*, January 3, 1845.

⁶⁵ William Buell Sprague, another student during Dwight’s administration, decided to compile reminiscences of Yale’s former President and asked Sherman for an account. Roger Minot Sherman to William B. Sprague, 7 February 1844, in *Annals of the American Pulpit*, ed. William Buell Sprague (New York: Robert Carter and Brothers, 1857), 2:164-165.

Gardiner Spring, Yale Class of 1805 and later involved in the creation of the American Bible Society in 1816, experienced the 1802 Revival as a freshman and numbered among those who joined the College Church.⁶⁶ In an oration at Dwight's funeral, he championed Connecticut as the "Athens of America" and Dwight as the "Solon of Athens."⁶⁷ Like his contemporaries, Spring discussed Dwight's successful attack on infidelity at Yale, claiming: "The effervescence of Transatlantic philanthropy had begun to diffuse its poison throughout the presses and bosoms of this young and flourishing Republic." He continued, "In [Dwight's] systematic and vigorous opposition to this flood of error and iniquity ... his official labours as the President of Yale College ... must be numbered among the boldest efforts against the tide of Modern Philosophy."⁶⁸

Heman Humphrey was also Class of 1805, but he arrived at Yale as a junior and thus wrote of Dwight's involvement in the Revival based on others' accounts.⁶⁹ He claimed that "although several classes were deeply tinctured with French infidelity," no student could sit through four years of Dwight's sermons without a desire to convert. In addition, he authoritatively claimed that Dwight's first debate on the power of the Scriptures, noted also in Beecher's account, was the "hour infidelity lost its prestige at Yale college, and has never dared openly to show its head since."⁷⁰ This first disputation "enthroned the president in the confidence of the students, and prepared them to listen with new interest to his admirable discourses from the pulpit."⁷¹ Again, Dwight's rhetoric was immediately successful in heightening respect for religion among students.

⁶⁶ Spring, *Personal Reminiscences*, 79-82; Reynolds et al., *Two Centuries*, 293.

⁶⁷ Spring, *Oration*, 25.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 27-29.

⁶⁹ Zephaniah Moore Humphrey, *Memorial Sketches: Heman Humphrey, Sophia Porter Humphrey* (Philadelphia: J.P. Lippincott & Co., 1869), 20.

⁷⁰ Humphrey, *Revival Sketches*, 197-198.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 197.

These five men – Beecher, Silliman, Sherman, Spring, and Humphrey – represent a sampling of those at Yale whose feelings towards Dwight and strong religious connections led them to praise him with fervency. Yet, even though they were biased, their accounts shaped Dwight's reputation and an understanding of the Revival long after his death, describing the near instant religious impact of his influence on campus and ultimately launching what came to be known as the "Beecher myth."

Dwight's "Attack on Infidelity" – In Reality

Although extremely exaggerated, these early accounts accurately portrayed how Dwight first accumulated power and then launched an attack on irreligion immediately after arriving on campus. As President, Dwight assumed immense authority by altering the laws of the College, adopting multiple academic and administrative roles, and manipulating faculty appointments. He then took advantage of this newfound control, using his sermons and theological instruction to students as a means to attack infidelity and tie irreligion to the Enlightenment and French Revolution.

After arriving at Yale, Dwight first addressed the school's system of governance, almost immediately increasing the power of the Presidency by altering the University's laws. The 1787 *Laws of Yale College* lay out the power of President Stiles in the last chapter, almost as an afterthought; in a single paragraph it states, "The President hath Power to rule, govern and direct the College, and all Matters relating thereto; and likewise all the Students, both Graduates and Undergraduates."⁷² In contrast, Dwight's laws of October 1795 highlighted the President's authority in the first chapter, adding that

⁷² *Laws of Yale College, in New Haven, in Connecticut, enacted by the President and Fellows* (New Haven: Josiah Meigs, Printer to the University, 1787), Ch. 11, Early American Imprints no. 20902.

the “President shall have power ... to punish all crimes and offenses.”⁷³ In addition, the new regulations described the President’s prerogative to appoint a general meeting of the Faculty and Corporation, as well as to control and appoint the meetings of the Prudential Committee, an exclusive group holding even more power than the Corporation.⁷⁴

Not only did Dwight increase Presidential authority, but he also changed the rules on religious instruction.⁷⁵ The regulations of 1787 failed to mention a "Professor of Divinity" entirely, whereas the laws of 1795 vested it with immense responsibility.⁷⁶ Dwight’s regulations gave the Professor of Divinity the “duties of the ministerial and pastoral office in the College,” and ordered him to “use his best and most faithful endeavours to preserve the Students from irreligion, error and vice.” In addition, the Professor of Divinity was to preach two sermons on the Lord’s Day, give another public theological lecture in the Chapel on some other day of the week, and perform lectures and private instruction to resident Graduate students. Finally, in reflection of the original founding mission of the college, the Professor should “form for future usefulness, in the work of the evangelical ministry, such of the Students as shall appear desirous of being prepared for it.”⁷⁷ After creating this powerful position, Dwight promptly declared himself the new Professor of Divinity.⁷⁸ Thus, his updated laws granted him more

⁷³ *Laws of Yale College* (1795), Ch. 1, Art. 2-7.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

⁷⁵ Some laws concerning religion remained the same: both in 1787 and 1795, students had to pay a fine if they missed morning prayers or a service called by the President on a Day of Fasting. They had to respect the Sabbath by not profaning the day by “unnecessary business, by diversion, or by walking abroad, or ... admit[ting] any other Student or stranger into his chamber; or on the preceding or following evening ... mak[ing] indecent noise or disturbance.” See *Laws of Yale College* (1787), Ch. 2; *Laws of Yale College* (1795), Ch 3, Art. 2-4, 6.

⁷⁶ Yale’s Corporation under President Thomas Clap formed the Professor of Divinity position in 1753 and chose Naphthali Daggett for the office in 1755. See Ebenezer Baldwin, *History of Yale College from its Foundation, A.D. 1700, to the Year 1838* (New Haven: Benjamin and William Noyes, 1841), 73.

⁷⁷ *Laws of Yale College* (1795), Ch. 3, Art. 5.

⁷⁸ The Professor of Divinity position had been empty for two years prior to Dwight’s arrival. See Cuninghame, *Timothy Dwight*, 180. In addition, only one other Professor existed until 1801, according to a

administrative power than prior presidents, and heightened his authority over the religious lives of students.

The Presidency and Professor of Divinity were not the only roles Dwight assumed upon his arrival in New Haven. Another means he used to amplify his influence over Yale was the assumption of two additional offices – Professor of Belles Lettres and Oratory, and instructor of senior class recitations – making a grand total of four formal posts, any of which “might have furnished ample employment for an individual.”⁷⁹ The assumption of so many positions guaranteed Dwight constant interaction with students, especially the senior class, lending him what Silliman called a “double character, of Instructor and Governor.”⁸⁰ In addition, diaries of students during Dwight’s administration cite the President’s constant instruction, whether in theological lectures, the disputation room for seniors, or Sunday sermons. Jeremiah Evarts, Class of 1802, recorded on Saturday, October 31, 1801, that he “had an excellent Theological lecture from the President.” Less than a week later, he wrote, “At noon recitation the President made some excellent observations...” And the following Sunday, Dwight “preached on [the] importance of the soul in Matthew 16, 26.”⁸¹ Dwight’s multiple positions gave him the opportunity to mold constantly both the educational and spiritual lives of students.

letter from Dr. Marsh, who arrived at Yale in 1800. Reverend John Marsh to George P. Fisher, 2 March 1865, in Fisher, *Life of Benjamin Silliman*, 49.

⁷⁹ Alexander Johnston, *A Study of Commonwealth Democracy: Connecticut* (Boston and New York: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1887), 305, Box 3, Folder 171, Anson Phelps Stokes Autograph Collection, Manuscripts and Archives, Sterling Memorial Library, Yale University.

⁸⁰ Silliman, *A Sketch in the Life*, 16. For more on Dwight’s pervasive rhetoric and instruction to students, see Abe C. Ravitz, “Timothy Dwight: Professor of Rhetoric,” *The New England Quarterly* 29, no. 1 (March 1956): 63-64.

⁸¹ Jeremiah Evarts, *Journal: September 27, 1801 – January 2, 1802*, October 31, 1801, November 6, 1801, November 8, 1801, Box 5, Folder 192, Evarts Family Papers, Manuscripts and Archives, Sterling Memorial Library, Yale University. Jeremiah Evarts was a senior during the Revival of 1802 and had an intensive conversion process that became famous throughout the country. See Ebenezer Carter Tracy, *Memoir of the Life of Jeremiah Evarts* (Boston: Crocker and Brewster, 1845), 19-25.

The last means by which Dwight assumed immense authority was by manipulating faculty appointments. Upon arriving at Yale, he immediately set out to remove any professors that disagreed with his conservative, anti-Republican, and especially anti-French ideology. His main target was Josiah Meigs, Yale Class of 1778 and inducted as Professor of Mathematics and Natural Philosophy under Stiles.⁸² Although Dwight had actually tutored Meigs, and the Professor had produced a periodical in the early 1790's to which Dwight often contributed articles, Meigs's Republican leanings, and especially his support of the French Revolution, doomed him in Dwight's eyes.⁸³

Meigs first began presenting problems when his pro-French tendencies were the alleged cause of a brawl between intoxicated citizens on July 4, 1797. The fight resulted from a misunderstanding between him and a friend who didn't favor the Professor's pro-French, anti-British sentiment. As Meigs later explained to the Yale Corporation, his intentions were "far from being hostile" when he told a story about British cruelty during the American Revolution, but his offended friend instantly elevated the situation, proclaiming that he would die at the hands of the British, "rather than submit to the aggression of France."⁸⁴ Soon after the episode, the [New York] *Daily Advertiser*

⁸² [New Haven] *Connecticut Journal*, October 15, 1794. See also William Montgomery Meigs, *Life of Josiah Meigs*, (Philadelphia: J. P. Murphy, 1887), 31-32.

⁸³ Meigs, *Life of Josiah Meigs*, 33-38. For information about the public paper, see Josiah Meigs to the Yale Corporation, *Regarding his Retaining his Position at Yale after being Publicly Charged as being an Enemy of the United States*, September 18, 1798, Box 1, Yale University Corporation Records, Manuscripts and Archives, Sterling Memorial Library, Yale University.

⁸⁴ Meigs, *Regarding his Retaining his Position at Yale*. In his letter to the Corporation, Meigs claimed that as the inebriated crew walked through New Haven's streets singing "Hail Columbus," the first two lines of the second verse – "Immortal Patriots, rise once more; Defend your rights, defend your shore" – reminded him of a moment on Long Island in 1794. There he had seen the remains of American captured soldiers from the Jersey prison ship lying exposed to the elements, and he had asked the company to bury the dead. Because this British ship was a place to hold American prisoners during the Revolutionary War and became a symbol of English cruelty, Meigs story exuded anti-British sentiment. For more information on

published an article condemning Meigs for his violent anti-British sentiment and pro-French sympathies.⁸⁵

While Meigs was dealing with these issues, his Republican political leanings and support of the French Revolution further aggravated his standing with Dwight.⁸⁶ Despite Connecticut's heavily Federalist politics, Meigs publicly declared himself a Jeffersonian Republican and proud supporter of the French Revolution.⁸⁷ He was so clear about his political leanings that the Federalist *Commercial Advertiser* described him as a "known Democrat" and "known opposer of our government," who was unfit to teach at Yale.⁸⁸ On the other side of the debate, Abraham Bishop, a fiery Republican orator famous for his Jeffersonian loyalties, praised Meigs as "one of the most ardent and intelligent of our brethren" against the "British friends of order."⁸⁹

With so much unrest surrounding Meigs, Dwight finally convinced the Corporation in 1798 that his support of the French Revolution made him an enemy of the United States. Meigs responded on September 13, 1798, with a formal defense to the Yale Corporation.

I have been a warm friend of the French Revolution, and hoped it would be productive of human happiness; but for a long time past I have with great pain beheld them violating the Rights of Nations ... The Present Situation of our

the Jersey Prison Ship, see Albert E. Greene, *Recollections of the Jersey Prison-Ship* (New York: P.M. Davis, 1831), xiii-xiv.

⁸⁵ [New York] *Daily Advertiser*, July 30, 1798.

⁸⁶ As previously mentioned, Dwight had always been an outspoken critic of the French Revolution. See Cuninghame, *Timothy Dwight*, 297-300. Dwight also distrusted Americans who had spent considerable time in Europe. One of these was Joel Barlow, a fellow Yale graduate and "Connecticut wit" who supported the French Revolution. Dwight ceremoniously took down all portraits of Barlow upon entering office. See Silverman, *Timothy Dwight*, 97.

⁸⁷ Meigs, *Life of Josiah Meigs*, 33-38.

⁸⁸ [New York] *Commercial Advertiser*, May 23, 1798.

⁸⁹ Abraham Bishop, *Oration delivered at Wallingford on the 11th of March 1801*, in [Providence, RI] *Impartial Observer*, June 20, 1801.

Country demands the aid of all the Citizens, and I am determined to support the Executive of the United States in the defence of their Constitutions.⁹⁰

Despite this statement and an article to the public on September 18 renouncing support for the French Revolution, Meigs left Yale three years later and moved southward, ultimately becoming the first President of the University of Georgia.⁹¹ While he might have left Yale due to a leadership opportunity in Athens, later correspondence suggests that the administration forced his exit. In a letter from Meigs's wife Clara to their son, Henry, she wrote that not only Timothy Dwight, but also his brother Theodore, were the cause of Meigs's "exile" to the backwoods of Georgia "for no earthly reason but his stern democracy."⁹² And Meigs himself in 1815 recounted this sequence of events: "In 1795, my Friend and Patron Doctor Stiles died – In 1800 I was elected President of the University of Georgia – I was placed in the woods – I was a Democrat ... The Tories and the Religionists dismissed me."⁹³

Ultimately Dwight's efforts to mold the faculty into a group of what Meigs perceived as "Tories and Religionists" proved successful. In fact, in a letter written from Yale student Stephen Farrar Jones to his Exeter pal at Harvard, Jared Sparks, the young Yale observed that the President and faculty were "perfectly united in their sentiments, with regard to Politics and Religion," which were "very nearly the same with those of

⁹⁰ Josiah Meigs to the Yale Corporation, *Declaration to the Committee of the Corporation Regarding the French Revolution*, September 13, 1798, Box 1, Yale University Corporation Records, Manuscripts and Archives, Sterling Memorial Library, Yale University.

⁹¹ The Yale Corporation minutes noted on September 8, 1801, "The Corporation was presented by the President with Mr. Professor Meigs's Resignation..." *Minutes of the Corporation: Records of the President and Fellows, September 12, 1798 – September 9, 1828*, Box 6, Reel 5, Yale University Corporation and Prudential Committee Minutes, Manuscripts and Archives, Sterling Memorial Library, Yale University; [New Haven] *Columbian Register*, September 21, 1822; Meigs, *Life of Josiah Meigs*, 42-45.

⁹² Clara Benjamin Meigs to Henry Meigs, 1840, in Meigs, *Life of Josiah Meigs*, 42-43.

⁹³ Josiah Meigs, *Reminisce: Letter to "My Dear Friend,"* October 13, 1815, Box 1, Yale Student Reminiscences, Manuscripts and Archives, Sterling Memorial Library, Yale University.

Calvin and Washington.”⁹⁴ By 1811, when Jones drafted this letter, Dwight had manipulated professor appointments to such a degree that the entire faculty represented one conservative ideology.

As he assumed immense power over governance of the College, Dwight’s position as Professor of Divinity and head of the Church of Christ allowed him to disseminate aggressive religious rhetoric that attacked the Enlightenment and French Revolution. Just as Beecher, Silliman, and other contemporaries suggested, Dwight indeed encountered campus-wide unrest and infidelity when he became President. The Yale Corporation Minutes from February 2, 1795, indicate that crime was widespread: the Prudential Committee recorded, “Damage has been done in several instances lately, in the Chapel, and in the Fences around the College Yard, in the night time.” The Corporation also received a petition from students of several classes “requesting a Vacation or Cessation from their Collegiate Residence and Studies for a Fortnight or three weeks, this petition being directly contrary to the Acts of the Corporation.”⁹⁵

In addition to student crime and a lack of interest in their studies, Yale students were also questioning Christianity. Records of the Yale Church of Christ noted that only eleven students of a total population of 110 were congregation members in 1795.⁹⁶

⁹⁴ Stephen Farrar Jones to Jared Sparks, 30 January 1811, 28 May 1811, in *Life and Writings of Jared Sparks*, ed. Herbert Baxter Adams (Boston and New York: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1893), 1:45-46.

⁹⁵ *A Book of Original Entries and Minutes at the Meetings of the Corporation and of their Committees, begun A.D. 1786*, February 2, 1795, Box 5, Reel 4, Yale University Corporation and Prudential Committee Minutes, Manuscripts and Archives, Sterling Memorial Library, Yale University.

⁹⁶ *Chronological Catalogue of the Members of the Church of Christ in Yale College, 1757 to 1927*, Box 1, Folder 1, Church of Christ, Yale University, Records, Manuscripts and Archives, Sterling Memorial Library, Yale University. For total student population, see Stokes, *Eminent Yale Men*, 223. The Yale Church of Christ had been founded under President Clap on June 30, 1757, as a response to the radical undercurrents of the Great Awakening. Becoming a member meant the student was “desirous to attend upon the Ordinance of the Lord’s Supper under the Administration of the Rev Professor.” *Record of the Church of Christ in Yale College in New Haven, from June 30, 1757, to September 7, 1817*, Box 1, Folder

Chauncey A. Goodrich, Yale class of 1810 and later Professor of Rhetoric and Oratory under President Jeremiah Day, recalled that the death of former Professor of Divinity Dr. Wiles in 1793, combined with the increasing influence of the French Revolution, inspired students to “call in question the peculiar doctrines of the gospel, if not the truth of Christianity itself.”⁹⁷

Dwight’s authority as Professor of Divinity allowed him to confront these problems with aggressive religious and political rhetoric. And not only did his sermons and public orations offer theological instruction to students, but they also reached a larger audience through the plethora of newspapers that printed his discourses across the nation.⁹⁸ His messages mostly centered on irreligion and its connection with French philosophy and liberal politics. One of his more widely dissipated sermons was “The Nature and Danger of Infidel Philosophy,” ministered at the baccalaureate service to the Class of 1797. At this ceremony, Dwight criticized the confusing, contradictory arguments of nine ancient infidel philosophers and nine modern philosophers, including Rochester, Wharton, Woolston, Blount, Tyndall, Hobbes, Voltaire, Hume, and Rousseau.⁹⁹ Then he warned the nation of the European Enlightenment’s successful leap over the Atlantic, preaching: “But even here the evil in a degree exists.... At home, you

2, Church of Christ, Yale University, Records, Manuscripts and Archives, Sterling Memorial Library, Yale University.

⁹⁷ Goodrich, “Revivals of Religion,” 70. For information on Goodrich, see Kelley, *Yale: A History*, 143.

⁹⁸ For more information on the rising print culture in the United States and its dissemination of religious and political tracts, see Donald Stewart, *The Opposition Press of the Federalist Period*, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1969); Clarence S. Brigham, *History and Bibliography of American Newspapers, 1690-1820*, (Worcester: American Antiquarian Society, 1947); Constance Schulz, “Of Bigotry in Politics and Religion: Jefferson’s Religion, the Federalist Press, and the Syllabus,” *The Virginia Magazine of Biography and History* 91, no. 1 (January 1983): 73-91. Abraham Bishop, a staunch Republican, specifically criticized the Federalists’ manipulation of national celebrations to espouse their conservative ideology. He claimed Federalists used the pulpit like a theater “stage” in promoting their selfish interests. Waldstreicher and Grossbart, “Abraham Bishop’s Vocation,” 638-639.

⁹⁹ Timothy Dwight, *The Nature and Danger of Infidel Philosophy: Addressed to the Candidates for the Baccalaureate in Yale College, September 9, 1797* (New Haven: printed by George Bunce, 1798), 20-27, Early American Imprints no. 33657. See also Gabriel, *Religion and Learning at Yale*, 68-69.

will see one decent or doubtful person ... sliding slowly down the declivity of irreligion.... Among these will frequently be found ... the grave, the learned, and the honourable.”¹⁰⁰ The French Enlightenment’s infidelity was even infecting America’s most intellectual and honored leaders.

Another fiery sermon was Dwight’s “The Duty of Americans at the Present Crisis,” which he preached at a July Fourth celebration in 1798. This oration promulgated recent news that an anarchist, anti-Christian society called the Illuminati had migrated from Europe and was spreading in Republican clubs ("democratic societies") across the United States.¹⁰¹ Although the rumors, spread originally by fellow Congregationalist minister Jedidiah Morse, ultimately held no truth, Dwight gave a ranting sermon warning that support of French Enlightenment ideals would aid this secret society and ultimately lead to the destruction of American government and religion.¹⁰² He asked:

Is it that we may change our holy worship into a dance of Jacobin phrenzy, and that we may behold a strumpet personating a Goddess on the altars of Jehovah? Is it that we may see the Bible cast into a bonfire ... and our children ... uniting in the mob, chanting mockeries against God.... Shall our sons become the disciples

¹⁰⁰ Dwight, *Nature and Danger of Infidel Philosophy*, 64-65.

¹⁰¹ Ultimately rumors about the Illuminati were crushed, embarrassing Federalists and Congregationalist ministers alike who had preached of the society’s immense threat to the nation and its ties to the Republican Party. For more information, see Silverman, *Timothy Dwight*, 99-100; Vernon Stauffer, *New England and the Bavarian Illuminati* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1918); James King Morse, *Jedidiah Morse: A Champion of New England Orthodoxy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1939), 51.

¹⁰² Jedidiah Morse, *A Sermon, Delivered at the New North Church in Boston, in the Morning, and in the Afternoon at Charlestown, May 9th, 1798, being the Day Recommended by John Adams, President of the United States of America, for Solemn Humiliation, Fasting and Prayer* (Boston: printed by Samuel Hall, 1798), 21, Early American Imprints no. 34149.

of Voltaire, and the dragoons of Marat, or our daughter the concubines of the Illuminati?¹⁰³

Again, Dwight used religious occasions to attack Enlightenment ideals and the French Republic's liberal politics.

Dwight's manipulation of theological events to spread his political opinions led to severe criticism, which usually cast him as a tyrannical aristocrat seeking to control the religious and political lives of Americans.¹⁰⁴ John Cosens Ogden, atypical in that he was an Episcopalian minister but also an ardent Republican, proclaimed that Dwight would prejudice "the young men...taught by him" "with the scorpions of Calvinism and Edwardeanism, the scorpions of polemic divinity, party politics."¹⁰⁵ Ogden even claimed that Dwight was the leader of the Illuminati, which was in truth, according to Ogden, a society of aristocratic, power-hungry clergymen.¹⁰⁶ In addition the Republican *American Mercury* stated, "in the *ecclesiastical carcase* of Connecticut, the President of Yale is the *grand pabulum*," uttering his "cautious *intrigues* of party, in sermonizing [and]

¹⁰³ Timothy Dwight, *The Duty of Americans, at the Present Crisis, Illustrated in a Discourse* (New Haven: printed by Thomas and Samuel Green, 1798), 20-21, Early American Imprints no. 33656.

¹⁰⁴ For a general overview of criticism of Dwight, notably by Republicans John C. Ogden, David Austin, Stanley Griswold, Ephraim Kirby, Abraham Bishop, William Duane, and Charles Holt, see Imholt, "Federalist Pope of Connecticut," 386-411; Colin Wells, *The Devil and Doctor Dwight: Satire and Theology in the Early American Republic* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 19-22; Christopher Grasso, *A Speaking Aristocracy: Transforming Public Discourse in Eighteenth Century Connecticut* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999), 377-378. For secondary literature that criticizes Dwight for his aggressive tactics, see Douglas L. Good, "The Christian Nation in the Mind of Timothy Dwight," *Fides et Historia* 7 (1974): 9; Robert Edson Lee, "Timothy Dwight and the Boston *Palladium*," *New England Quarterly* 35, no. 2 (June 1962): 238; Stephen E. Berk, *Calvinism versus Democracy: Timothy Dwight and the Origins of American Evangelical Orthodoxy* (Hamden, CT: Archon Books, 1974), 161-193.

¹⁰⁵ John Cosens Ogden, *An Appeal to the Candid, upon the Present State of Religion and Politics in Connecticut* (New Haven, 1798), 11-12, Early American Imprints no. 34267.

¹⁰⁶ Josh Cosens Ogden, *A View of the New England Illuminati: who are Indefatigably Engaged in Destroying the Religion and Government of the United States; under a Feigned Regard for their Safety – and under an Impious Abuse of True Religion* (Philadelphia: printed by James Carey, 1799), 17, Early American Imprints no. 36010.

prayer.”¹⁰⁷ Others claimed that Dwight even controlled the Connecticut state government, referring to him as the “present priest, who may be honored with the appellation of pope,” and who “emphatically holds the keys which command [the government’s] political damnation or salvation.”¹⁰⁸ Not surprisingly, Dwight's tyrannical power and political tirades ultimately fostered negative backlash from the Republican Party.

Irreligion at Yale: 1795-1801

While Beecher, Silliman, and other contemporaries accurately described Dwight's immense assumption of authority with regard to governance of the school and aggressive religious rhetoric, they ultimately over-exaggerated its effects. Despite the “Beecher myth,” in actuality irreligion and student mischief continued through 1801, with 1800 often seen as the College’s darkest year. Examination of Church Records, the minutes of the Moral Society – the only religious group on campus – and a student’s personal diary reveal sustained immorality during the six years following Dwight’s arrival.

Despite Dwight's best efforts, Church membership actually declined during his first years at Yale. Between 1795 and 1801, only twenty new members entered the Church of Christ.¹⁰⁹ Of these twenty, three were professors or tutors – Josiah Meigs, Jeremiah Atwater, and Roger Minot Sherman – and a fourth was Clara Meigs, who most

¹⁰⁷ [Hartford, CT] *American Mercury*, April 30, 1801.

¹⁰⁸ John Wood, 1802, in Johnston, *Commonwealth Democracy*, 245, Anson Phelps Stokes Autograph Collection. Dwight was commonly referred to as the “Pope of Federalism” due to his extreme clerical influence in New England and his conservative political ideology. This characterization can be seen in numerous Republican newspaper stories, including [Philadelphia] *Constitutional Diary*, January 17, 1800; [Hartford] *American Mercury*, March 19, 1801; [New York] *American Citizen*, March 29, 1802. For other nicknames, such as “The Metropolitan See of Federalism,” see Silverman, *Timothy Dwight*, 101.

¹⁰⁹ *Chronological Catalogue of Members*, Church of Christ, Yale University, Records.

likely joined the Church to alleviate the trouble surrounding her husband's behavior.¹¹⁰ In his description of Yale in 1795, Professor Chauncey Goodrich included a footnote: "eleven undergraduates have been pointed out to me by persons then in college, who are *known* to have been professors of religion [church members] in 1795. About four years after, the number was reduced to four or five."¹¹¹ David D. Field, the historian from the Class of 1802, also mentioned his class's low Church membership "for the greater part of our entire four years course, indeed until within six months of our graduation."¹¹² Only one member of his class, Daniel Strong, entered College as a "professor of religion," but he passed away at the end of their junior year.¹¹³ Field even remembered: "At the administration of the Lord's Supper, in September 1801, there was not an undergraduate among the communicants."¹¹⁴

The records of the Moral Society also demonstrate the lack of religious zeal under Dwight's initial tutelage, despite his best efforts. This organization, founded in April 1797 with the mission to improve the moral lives of its members through biweekly theological discussion, may have been in line with Dwight's intentions, but it failed to gain an active, dedicated community in its initial years.¹¹⁵ Attendance at meetings was sporadic: the first President of the Society failed to show up at the first three meetings.¹¹⁶ Shubael Bartlett was elected President in 1800 after the two prior officers failed in their

¹¹⁰ *Record of the Church of Christ*, Church of Christ, Yale University, Records.

¹¹¹ Goodrich, "Revivals of Religion," 70n. For more information on the evolution of Church membership in the 18th century, see Morgan, "Ezra Stiles and Timothy Dwight," 105-109.

¹¹² Field, *Brief Memoirs*, 8. Field converted on March 4, 1802.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 9.

¹¹⁵ Kelley, *Yale: A History*, 118; Gabriel, *Religion and Learning at Yale*, 72-74. Gabriel argues that the Moral Society was a pioneer of the voluntary, humanitarian religious organizations that proliferated in the nineteenth century, including missionary, tract, Bible, peace, temperance, and antislavery groups.

¹¹⁶ *Journal of the Meetings, Proceedings, and Transactions of the Moral Society*, April 11, 1797, April 25, 1797, June 13, 1797, Box 58, Folder 274, Clubs, Societies, and Organizations at Yale Records, Manuscripts and Archives, Sterling Memorial Library, Yale University.

duties.¹¹⁷ On multiple occasions the Orator was not prepared for the session, and during the winter of 1798, the minutes show that the Society failed to meet from December 2nd to March 3rd.¹¹⁸ In 1801, two members – Mr. Foster and Mr. Penit – abruptly quit the group, stating that they “could not dedicate so much time for the Society.”¹¹⁹

In addition, the Moral Society reached outcomes to disputations that counteracted Dwight’s conservative religious ideology. In two separate instances the meeting’s disputants addressed the topic, “Ought infidels to be excluded from holding public offices?” and unanimously decided it in the negative.¹²⁰ In another meeting, the Society voted that “civil ought to interfere with ecclesiastical authority.”¹²¹ And in a third discussion, members concluded that “theaters are beneficial” to society, even though Dwight clearly denounced the immorality of watching plays.¹²²

The Moral Society’s Minutes also revealed the crimes of Yale students, since its mission was to address and root out student mischief.¹²³ The Society gave members the opportunity to confess their sins and seek forgiveness: Lyman Beecher came forward during one meeting and admitted that, “diverted of consideration by the impulse of

¹¹⁷ Ibid., September 11, 1800. Charles Cuninghame notes that Shubael Bartlett was dismissed from the Moral Society because he was *too* religious. However, the minutes show his holding officer positions throughout his undergraduate career and therefore prove Cuninghame’s assertion incorrect. See Cuninghame, *Timothy Dwight*, 302.

¹¹⁸ The *Journal of the Moral Society* shows that an orator or President failed to attend on January 9, November 2, and December 18, 1798, April 12, 1799, and July 14, 1801.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., December 23, 1801.

¹²⁰ Ibid., July 11, 1797, September 4, 1798.

¹²¹ Ibid., March 13, 1798.

¹²² Ibid., March 10, 1801. In a sermon given to the students and recorded in Jeremiah Evarts’s *Journal*, Dwight grouped “frequenting theaters” with gambling and visiting brothels to give examples of “how much ingenuity prevails in the more public behavior of men.” See Evarts, *Journal*, November 1, 1801.

¹²³ More evidence for the crimes and misbehavior of students lies in a petition in 1799 from the sophomore class for Samuel S. Baldwin, a student suspended for defacing a building in a “moment of folly and juvenile rashness.” Austin, Clark, Deming, and Wales, Committee on behalf of the Sophomore Class, *Copy of a Petition of the Sophomore Class on Behalf of S. S. Baldwin*, 1799, Box 5, Folder 37, Student Unrest at Yale Collection, Manuscripts and Archives, Sterling Memorial Library, Yale University. While most mischievousness resulted in damage to buildings or failure to follow certain College stipulations, the students also got in “town and gown” skirmishes with sailors using the New Haven port. See Brooks Mather Kelley, *Yale: A History*, 124-126.

passion,” he had broken glass by throwing stones from his window.¹²⁴ In another meeting, a Mr. Lyman professed that he had used profanity on a regular basis.¹²⁵ One eventful evening the President called an emergency session to discuss the playing of cards by four members of the Society: “Gilbert of the Senior class came forward and voluntarily confessed it. . . . The Stand Committee proceeded to name those whom they suspected (viz.) Whitman and Benedict of the Senior Class, and Wales of the Junior Class.”¹²⁶ While all four students ultimately asked forgiveness for seeking “amusement in the walls of the College,” Benedict had to read a more humbling confession since he had played cards for profit. Finally, in December 1801, Jeremiah Evarts gave an address to the Society, asserting that “sin, profanity, and vice prevailed in the College in so uncommon a degree” that he suggested the Society create a committee to approach corrupt students.¹²⁷

Jeremiah Evarts, this strict moralist who suggested amending his less upstanding peers, revealed in his diary that even he misbehaved. On a few occasions he recorded that Church was boring, or that he had skipped prayers.¹²⁸ His record of expenses shows that he spent a small amount on Buttery snacks, oil, and candles, but he squandered most money on wine.¹²⁹ He also paid a decent sum to “see a dwarf which was exhibited as a show,” and wrote an insensitive description of the eleven-year-old boy as “possess[ing] less mental powers than [a] dog, or a parrot.”¹³⁰

¹²⁴ *Journal of the Moral Society*, August 8, 1797.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, August 8, 1797, August 11, 1801.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, April 29, 1800.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, December 23, 1801, December 29, 1801.

¹²⁸ Evarts, *Journal*, October 11, 1801, November 24, 1801.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, December 7, 1801.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, December 6, 1801. Such activities as going to shows and paying money for bizarre entertainment were considered irreligious to a strict Congregationalist like Dwight.

In addition to his own misbehavior, Evarts described Dwight chastising students for their crimes. He recorded that during an evening reading by a tutor, “considerable disturbance was made on account of the impatience of the students,” and “the President remarked ... that for all such conduct an account would be required at the great day.”¹³¹ One day after prayer meeting, the President angrily abolished all speaking in the Chapel because of increased disturbance. He then “grieved at several things ... the windows in the Brick Meeting House were injured, the town pump was unfitted for use, and logs were thrown down the stairs of College.” He bemoaned, “These tricks are beneath the dignity of young gentlemen pursuing a course of liberal education.”¹³²

Clearly, the years from 1795 to 1801 saw the continuance, if not the increase, of irreligion and misbehavior, proving again that the "Beecher myth" falls short. Although Dwight assumed significant power over the academic and religious lives of students, his “Attack on Infidelity” failed to coincide with an immediate moral reform or religious revival on campus.

Liberalism among Yale Students

The reason that Dwight was unsuccessful in transforming his irreligious Yalies into moral saints was that his conservative dogma clashed with their liberal ideologies. Not only did an irreligious environment pervade the school until 1802, but students also openly disagreed with Dwight on numerous other issues. These included their desire to read Enlightenment authors, debate controversial topics, and form their own political opinions, Federalist or otherwise. While Dwight shared some opinions with the students,

¹³¹ Ibid., November 15, 1801.

¹³² Ibid., December 22, 1801.

such as appreciation for the merits of education and support of elective government, the liberal thought that pervaded student life doomed Dwight's efforts – at least, for a time.¹³³

Yalies differed from Dwight in that they embraced new scientific ideas and texts, a branch of learning that conservatives often identified with dangerous Enlightenment ideas that promoted reason over faith.¹³⁴ A series of letters between Jeremiah Evarts and his friend, John White of East Guilford, reveal the students' awe for science at the turn of the century.¹³⁵ Discussing Isaac Newton's merits, Evarts stated, "We acquire of ourselves all that is really meritorious ... if a man improves his mind ... he is entitled to praise."¹³⁶

White also included poetry in his letter of praise for Newton; one verse read, "nature

¹³³ Both Dwight and his students demonstrated their more general appreciation of education. For an example of student sentiment, freshman Horace Holley wrote a letter to his father after the winter recess in 1800, exuding excitement that he had "settled down again to a regular course of studying, than which, nothing I find is more conducive to happiness." See Horace Holley to Luther Holley, 9 February 1800, Box 1, Folder 21, Ravi D. Goel Collection, Manuscripts and Archives, Sterling Memorial Library, Yale University. Jeremiah Evarts also praised education as the most important benefit of permanent, patriotic societies, stating, "This predilection of ones own country...preserves the knowledge of the arts and sciences." See Jeremiah Evarts, *A Dissertation on Amor Patriae: A Student Essay*, August 6, 1800, Box 5, Folder 190, Evarts Family Papers, Manuscripts and Archives, Sterling Memorial Library, Yale University. Dwight and his students also expressed similar opinions on democracy and the importance of elections. The debating societies featured the students' deciding the affirmative to the question, "[Is] a democratical form of government more favorable to a monarchy?" and championing an elective over a hereditary government. See *Brothers in Unity Records, from December 4, 1783 to April 20, 1803*, March 23, 1795, February 7, 1798, Box 8, Folder 36, Clubs, Societies, and Organizations at Yale Records, Manuscripts and Archives, Sterling Memorial Library, Yale University; *Records of the Linonian Society, From the 21st of November, 1797, started by E. Bronson*, December 23, 1800, Box 5, Folder 15, Linonian Society, Yale College, Records, Manuscripts and Archives, Sterling Memorial Library, Yale University.

¹³⁴ Dwight was specifically opposed to students' *independent* study of science through reading works of radical, non-Federalist scientists. He also denied scientific theories that challenged traditional religious beliefs, such as physical geography and geology's contradiction of creation. He did not actually oppose science in general, and in fact supported the introduction of sciences into the curriculum later in his administration, as long as he controlled the religious, conservative professors teaching these subjects and made sure they explained science as supporting Christian beliefs. See Cuningham, *Timothy Dwight*, 314; Kerber, *Federalists in Dissent*, 80-88. Dwight's manipulated version of science prompted historians Kathryn and Philip Whitford to claim that he was an "amateur scientist," and "intellectually committed to a preconception of universal order governed by his view of the nature of God." Kathryn and Philip Whitford, "Timothy Dwight's Place in Eighteenth-Century American Science," *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 114, no. 1 (February 1970): 62.

¹³⁵ The first letter in the series lists some of Evarts's critiques of White's poetry, such as proper syllable usage for the word "clarion" and instruction never to use the infinitive after words like "bid" and "dare." See Jeremiah Evarts to Mr. John White, 17 October 1801, Box 3, Folder 126, Evarts Family Papers, Manuscripts and Archives, Sterling Memorial Library, Yale University.

¹³⁶ Jeremiah Evarts to John White, 28 December 1801, *ibid.*

yielded to the bold research; Of Newton's indefatigable soul; whose mind sagacious turned."¹³⁷

Another proclamation of the benefits of scientific discovery came in a Phi Beta Kappa oration delivered before the 1797 Commencement.¹³⁸ The speaker was Charles Chauncey, who graduated Yale in 1792 at the mere age of 15 and ultimately became a highly esteemed judge in Philadelphia.¹³⁹ Although the Phi Beta Kappa orations tended to be reactionary, Chauncey argued against the widely held, conservative criticism that scientific progress bred infidelity. He asserted, "scientific progression, if just, tends to the establishment of an attendant progression in Morals ... the numerous associations, for the promotion of Science, in Europe and America, may ... be adduced as proof of the advancement of the present age."¹⁴⁰ Furthermore, he praised the discovery of electricity for its "supremacy of philosophical invention and improvement;" chemistry for its ability to "preserve the health and diminish the labour of man;" and the "pursuits of the Astronomer, towards nobler objects."¹⁴¹

The minutes of Yale's two debating societies also demonstrate the students' independent quest for scientific and Enlightenment knowledge, specifically through the outcome of disputations and the purchasing of works by European philosophers. The

¹³⁷ Jeremiah Evarts to John White, 5 November 1801, *ibid.*

¹³⁸ Phi Beta Kappa was introduced to Yale and Harvard in 1781 after being founded at William and Mary in December 1776. Its mission was to encourage mutual aid in literature between educated men of different universities, and the Yale chapter began its orations and poems at Commencement for this purpose in September 1787. See Adams, *American Education History*, 133-134; Kelley, *Yale: A History*, 108, 223.

¹³⁹ For Chauncey's biographical information, see his Obituary in [Litchfield, CT] *Litchfield Republican*, September 13, 1849; Charles William Darling, *Memorial to my Honored Kindred* (Utica, NY: 1888), 56-58.

¹⁴⁰ Charles Chauncey, *An Oration Delivered before the Society of Phi Beta Kappa; at their Anniversary Meeting in the City of New Haven, on the Evening Preceding Commencement* (New Haven: printed by T. and S. Green, 1797), 27, Box 5, Folder 261, Phi Beta Kappa, Yale University, Records, Manuscripts and Archives, Sterling Memorial Library, Yale University.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 6-7; 9-10; 11.

Linonian Society and Brothers in Unity Society, formed in 1753 and 1764 respectively, stood as two rival, student-run organizations that provided a weekly avenue for disputation and intellectual exchange.¹⁴² The “Brothers” Constitution, written in 1784, proclaimed its mission to give members a liberal education regarding “political interest,” “the origin of literary institutions,” and “the improvement of science and friendship.”¹⁴³ As the precursors to Yale’s modern day secret societies, these clubs allowed students to debate controversial topics, perform plays, and borrow books from their free-lending libraries, which held no relationship to the Yale College library.¹⁴⁴

The societies’ debates and inclusion of radical texts in their libraries demonstrate that Yale students at the turn of the century valued scientific and Enlightenment ideas and ideals, even though Dwight would have discouraged independent study of science and condemned their reading of Enlightenment philosophical texts.¹⁴⁵ In a 1796 Brothers in Unity disputation, the members asked, “Has or is it probable that Paine’s Age of Reason will produce bad effects?” The scribe noted the question “was fully discussed as

¹⁴² Cuningham, *Timothy Dwight*, 251-252; Robson, *Educating Republicans*, 151; Ezekiel Porter Belden, *Sketches of Yale College* (New York: Saxton and Miles, 1843), 124-125; Joshua C. Kendall, *The Forgotten Founding Father: Noah Webster’s Obsession and the Creation of an American Culture* (New York: G. P. Putnam’s Sons, 2011), 30. Jeremiah Evarts was so loyal to the Brothers in Unity that in a composition, he concluded, “Every person . . . anticipates the time, when . . . his memory shall tough with the peculiar delight on such scenes exhibited in the Philocation Society, as shall enliven his spirits and elevate his soul.” Evarts, *A Dissertation on Amor Patriae*, August 6, 1800.

¹⁴³ “Constitution,” *Brothers in Unity Records, from December 4, 1783 to April 20, 1803*, December 4, 1783, Box 8a, Clubs, Societies, and Organizations at Yale Records, Manuscripts and Archives, Sterling Memorial Library, Yale University.

¹⁴⁴ Notably, members could simultaneously belong to the Moral Society: the Brothers in Unity boasted the names of such religious students as Beecher, Silliman, and Evarts, while Church of Christ converts Junius Smith, John Hall, and Roswell Randall Swift served as Linonian President, Vice President, and Scribe in 1802. See *Brothers in Unity Catalogue of Members, 1768-1845*, Box 9, Folder 45, Clubs, Societies, and Organizations at Yale Records, Manuscripts and Archives, Sterling Memorial Library, Yale University; *Records of the Linonian Society*, March 10, 1802, April 14, 1802, June 23, 1802.

¹⁴⁵ For Dwight’s criticism of the Enlightenment, see Dwight, *Nature and Danger of Infidel Philosophy*, 20-27, 63-64; Wells, *Devil and Doctor Dwight*, 18, 37. For an example of his disdain for any science that contradicted Christianity, see his blaming “men of science” for calling into question the Bible’s account of creation. Timothy Dwight, *Theology: Explained and Defended, in a Series of Sermons* (New Haven: T. Dwight and Son, 1839), 1:278-279.

negative.”¹⁴⁶ In an “elegant and thorough disputation,” on March 4, 1801, the Brothers affirmed, “science increases happiness.”¹⁴⁷

The Linonian and Brothers in Unity also included controversial authors in their libraries – which by 1814 contained 854 and 860 books, respectively – with both libraries largely created due to strict restrictions on borrowing books from the Yale College Library.¹⁴⁸ Texts included Jefferson’s *Notes on the State of Virginia*, a biography on Mahomet, and the *Memoirs of Voltaire*, none of which would have pleased Dwight and his conservative dogma. The libraries also housed works by Enlightenment thinkers, such as Thomas Paine’s *Works*, as well as poetry and plays, including Republican Joel Barlow’s *Columbiad* and *Vision of Columbus*.¹⁴⁹ These volumes, especially those of highly liberal thinkers like Voltaire and Paine, demonstrate the students’ persistence in obtaining access to modern, controversial authors, despite Dwight’s criticisms.¹⁵⁰

Yalies also disagreed with Dwight’s conservative ideology by championing public education, arguing the equality of the sexes, and even calling for the allowance of infidels in office. On the subject of public education, liberals traditionally advocated –

¹⁴⁶ *Brothers in Unity Records*, November 9, 1796.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, March 4, 1801.

¹⁴⁸ When Dwight took office, the library only numbered 2,700 antiquated volumes, most of which Dean Berkeley had donated in 1733. Although Dwight undertook a revamping of the library, seeking funds from the Connecticut state government and purchasing new texts from Europe, the Prudential Committee emphasized “Dwight’s judgment to select works of a correct character.” Furthermore, according to the *Laws of Yale College*, only juniors and seniors had the privilege to borrow books. Therefore, the library only bore texts that garnered Dwight’s stamp of approval, and freshmen and sophomores had no means to access information. For information on the library, see Cuningham, *Timothy Dwight*, 248-250; for the law regarding access to the library, see *Laws of Yale College*, (1795), Chapter 9, Article 1.

¹⁴⁹ *Catalogue of Books in the Linonian, Brothers’, and Moral Libraries, Yale College* (New Haven: printed by Oliver Steele, 1814), Beinecke Library, Yale University. Barlow actually published these works in 1807, after the Revival, but their avocation of republican ideals and institutions represents the liberal nature of the Societies’ libraries. See Steven Blakemore, *Joel Barlow’s Columbiad: a Bicentennial Reading* (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 2007), 1-2.

¹⁵⁰ Dwight disagreed so much with Voltaire’s teachings that he addressed his entire *Triumph of Infidelity* – a poem criticizing irreligion – to the philosopher. In the introduction, Dwight writes to Voltaire, “...you opposed truth, religion, and their authors, with sophistry, contempt, and obloquy.” See Timothy Dwight, *The Triumph of Infidelity: A Poem* (Printed in the World, 1788), Early American Imprints no. 21065. For Dwight’s criticism of Paine, see Dwight, *Travels*, 4:264; Cuningham, *Timothy Dwight*, 297-300.

and conservatives disparaged – a shift away from private teachings to state-sponsored schooling.¹⁵¹ While Federalists wished to maintain the Standing Order by expanding the private universities established by their forefathers, leading Republicans like Benjamin Rush and Joel Barlow were strong advocates for establishing national universities.¹⁵² Rush wrote that with “one general, and uniform system of education ... I consider it possible to convert men into Republican machines.”¹⁵³ The prospect of a “Republican machine” would hardly have inspired traditionalist Federalists.

However, Dwight’s students embraced this liberal Republican sentiment. When the Brothers debated the question, “Is a public preferable to a private Education?” they concluded “by a very large majority in the affirmation.”¹⁵⁴ Yale student Daniel Haskel recorded a similar disputation but included an explanation. He reasoned that regulated education would instate and ensure virtuous and moral teachings in universities, and because it was “necessary ... that youth should receive a moral education ... [and] that habits of industry should be acquired in youth,” the United States government should assume control of such a crucial educational system.¹⁵⁵

¹⁵¹ Federalists assumed that a Republican president would manipulate the curriculum at a national university by removing the classics and ancient languages, which they viewed as indispensable in maintaining a sense of history and tradition. See Kerber, *Federalists in Dissent*, 106-111, especially 112.

¹⁵² Federalist Rufus King addressed the present responsibility to maintain private universities; he wrote, “our forefathers ... in the midst of their difficulties founded Colleges,” and “their Posterity in more favourable Circumstances neglect them.” Rufus King to Noah Webster, 30 June 1807, from *The Life and Correspondence of Rufus King: His Letters, Private and Official, his Public Documents, and his Speeches*, ed. Charles R. King (New York: G. P. Putnam’s Sons, 1898), 5:34-35. For information concerning Rush and Barlow, see Kerber, *Federalists in Dissent*, 107-109.

¹⁵³ Benjamin Rush, “Of the Mode of Education Proper in a Republic,” in *The Selected Writings of Benjamin Rush*, ed. Dagobert D. Runes (New York: Philosophical Library, 1947), 92. Historian Linda Kerber discusses that when Rush wrote this in 1786, it didn’t garner much Federalist criticism. However, when the issue of a national university became a partisan conflict at the turn of the century, it was reprinted in the *New England Quarterly Magazine* for its use of the specific term “Republican.” See Kerber, *Federalists in Dissent*, 108-109.

¹⁵⁴ *Brothers in Unity Records*, December 17, 1800.

¹⁵⁵ Daniel Haskel, *Composition written between August 22nd, 1800, and July 4th, 1803*, November 1800, Box 1, Folder 2, Yale Debates and Disputations Collection, Manuscripts and Archives, Sterling Memorial Library, Yale University.

Another area in which students held liberal opinions was the question of gender relations. While traditionalist Federalists reinforced the continued separation of male and female spheres of influence, as well as women's inherent weakness, Yale students felt differently.¹⁵⁶ In the Brothers in Unity meeting of November 19, 1795, the society debated, "Are the natural abilities of the females inferior to those of the males?" The students "decided in favour of the negative by a majority of 24 to 13."¹⁵⁷ The Linonians also debated this question on March 11, 1801, and arrived at the same conclusion.¹⁵⁸ Similarly, students Jeremiah Evarts, Jesup Couch, and Daniel Haskel wrote compositions contending that the natural abilities of men and women were equal. Evarts wrote, "If we train females, throughout periods of childhood, and youth, we shall find that they receive instruction with equal facility."¹⁵⁹ Couch argued, "in childhood it is manifest that the females are full equal to the males in learning," so men's natural endowments couldn't be considered superior.¹⁶⁰ And Haskel answered affirmatively to the question, "Is the genius

¹⁵⁶ Historians often see the Federalists as suffering from a crisis in masculinity as they lost power around the turn of the century, leading the "male world of the young Federalists" to be "one of the locations where, in Toby L. Ditz's words, the 'cultural production of gender categories' took place." Albrecht Koschnik, "Young Federalists, Masculinity, and Partisanship during the War of 1812," in *Beyond the Founders: New Approaches to the Political History of the Early Republic*, eds. Jeffrey L. Pasley, Andrew Whitmore Robertson, and David Waldstreicher, 159-179 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 161. See also Toby L. Ditz, "Shipwrecked; or, Masculinity Imperiled: Mercantile Representations of Failure and the Gendered Self in Eighteenth-Century Philadelphia," *The Journal of the Early Republic* 81, no. 1 (1997): 53; David Waldstreicher, "Federalism, the Styles of Politics, and the Politics of Style," in *Federalists Reconsidered*, eds. Doron Ben-Atar and Barbara B. Oberg, 99-117 (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1998), 115. Historian Shirley Samuels discusses Dwight specifically, arguing that in his *Triumph of Infidelity* and *A Discourse on Some Events of the Past Century*, he identifies Deism and infidelity as a threat to the pure Christian women, and chauvinistically implies that wives and daughters are dependent on protection from men. See Shirley Samuels, "Infidelity and Contagion: The Rhetoric of Revolution," *Early American Literature* 22, no. 2 (Fall 1987): 185-186.

¹⁵⁷ *Brothers in Unity Records*, November 19, 1795.

¹⁵⁸ *Records of the Linonian Society*, March 11, 1801.

¹⁵⁹ Jeremiah Evarts, *Are the Abilities of Females Inferior to those of Males?: A Student Essay*, January 25, 1801, Box 5, Folder 191, Evarts Family Papers, Manuscripts and Archives, Sterling Memorial Library, Yale University.

¹⁶⁰ Jesup Couch, *Common Place Book or a Particular Account of the Disputations and Questions discussed in Yale College by the Davis Division, from the 16th of February, 1801*, Question 17, Box 2, Folder 7, Yale Debates and Disputations Collection, Manuscripts and Archives, Sterling Memorial Library, Yale

of the females equal to the males?,” arguing that females have not at that time “made such a figure or shone with equal luster with males,” because of their “want of opportunity and not of genius.” He specifically worried that if a woman developed her intellect, “it would immediately be said that she meant to supplant the men by wearing the breeches and was ... out of the sphere of a woman’s observations.”¹⁶¹

In addition to public education and gender equality, students also differed with Dwight on the topic of infidels and foreigners in political office. Even though Dwight didn’t want his students too involved in politics – Evarts even recorded a speech in which Dwight rebuked “students’ meddling with political characters” – his Yalies often discussed governmental concerns.¹⁶² The Brothers in Unity, most likely in the heat of 1800 election excitement, even answered “Ought Students interest themselves in politics?” soundly in the affirmative.¹⁶³ Not only were they involved in politics, but students also voiced general acceptance of infidels and foreigners in office, even after Dwight’s countless diatribes attacking irreligion and the French. The Brothers in Unity Minutes from December 26, 1798, read, “Disputed whether Infidels ought to be excluded from public offices, which was decided in the Negative.” This same topic generated identical sentiment on December 15, 1799, and November 19, 1800.¹⁶⁴ In a similar vein, Haskel noted a disputation questioning, “Ought Foreigners to be excluded from public

University. Couch became a Representative in the Ohio State Legislature in 1808 and assumed the position of Judge of the Supreme Court from 1816 until his death in 1821. See Dexter, *Biographical Sketches*, 5:480.

¹⁶¹ Haskel, *Composition*, August 22, 1800.

¹⁶² Evarts, *Journal*, November 6, 1801.

¹⁶³ *Brothers in Unity Records*, June 18, 1800. Jeremiah Evarts was so interested in current news and politics that he went to observe a trial for murder at the Superior Court. A New Haven resident, Zacharias Ned Thomson, had become intoxicated at a local “grogshop,” and after a night of belligerent behavior, had murdered another man with a club. The court convicted him of manslaughter. Evarts, *Journal*, December 30, 1801. For more examples of student interest in politics, see *Brothers in Unity Records*, August 20, 1795, March 14, 1797; *Records of the Linonian Society*, July 29, 1801.

¹⁶⁴ *Brothers in Unity Records*, December 26, 1798, December 15, 1799, November 19, 1800.

office?” Haskel explained why the disputation concluded in the negative: “I wish not to be understood to think that foreigners are men better calculated for public office than our own citizens. But if there are such in the U. States . . . who are more suitable persons for public offices than our own citizens, they ought to be elected.”¹⁶⁵ In contrast to Dwight, the students believed that the man best fit should take office, even if he was an infidel or foreigner.

Notably, while liberalism in this period was often associated with rising Jeffersonian Republicanism, the students appeared not to have aligned with a specific party. Their debates, essays, and correspondence mentioning political events, such as the Jay Treaty and Alien and Sedition Acts, fail to reveal party alignment. In fact, students often flip flopped between Republican and Federalist positions. The Brothers in Unity decided on August 9, 1795, that it would not “... be politic for the United States to ratify Mr. Jay’s treaty between Great Britain and America” – a pro-Republican view, given that Federalists championed the treaty as a way to strengthen British-American relations.¹⁶⁶ However, in November 1800, and again in February 1801, the Brothers “decided by a very great majority in the negative” to the question, “Is the sedition Law an infringement of the Constitution?” – a pro-Federalist view, particularly given that the act was partly aimed at crushing the Republican press.¹⁶⁷ The Linonian Society Minutes and Jesup

¹⁶⁵ Haskel, *Composition*, [no date], p. 89.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, August 9, 1795. The Jay Treaty, signed with Great Britain by John Jay in 1794 and approved by Alexander Hamilton and President Washington, was so hotly contested between Federalists and Republicans that it has been referred to as “the beginning point for national party machinery.” The treaty effectually violated the 1778 Alliance between France and the United States and strengthened economic ties with Britain, thus reflecting Federalist aims. See Sharp, *American Politics*, 113-135.

¹⁶⁷ *Brothers in Unity Records*, November 3, 1800, February 18, 1801. The Alien and Sedition Acts included the Alien Act; the Naturalization Act, which increased time needed to become a citizen of the United States from 5 to 14 years; the Alien Enemies Act, giving the President the right to deport any resident alien from a country that was currently at war with the U.S.; and the Sedition Act, which declared that publishing false or malicious information about the government was a crime. See Alan Taylor, “Alien

Couch's notebook also reveal the same affirmative conclusion to the question, "Is the Sedition law politic?"¹⁶⁸

In addition, students criticized both Federalists and Republicans when lamenting emerging partisan politics and the rise of campaign slander. In *A Dissertation on Amor Patriae*, Jeremiah Evarts proclaimed, "Why is [patriotism] not oftener inculcated as a duty in our periodical publications; instead of so much vain altercation between mad party zealots?"¹⁶⁹ In the same tone, Daniel Haskel, in a composition titled "Ambition," denounced politicians, noting that in order that a political candidate's "calumnies may spread farther, [and] take deeper root, he publishes in every newspaper against public men & public measures, [and] represents every subject in a false light."¹⁷⁰ Jesup Couch also touched on this subject when he recorded an affirmative conclusion to the dispute, "Is Party Spirit detrimental to the cause of Liberty?"¹⁷¹

Thus, although students did not consistently align with Jefferson's Republicans, they constantly demonstrated their willingness to dissent from Dwight's teachings.¹⁷² In contradiction to the "Beecher myth," Dwight's highly conservative dogma failed to turn liberal Yalies into loyal Federalists. However, even as the students veered in their religion, misbehavior, and politics, a slow evolution was occurring on campus that would transform religious life among students for a decade to come.

and Sedition Acts," in *American Congress: The Building of Democracy*, ed. Julian E. Zelizer, 63-76 (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2004), 63-72.

¹⁶⁸ *Records of the Linonian Society*, February 25, 1801; Couch, *Common Place Book*, Question 13.

¹⁶⁹ Evarts, *A Dissertation on Amor Patriae*, August 6, 1800.

¹⁷⁰ Haskel, *Composition*, February 1802.

¹⁷¹ Couch, *Common Place Book*, Question 1.

¹⁷² The students even exposed irreverence for Dwight and his administration: in a Brothers in Unity debate, the students asked, "Whether it was best to give the Corporation and other Clergymen a dinner, at the annual Commencement," and the majority ultimately voted in the negative. See *Brothers in Unity Records*, August 31, 1796.

The Religious Revival of 1802

Six years of Dwight's "Attack on Infidelity" failed to affect his students dramatically. Then in the early spring of 1802, a "memorable dispensation of divine grace" descended on the College, culminating in the Revival of 1802.¹⁷³ The Reverend Dr. Porter of Farmington, a junior at the time, reminisced that first David Field, "was now so established in hope, that he was propounded to the church, and on the first Sabbath in March, was received."¹⁷⁴ Fellow senior Jeremiah Evarts took Communion on April 4, 1802, "so smitten with conviction of sin, that his anxiety could not be concealed, until it terminated ... in consolation and peace."¹⁷⁵ Three juniors and three sophomores followed on May 2 and May 18, and a rush of 50 students inquired about joining the Church before the summer holiday. "Wherever students were found in their rooms, in the chapel, in the hall, in the college-yard, in their walks about the city," Porter concluded, "the reigning impression was, 'Surely God is in this place.'"¹⁷⁶

Beginning with Field's conversion on March 4, 1802, Church Records indicate that a total of 63 students professed Christianity and joined the College Church by the end of the year. This number tripled – in just ten months – the 21 students who had joined the Church in the six years following Dwight's arrival in 1795, and it embraced all classes, although it had the largest impact on the senior class.¹⁷⁷ According to Field, "on the Sabbath preceding our own graduation, twenty-five of our Class sat down at the table of

¹⁷³ Goodrich, "Revivals of Religion," 71.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid. David D. Field, the historian for the class of 1802, was the first convert. *Record of the Church of Christ*, Church of Christ, Yale University, Records.

¹⁷⁵ Goodrich, "Revivals of Religion," 71.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷⁷ For annual statistics, see *Chronological Catalogue of the Members*, Church of Christ, Yale University, Records; for Church minutes recording specific names, class year, and dates of profession, see *Record of the Church of Christ*, Church of Christ, Yale University, Records. The majority of students joined the Church on July 4, 1802, August 1, 1802, and November 7, 1802, thereby demonstrating the sustained impact of the Revival into the fall of 1802.

the Lord;” a third of the class of 56 students later became ministers.¹⁷⁸ “The whole college was shaken,” recalled Heman Humphrey, a freshman at Yale during the spring of 1802. It seemed for a time as if the entire “mass of the students would press into the kingdom.... It put a new face upon the college.” Like Field, Humphrey also noted its impact on the future careers of the converted Yale students: “In the four preceding classes only *thirteen* names of ministers stand against *sixty-nine* in the next four years, nearly if not quite all of them brought in by the great revival.”¹⁷⁹ The Class of 1803 even formed a Constitution that bound its signers long after graduation to “make mention of each in our prayers to the throne of Grace,” “strive so far as in us lies for the prosperity of Zion,” and pray for those who had not joined the College Church upon leaving Yale.¹⁸⁰

President Dwight made sure to spread word of the Revival to the public, painting an image of Yale’s campus as bursting with recently converted saints humbly reaching out to their less fortunate classmates. Dwight published a description in the *Connecticut Evangelical Magazine* of June 15, 1802; while he rejoiced in the number of recent converts, he also noted that the increase in religion did not cause a heightened legalism on campus. He wrote, “[n]o spirit of self-sufficiency, no inclination to distribute censures, no appearance of arrogance have hitherto been discovered.” Delighted with the change, Dwight concluded, “The state of Yale College is, in the view of the Instructors, more pleasing and desirable than at any former period within their knowledge.”¹⁸¹ Other

¹⁷⁸ Field, *Brief Memoirs*, 8-9.

¹⁷⁹ Humphrey, *Revival Sketches*, 198.

¹⁸⁰ *Articles of Agreement: Class of 1803 Constitution*, September 14, 1803, Box 1, Folder 1, Yale College Records of Classes, Manuscripts and Archives, Sterling Memorial Library, Yale University.

¹⁸¹ “A Brief Account of the Revival of Religion now Prevailing in Yale College, New-Haven, Communicated to the Editors by one of the Instructors of the College,” [Hartford, CT] *Connecticut Evangelical Magazine*, June 15, 1802. The article was also included in a letter from David D. Field to Reverend Ebenezer C. Tracy because Field felt it most accurately presented the events occurring at Yale.

newspapers across the country also promulgated news of Yale's Revival.¹⁸² And in addition to his article in the *Connecticut Evangelical*, Dwight added in a letter to Jedidiah Morse on July 22, 1802, that "of the whole number, who have been pious, a very few only, hitherto, appeared to fade off." He also predicted that nine more students would probably be admitted at the next Sabbath, but he returned to the letter after that Sunday to add a footnote: "July 28th – There were *seventeen* students propounded the last Sabbath."¹⁸³

Student accounts during this period also overflowed with religious sentiment. Take, for example, the diaries of Jeremiah Evarts. In the fall and winter months directly prior to the spring Revival, Evarts immersed his studies in religious ideas and texts. On October 24, 1801, he wrote that he had read one of Dwight's sermons, noting, "On the whole it is very good. The President proved beyond doubt that Religion is the chief end of man."¹⁸⁴ He attended the Moral Society on Tuesday, October 27, where he read a fiery sermon by J. Leland.¹⁸⁵ He spent his free time reading theological texts, such as Butler's *Analogy of Religion to the Constitution and Course of Nature* and Fuller's Gospel, "a book which will do much good in the world."¹⁸⁶ By the end of December, he had finished Beilby's *Evidence of the Truth of Christianity*, "a useful work, especially for the young, and those who have not opportunity to read larger works on the subject," and

David D. Field to Ebenezer C. Tracy, 1802, Box 3, Folder 142, Evarts Family Papers, Manuscripts and Archives, Sterling Memorial Library, Yale University.

¹⁸² For other newspapers that published articles on the Revival of 1802, see [Windham, CT] *Windham Herald*, June 3, 1802; [Brattleboro, VT] *Federal Galaxy*, August 9, 1802; [Boston] *Independent Chronicle*, August 26, 1802; [Fredericktown, MD] *Political Intelligencer*, September 17, 1802.

¹⁸³ Timothy Dwight to Jedidiah Morse, 22 July 1802, Box 3, Morse Family Papers, Manuscripts and Archives, Sterling Memorial Library, Yale University, (emphasis added).

¹⁸⁴ Evarts, *Journal*, October 24, 1801.

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, October 27, 1801, October 29, 1801.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, October 25, 1801, November 29, 1801.

three of Bishop Horne's Sermons "on the death of King Charles I, on Church Music, and on the character of true wisdom."¹⁸⁷

Evarts's budding religiosity took off after his conversion in April of 1802, which was such an emotional, public process that it became famous in many accounts.¹⁸⁸ Before the Revival, his typical week day at Yale featured prayer and washing up before seven AM, breakfast and work followed by morning and noon recitation, supper and strolling, and finally socializing and work until bedtime at eleven PM.¹⁸⁹ After the Revival, as he went off into the world to head a Vermont school, he infused his day with religion. In addition to his former activities, he sought to, "engage in writing something of a religious or moral nature till breakfast ... after breakfast and family prayers devote half an hour of reading the Scriptures and prayer ... endeavour to compose my mind so as to pray in school ... spend half an hour about sundown in prayer, self-examination, and reading the Word of God ... spend the evening until ten as I shall think will be the most to the glory of God."¹⁹⁰ He made similar demands of his sister, writing to her in 1803 that she should pursue a personal, fervent relationship with God. "[Y]ou must not think that mere formal approbation of religion in the gross will be of any avail," he wrote, "[T]he heart must be thoroughly subdued by Divine grace.... You cannot help acquiring [this] if you look attentively into the Word of God."¹⁹¹

¹⁸⁷ Ibid., December 12, 1801, December 27, 1801.

¹⁸⁸ Such accounts include the letter from David D. Field to Ebenezer C. Tracy that included Dwight's article in the *Connecticut Evangelical Magazine*. Field specified to Tracy that the anonymous boy mentioned in Dwight's article for undergoing such a tumultuous conversion in April was Jeremiah Evarts. David D. Field to Ebenezer C. Tracy, 1802, Evarts Family Papers. For other accounts that include Evarts's emotional story, see Goodrich, "Revivals of Religion," 72; Tracy, *Life of Jeremiah Evarts*, 19-25.

¹⁸⁹ Evarts, *Journal*, November 3, 1801.

¹⁹⁰ Jeremiah Evarts, *Journal: May 22, 1803 – September 12, 1803*, June 18, 1803, Box 5, Folder 193, Evarts Family Papers, Manuscripts and Archives, Sterling Memorial Library, Yale University.

¹⁹¹ Jeremiah Evarts to Sarah Washburn, 3 May 1803, Box 3, Folder 123, Evarts Family Papers, Manuscripts and Archives, Sterling Memorial Library, Yale University.

Other student accounts also demonstrated this extreme rise in religious conviction. Even the societies focused their debates on religion: on July 14, 1802, in the midst of conversions, the Brothers in Unity debated twice whether “the observance of the Sabbath [was] a temporal benefit,” concluding in the affirmative on both occasions.¹⁹² The Moral Society asked a similar question: “Has the Christian religion been beneficial to mankind, as it respects the enjoyments of life?,” and decided in the affirmative.¹⁹³ During a recitation on December 15, 1803, which answered the question, “Has the Discovery of America been beneficial to the world?,” students concluded that the “science of navigation [and] natural history has been improved greatly,” but the most important benefit was the “introduction of religion among the natives of America.”¹⁹⁴ Samuel Farmer Jarvis, Yale Class of 1805 and son of a New Haven Bishop, recorded on his January 20th birthday, “God grant that often as every revolving year ... thro’ his grace [I] conduct myself in the manner most suitable to His glory.”¹⁹⁵

Students were even dreaming about religion. In an essay titled “Dreams are from Jove,” Daniel Haskel recorded his vision from the night before. A person “rob’d in the purest white” took him through a village in which resided “all the different characters among men.” They encountered a rich man, a popular politician, and finally a powerful monarch, all of them depressed and discontented. Haskel and his guide then came across a “man in a most pitiful condition,” almost naked from poverty and inflicted with disease. However, the man had faith: “his soul continually breathed out hallelujahs toward

¹⁹² *Brothers in Unity Records*, July 14, 1802, December 29, 1802.

¹⁹³ *Journal of the Moral Society*, December 28, 1802.

¹⁹⁴ Moses Bradford, *Miscellaneous Observations made in the Recitation Room*, December 15, 1803, Beinecke Library, Yale University.

¹⁹⁵ Samuel Farmer Jarvis, *Diary No. 1, from September 29, 1802 to February 28, 1803*, January 20, 1803, Box 19, Folder 315, Diaries (Miscellaneous) Collection, Manuscripts and Archives, Sterling Memorial Library, Yale University.

Heaven,” and “he even blessed God for his own affliction.” So the poor beggar was the happiest of the four characters, leading Haskel to observe that anyone who had an individual relationship with the Creator “possessed that which is real and permanent.”¹⁹⁶

Finally, the religious reform that Dwight had so adamantly desired was sweeping campus – but not because of his overweening power and aggressive rhetoric, and only after the passage of seven years. Something had changed on campus, but what? By emphasizing Dwight's almost immediate conversion of Yale students, the “Beecher myth” ignores this question. No doubt the President's constant theological instruction had influenced religious sentiment on campus since 1795, but what was the impetus for such a radical shift from irreligion to the “change produced in the face of college [by the] finger of God” in the spring of 1802?¹⁹⁷

Democratization of Dwight's Ideology

While many factors contributed to the dramatic change on Yale's campus, one major influence was the evolution in Dwight's method of teaching and preaching. By 1802, Dwight was fully focused on making Yale College a modern institution; he reformed governance of student discipline, modernized academics, and began preaching of the importance of morality for the individual and society, rather than using his religious rhetoric to attack French infidelity. Ultimately, the evolution of Dwight's dogma molded a new understanding of religion and its relationship to progressive ideals, so that by the spring of 1802, students at Yale could embrace Dwight's religious

¹⁹⁶ Haskel, “Miscellanies. Salisbury, April 12, 1803 – Elsans, Number 1st Salisbury April 12th,” *Composition*, 1803.

¹⁹⁷ Noah Porter to his brother, Preceptor of Hamilton Oneida Academy, 30 May 1802, published in [Providence, RI] *Providence Gazette*, September 4, 1802.

teachings while maintaining their liberal ideology. Ironically, by softening his conservative dogma, he won over far more students than he had with his “Attack on Infidelity.” This isn't to say that outside influences didn't shape Yale's Revival, as many scholars have shown. But the President’s actions on campus *also* heavily influenced religious stirrings in 1802, simply by making room for them.

Dwight’s ideas didn't change overnight. As early as 1796, even while amassing tyrannical control over the College’s governance and expounding aggressive religious rhetoric, he was also enacting democratic changes to student discipline. Since the time of President Clap, student governance had depended on a large set of rules that imposed fines for certain crimes, such as playing billiards or missing prayers, and allowed upperclassmen to demand services and errands from freshmen.¹⁹⁸ Dwight upended these rules in a number of ways, including mitigating the enforcement of fines, creating a “parental system” of discipline for young Yalies entering college as early as sixteen, and amending the Freshman Laws.¹⁹⁹

The fining system was Dwight’s first reform, as he thought that monetary punishments were more a burden for parents than students.²⁰⁰ Although the Yale College Laws continued to list fines for certain crimes, such as skipping Thanksgiving services or participating in a Comedy or Tragedy, Dwight chose not to enforce these reparations.²⁰¹

¹⁹⁸ Kelley, *Yale: A History*, 120-122; Cuningham, *Timothy Dwight*, 252-260.

¹⁹⁹ Historian Brooks Kelley uses Volumes 4, 5, and 6 of Dexter’s *Biographical Sketches* to calculate that the median age of men entering Yale usually hovered around sixteen. Kelley, *Yale: A History*, 120.

²⁰⁰ Cuningham, *Timothy Dwight*, 258; Gabriel, *Religion and Learning at Yale*, 62; Frederick Rudolph and John Thelin, *The American College and University: A History* (Atlanta: University of Georgia Press, 1962), 107; Franklin Bowditch Dexter, *Student Life at Yale College under the First President Dwight* (Worcester, MA: American Antiquarian Society, 1918), 393.

²⁰¹ The *Laws of Yale College* in 1787 charge four pence for missing Thanksgiving sermons, three Shillings for acting in a play (and actually four Shillings for playing the part of a woman), and two Shillings and six Pence for playing Billiards. The *Laws of Yale College* in 1795 demanded these same monetary values,

Instead, he disciplined through his “parental system,” in which he developed individual relationships with students to promote good behavior and admonish them on a more personal level.²⁰² Dwight ensured his disciplinary control by passing a new regulation through the Yale Corporation stipulating that when a student under age fifteen committed a crime that should result in expulsion, “the Executive Authority may at their Discretion, interdict his connection with the College until the next Meeting of the Corporation ... who may inflict any other punishment, less than Expulsion.”²⁰³ Dwight's new regulation enabled him to decide whether a boy was lacking in maturity instead of morality, and whether or not to expel him.

Dwight’s new system wasn't intended to be soft on students, but he believed that his personal touch would be more effective. As Silliman noted in his eulogy of Dwight, the President thought that “a sway of influence, rather than a coercion ... a course of *private* persuasion – remonstrance and admonition, aided by parental counsels ... may often save a youth, upon whom, the mere penalties of law would exert no effectual influence.”²⁰⁴ Dwight later described this system as designed “to prevent the commission of crimes by moral influences, rather than to punish them when committed” with fines.²⁰⁵

Dwight also modernized student discipline by mitigating the pervasiveness of the “fagging system.” This tradition allowed sophomores, juniors, and seniors to demand

although fines were expressed in cents. See *Laws of Yale College*, (1787), Ch. 2,4; *Laws of Yale College* (1795), Ch. 3, 8.

²⁰² Rudolph and Thelin, *The American College*, 103-104; Kingsley, *History of Yale College*, 46; Edmund S. Morgan, *The Gentle Puritan: A Life of Ezra Stiles, 1727-1795* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1962), 326, 345, 368, 425.

²⁰³ *Minutes of the Corporation*, September 8, 1802, Yale University Corporation and Prudential Committee Minutes.

²⁰⁴ Silliman, *A Sketch of the Life*, 24-25.

²⁰⁵ Timothy Dwight, “Dispute VIII – Is a Lie ever Justifiable?,” November 24, 1813, in *President Timothy Dwight’s Decisions of Questions, discussed by the Senior Class in Yale College, in 1813 and 1814*, ed. Theodore Dwight, Jr. (New York: Jonathan Leavitt, 1833), 53-55. See also Gregory Clark, “Timothy Dwight’s Moral Rhetoric at Yale College, 1795-1817,” *Rhetorica: A Journal of the History of Rhetoric* 5, no. 2 (Spring 1987): 152-154.

favors and errands of freshmen, as a means – as the official *Laws of Yale College* put it – of instructing freshmen in “that graceful and decent behaviour towards superiors, which politeness and . . . a reasonable subordination require.”²⁰⁶ Although opposition from Professor Meigs and three tutors prohibited Dwight from eliminating the system entirely in 1795, he was able to exclude sophomores, still bitter from their own freshman duties and therefore the most abusive of the fagging system.²⁰⁷ By February 1800, Freshman Horace Holley wrote to his father, “The practice of sending and lecturing freshmen has almost expired, and we live in perfect harmony with the two upper classes. I shall probably have no more applications as a post boy except from the tutors.”²⁰⁸ An anonymous eulogy published in 1817 remembered Dwight first and foremost for these reforms, writing, “Dwight abolished the primary-school system, and established among the class-men . . . such rules as are usually observed by gentlemen in social intercourse.”²⁰⁹ In the hope of better disciplining students, Dwight was slowly moving away from an antiquated disciplinary system.

Dwight’s democratization slowly evolved in the later 1790’s to embrace the modernization of Yale’s academics, leading his grandson and future President of Yale Timothy Dwight to designate him “the man who, at the opening of the century, grasped

²⁰⁶ *Laws of Yale College* (1795), Ch. 2, Art. 8. For description of the system, including the errands that combined “the vexatious with the insulting,” see Cuninghame, *Timothy Dwight*, 253-256.

²⁰⁷ Josiah Meigs et. al. to the Yale Corporation Committee, *Regarding the Subordination of Classes Lower than Senior*, August 18, 1795, Box 1, Yale University Corporation Records, Manuscripts and Archives, Sterling Memorial Library, Yale University; for the final law, see *Laws of Yale College* (1795), Ch. 2, Art. 7.

²⁰⁸ Horace Holley to Luther Holley, 9 February 1800, Ravi D. Goel Collection.

²⁰⁹ *Eulogy of Dwight*, 1817, Box 3, Folder 171, Anson Phelps Stokes Autograph Collection, Manuscripts and Archives, Sterling Memorial Library, Yale University.

the idea of the University of the coming time.”²¹⁰ Dwight began these reforms by modernizing the campus, ordering the renovation and construction of academic buildings to provide more laboratory and library space.²¹¹ He began by repairing Connecticut Hall, at this point a half-century old, and giving it a fourth floor; constructing a new roof on the Chapel; and repainting Union Hall.²¹²

The Corporation Minutes reveal that Dwight then initiated plans for two new buildings and created a committee for the project that included James Hillhouse and Elizur Goodrich. This group would “pray [to] the House Assembly to take the subject [of providing funds] into consideration, and to give ... assistance as they may think proper and necessary.”²¹³ The committee would beseech the state legislature for funds to build a “New College,” with the “whole area of the ground floor to be occupied by four large recitation rooms, with convenient study rooms annexed ... leaving enough for the Library Rooms to occupy the remainder of the floor.” The Corporation also detailed the construction of another brick building further North for dormitory space.²¹⁴ These reforms ultimately produced Berkeley Hall, a new residence for the increasing number of students, as well as the Connecticut Lyceum, which was the first building constructed

²¹⁰ Timothy Dwight, Jr., *Yale Life and Men, 1845-1899* (New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1903), 40, Box 3, Folder 171, Anson Phelps Stokes Autograph Collection, Manuscripts and Archives, Sterling Memorial Library, Yale University.

²¹¹ Kelley, *Yale: A History*, 127-129; Rollin G. Osterweis, *Three Centuries of New Haven, 1638-1939* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1953), 186-188. Again, Dwight supported the building of laboratories, and therefore science, because he would be in control of any scientific curriculum at the College.

²¹² Cunningham, *Timothy Dwight*, 182, 185; Brown, *Benjamin Silliman*, 56-57; Bernard Christian Steinger, *The History of Education in Connecticut* (Washington: The Government Printing Office, 1893), 131-132, 139.

²¹³ *Minutes of the Corporation*, September 10, 1800. For John C. Ogden’s criticism of Dwight’s desire for more money from the state government and “taste for shew and elegance in buildings,” see John Cosens Ogden, *Friendly Remarks to the People of Connecticut, upon Their College and Schools* (Litchfield: Thomas Collier, 1799), 6, Early American Imprints no. 36005.

²¹⁴ *Minutes of the Corporation*, November 4, 1800.

solely for academic purposes, and would house expanded study and recitation rooms, as well as the Library and new chemical laboratories.²¹⁵

Dwight continued his academic democratization by gradually surrendering control over the purchase of new educational materials. During its 1799 meeting, the Corporation, under the authoritative influence of Dwight, had voted that only he could buy books and supplies.²¹⁶ The following year, the Corporation again granted him complete control over acquiring materials.²¹⁷ However, by 1802, Dwight allowed the Corporation to give responsibility to purchase library texts to Charles Chauncey.²¹⁸ At this time, Dwight also surrendered power to Benjamin Silliman, who traveled to Philadelphia in 1802 and Europe in 1805 to acquire the most modern books and scientific materials available.²¹⁹ Dwight was gradually releasing his iron hold over academic authority.

In addition, Dwight also presided over the introduction of new academic subjects and Professorships.²²⁰ When he took the Presidency, the faculty had consisted only of

²¹⁵ Berkeley Hall was named after Bishop Berkeley, who had given a large donation to the College earlier in the century. See Cuningham, *Timothy Dwight*, 185; Steinger, *History of Education*, 139-140; John J. Boll, *Library Architecture, 1800-1875: A Comparison of Theory and Buildings with Emphasis on New England Libraries* (Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1961), 169-170.

²¹⁶ *Minutes of the Corporation*, September 11, 1799. Although the entire Corporation was voting for these changes along with Dwight, his position as leader of the group gave him immense control that implied the committee's decisions were also Dwight's personal wishes. For discussion of Dwight's controlling the Corporation and Prudential Committee, see Cuningham, *Timothy Dwight*, 181-182, 197, 205. For Republican criticism of Dwight's control of the Corporation, see Wood, 1802, in Johnston, *Commonwealth Democracy*, 245, Anson Phelps Stokes Autograph Collection.

²¹⁷ *Minutes of the Corporation*, September 10, 1800.

²¹⁸ *Ibid.*, September 7, 1802.

²¹⁹ Cuningham, *Timothy Dwight*, 201-209; Brown, *Benjamin Silliman*, 100-155.

²²⁰ Cuningham, *Timothy Dwight*, 192-199; Gabriel, *Religion and Learning at Yale*, 55-62; Brown, *Benjamin Silliman*, 83-84. Benjamin Silliman, Gardiner Spring, and Chauncey Goodrich also focused on Dwight's success in modernizing the curriculum and in addition praised his founding of the Connecticut Academy of Arts and Sciences as proof of his focus on learning. See Silliman, *A Sketch of the Life*, 28-29, 35; Spring, *Oration*, 24-25; Goodrich, "Revivals of Religion," 70-72.

Dwight, Meigs and three tutors.²²¹ This arrangement remained until the annual Corporation meeting of 1801, when Dwight began adding new, more liberal academic subjects. First, under Dwight's leadership, the Corporation voted to create a Professorship of Law "to read Lectures in the Chapel ... on the leading principles for the Law of Nations and the general principles of Civil Government, particularly of Republican representative government."²²² The next September saw the addition of a "Professorship of Chymistry and Natural History," filled by Benjamin Silliman, and a "Professorship of Languages and Ecclesiastical History," assigned to Mr. Ebenezer Marsh.²²³ Student Moses Bradford recorded Dwight's insistence during a recitation on adding even more Professorships: "There is not a thing in this college so defective as reading ... We need a Professor of Rhetoric."²²⁴ Thus, even if Dwight did not intentionally democratize his stance towards education, his actions certainly liberalized academics on campus.

The final stage in Dwight's democratization, and perhaps the most significant regarding the Revival, occurred around 1800. Instead of aggressively attacking French infidelity, Dwight gradually softened his religious rhetoric to focus on morality's betterment for both individuals and governments. The 1790's had inspired fiery classroom lectures and sermons, such as "The Nature and Danger of Infidel Philosophy."

²²¹ Joshua Lawrence Chamberlain and Charles Henry Smith, eds., *Universities and Their Sons: History, Influence, and Characteristics of American Universities* (Boston: R. Herndon Company, 1898), 258.

²²² *Minutes of the Corporation*, September 10, 1801. Elizur Goodrich had actually resigned from Congress in 1801 to take the post of collector of customs in New Haven. However, because Goodrich was a Federalist, Thomas Jefferson dismissed him from this position, which made him available to undertake teaching at Yale. See Kelley, *Yale: A History*, 131.

²²³ *Minutes of the Corporation*, September 7, 1802. Just one year following Marsh's appointment, he passed away, causing the Corporation to elect James Luce Kingsley as the first professor of Hebrew, Greek, and Latin and of Ecclesiastical History in 1805. See Cuninghame, *Timothy Dwight*, 196; Kelley, *Yale: A History*, 130, 134-135. In addition, the Corporation also filled the chair of Professor Mathematics and Natural Philosophy with Jeremiah Day in 1801. See *Minutes of the Corporation*, September 8, 1801.

²²⁴ Bradford, *Miscellaneous Observations*, December 14, 1802, Lec 33rd Pronunciation.

But as the nation gradually changed its politics and culture, Dwight changed the mood of his rhetoric as well.²²⁵ While this new oratory was still more conservative than liberal, it was far less stridently political, and far more personal, mirroring Dwight's focus on the individual in his "parental system" of student discipline. First he began preaching of an individualistic religion resembling a personal relationship with God. Moses Bradford noted Dwight's explanation that faith was a simple truth easily understood and embraced by any person, even a child. The President sermonized, "The resurrection of Christ is a fact, and known by the senses, a child may know such things as well Sir J. Newton..."²²⁶ An anonymous student who also documented Dwight's recitations recorded a speech in which Dwight insisted that while "[r]eason may teach us that there is a God," it did not dictate each individual's unique faith: "it does not teach us how, or in what manner we shall actually be justified."²²⁷

Dwight also drifted from politically charged tirades that linked infidelity with liberal ideals to instead preaching of government's dependence on individual morality, not even specifying that virtue be derived from orthodox Congregationalism.²²⁸ The same anonymous notebook included an extract from Vincent's Catechism with Dwight's remarks: "Wisdom of God appears in this government."²²⁹ In another debate recorded by Moses Bradford on universal salvation, Dwight bellowed, "Government in this world is

²²⁵ For how the election of 1800 affected Dwight, see Silverman, *Timothy Dwight*, 103, where Silverman writes, "[Dwight's] preaching, like that of many other conservative ministers after the election, became less openly political." Historian Richard Purcell also asserts that after Republicans in office didn't bring about an end to religion, Federalists "proceeded to attack irreligion and its associated sins directly rather than by belaboring the Republican Party." Purcell, *Connecticut in Transition*, 23. See also McDonald, "Was there a Religious Revolution of 1800?," 173-174.

²²⁶ Bradford, *Miscellaneous Observations*, December 11, 1803.

²²⁷ "No. 11 – Extract from Vincent's Catechism," *Notebooks*, Box 47, Yale Miscellaneous Manuscripts Collection, Manuscripts and Archives, Sterling Memorial Library, Yale University. See also Evarts, *Journal*, November 29, 1801, December 6, 1801.

²²⁸ For Dwight's rhetoric on the tying of religion and politics, see Snyder, "Foundations of Liberty," 385-387; Harris, "Dwight's Civic Participation," 458-460.

²²⁹ "No. 11 – Extract from Vincent's Catechism," *Notebooks*.

an establishment of God; to inflict punishment, and reward virtue.”²³⁰ And when Dwight discussed the right of rulers to enforce a specific religion, not even specifying the *Christian* religion, he argued, “A ruler ought to support one kind of religion, and that of the people, or majority of them. If he is a pagan, he should support the pagan religion.”²³¹ Dwight’s shift from political philippics to rhetoric focusing on individual morality completed his overall democratization. Even if this evolution was unintentional, it ultimately altered Yale’s conception of faith.

A New Relationship between Liberalism and Religion

Dwight's shift in methods and sentiment gradually fostered an environment at Yale that was friendly to both wide-ranging liberal ideas and heightened religious sentiment. Even after accepting much of Dwight’s theological instruction and joining the church in massive waves, students could still disagree with him on numerous issues, even those concerning his democratized theological teachings. For example, some students countered Dwight’s opinions on the proper role of religion in politics, revealing their continued ability to voice liberal beliefs. In a theological recitation between the President and his students in December 1803, students argued against the President that governments should not compel support of religion. They reasoned, “1. Government has no right to lay restraints upon free men ... 2. No right to bind the conscience of men, ergo, no right to compel to support religion.”²³² And on June 16, 1802, the Brothers in

²³⁰ Bradford, *Miscellaneous Observations*, December 13, 1803.

²³¹ *Ibid.*, December 20, 1803. See also Evarts, *Journal*, November 26, 1801, December 13, 1801.

²³² Bradford, “Disputation,” *Miscellaneous Observations*, December 20, 1803.

Unity debated “Can a free government exist without religion?” and “decided in the affirmative by a great majority.”²³³

In addition, students also continued contradicting Dwight on non-theological issues. One of these was their continued insistence on access to “radical” Enlightenment doctrines. During the height of the Revival, student President Roswell Randall Swan of the Linonia Society attempted to remove a handful of controversial texts from its library. The rest of the delegation protested: a month later they debated, “ought liberty of the press be restricted by law,” which was “decided in the negative by Vice President Hall.” In the end, the books, including works by Voltaire and Paine, remained.²³⁴ Jeremiah Evarts’s journal also revealed a continued insistence on access to information. Even while immersing his studies in religious conversation and texts directly prior to the Revival, Evarts also continued his exposure to Enlightenment ideas and texts. He attended the Moral Society on Tuesday, October 27, though he also went to a Brothers in Unity debate two days later.²³⁵ And as he spent his free time reading theological texts, he continued reading works that Dwight would have denounced, such as Paine’s *Ruling Passion*.²³⁶

The issue of free access to information arose again in a dispute between Dwight and the students on December 9, 1802. The question centered on the creation of a national university, which Dwight, in line with the Federalist Party, opposed.²³⁷ While Dwight argued that such a University would doubtlessly have a negative influence by bringing

²³³ *Brothers in Unity Records*, June 16, 1802.

²³⁴ For the discussion of removing texts, see the motion by conservative President Roswell Randall Swan in *Records of the Linonian Society*, May 5, 1801. For John Hall’s defense, see *Ibid.*, June 23, 1802.

²³⁵ Evarts, *Journal*, October 27, 1801, October 29, 1801.

²³⁶ *Ibid.*, December 2, 1801.

²³⁷ Kerber, *Federalists in Dissent*, 106-107.

European academics to the United States as new professors, the students countered, “that it will provide a larger library,” and “it will promote competition between universities and thus make them prosper.”²³⁸ Students again contradicted Dwight in taking a Republican stance concerning the government’s acquisition of western territory, which Federalists typically criticized because it diluted the power of New England in the national government.²³⁹ The Brothers in Unity voted in the affirmative to the question, “Would it be politic in the United States to take immediate possession of N. Orleans?”²⁴⁰

In addition to continuing their disagreements with the President over liberal policies and politics, the students also remained neutral or divided in terms of party support, not necessarily leaning towards Federalism, despite the ongoing link between the Christian religion and the Federalist Party.²⁴¹ Both parties’ nasty partisan politics was one reason for students’ neutrality. The Linonian Society’s reading of “an oration called ‘An art to prevent electioneering’” revealed this sentiment.²⁴² So did a lecture on July 4, 1803, recorded by Daniel Haskel, that asserted that party spirit was the “only source from whence we are to apprehend danger” of failing in the establishment of a republican government. “Electioneering is practiced as a business of course,” continued the speaker,

²³⁸ Bradford, “Debate on the National University and notes on Dr. Dwight’s Observations,” *Miscellaneous Observations*, December 9, 1802.

²³⁹ Federalists, such as Josiah Quincy, argued that western expansion threatened the nation’s unity by encompassing new groups who lacked classic American characteristics. See Watts, “Ministers, Misanthropes, and Mandarins,” 172. For a larger list of reasons why Federalists disliked the Louisiana Purchase, such as its financial benefit to the French in their war against Great Britain, the diversion from New England ports to New Orleans, and the eventual creation of new states in the west that would dilute power of the states already existing in Congress, see Kerber, *Federalists in Dissent*, 44-45.

²⁴⁰ *Brothers in Unity Records*, March 16, 1803.

²⁴¹ For the connection between Federalism and Christianity, see A. James Reichley, *Religion in American Public Life* (Washington, D.C.: The Brookings Institution, 1985), 178; A. James Reichley, *Faith in Politics* (Washington, D.C.: The Brookings Institution, 2002), 169; Richard Buel, Jr., *America on the Brink: How the Political Struggle over the War of 1812 Almost Destroyed the Young Republic* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2005), 168; Seymour Martin Lipset, *Revolution and Counterrevolution: Change and Persistence in Social Structures* (New Brunswick: Transaction Books, 1970), 312.

²⁴² *Records of the Linonian Society*, July 21, 1802.

"Facts are misrepresented, innocence is slandered, and falsehoods are extensively spread."²⁴³ Of course, some students did side with Federalism, revealing an atmosphere on campus that was open to diverging political views. In a letter to his father in 1802, Horace Holley disparaged Jefferson's new Judiciary Act, ranting, "That it may not pass our dumb House of Representatives is my earnest wish."²⁴⁴ The Linonian Society also supported a Federalist position when it decided the question, "Ought the terms of the naturalization law to be shortened?" in the negative.²⁴⁵ Thus, liberal leanings, including openness to diverging political beliefs, still coursed through Yale's student body, but now they coexisted with skyrocketing religious sentiment.

Clearly, Beecher's passionate appraisal was indeed a myth. Dwight failed to sweep religiosity into Yale, and for a number of years, actually seemed to do just the opposite. But his increasingly individualized, more liberal ideology made Yale fertile ground for the revivalism that swept the nation at the start of the nineteenth century, and in the process, transformed the College. There is a certain irony here: by softening his message, Dwight helped make Yale the kind of religious seedbed that his earlier, harsher message had failed to accomplish.

Just how satisfied was Dwight with the Revival of 1802? At the time he seemed enthusiastic, and in his reminiscences from 1816, a year before his death, he eulogized

²⁴³ Haskel, *Composition*, July 4, 1803.

²⁴⁴ Horace Holley to Luther Holley, 14 February 1802, Box 1, Folder 21, Ravi D. Goel Collection, Manuscripts and Archives, Sterling Memorial Library, Yale University.

²⁴⁵ *Records of the Linonian Society*, February 24, 1802. The Federalist government under John Adams had passed the Naturalization Law of 1798, which required that an immigrant live in the United States for 14 years before becoming a citizen. In December of 1801, President Jefferson beseeched the Congress to lessen this requirement to five years. The students' negative opinion of a shorter term indicated support of Adams's prior position. See John Sanderson, *Republican Landmarks: The Views and Opinions of American Statesmen on Foreign Immigration* (Carlisle, MA: Applewood Books, 1856), 136-137.

the effects of Connecticut's recent revivals, claiming, "The Christian church in New England has at no time since its settlement included so great a number of members as at the present time."²⁴⁶ However, in addition to his appraisal, he also revealed disappointment that the Revival of 1802, while increasing religious fervency, had failed to reinstate his ideal "Standing Order" society. In comparing his contemporaries with their Puritan ancestors, Dwight regretted, "The strictness, the energy, the commanding character of their religion, we have in a great measure lost.... They chiefly exhibited the magnanimous, we the gentler virtues ... on the whole, instead of improving, we have impaired their system."²⁴⁷ Although Dwight succeeded in seeing his Yale students embrace the Christian faith, this victory came at the cost of reshaping his dream of a conservative, Congregationalist nation. Dwight could behold more students filling the pews in the Church of Christ, but the very nature of the impetus for the Revival at Yale – the more liberal and tolerant atmosphere that prevailed – hindered a return to conservative politics and a Puritan lifestyle. Notably, in the year following Dwight's death, Republicans finally gained control of Connecticut's government; liberal rule in the "Land of Steady Habits" completed the evolution from Dwight's traditional New England society to an atmosphere that fostered both religious fervency and liberalism.

Word Count: 12,247

²⁴⁶ Dwight, *Travels*, 4:276.

²⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 4:277-278.

Bibliographic Essay

I began searching for an essay topic by looking through American National Biography for interesting figures in the 1790's. While I originally wanted this to be a Congressman, instead I was drawn to people who had played some role in religion during the period, especially those also involved in the partisan politics that emerged in the presidential election of 1800. I began reading texts about the declining Federalist Party, rising Republicans, and the relationship between religion and politics. The book that had the most impact on my reading was Linda Kerber's *Federalists in Dissent*, in which she answers the question, "Was there anything in the Jeffersonian definition of the meaning of American life which made Federalist hostility reasonable?" Kerber's argument is that the Federalists' dislike of Jefferson wasn't grounded on *political* objections, but instead on differing ideologies in the broadest sense. Kerber points out three areas where "Standing Order" ideology was under attack – science, education, and religion – and discusses how Federalists evolved their dogma after their failure in the election of 1800.

The other source that most influenced my reading was Andrew Siegel's "Steady Habits under Siege: The Defense of Federalism in Jeffersonian Connecticut," in *Federalists Reconsidered*. This article charts the rise of the Republican Party, specifically among Connecticut's new Jeffersonian leaders like Abraham Bishop and John Cosens Ogden, and addresses how it affected conservative Federalists generally, and Yale specifically. All of this research brought me to an interest in the figure of Timothy Dwight, Yale President from 1795-1817, who figured as one of the most prominent Congregationalist Federalists during this struggle to maintain conservative America's "Standing Order" society.

The three most renowned biographies of Dwight are Charles Cuninghame's *Timothy Dwight: 1752-1817*, Kenneth Silverman's *Timothy Dwight*, and John Fitzmier's *New England's Moral Legislator: Timothy Dwight, 1752-1817*. While the first two give biased favorable accounts of Dwight and his influence on New England, Fitzmier takes a more ambivalent approach to Dwight's impact on Connecticut, Yale, and the Second Great Awakening. Multiple articles were also more wary of Dwight's contributions and described some of his more aggressive tactics of tying morality and religion to Federalist goals. These included Gregory Clark's "Timothy Dwight's Moral Rhetoric at Yale College, 1795-1817," Edmund Morgan's "Ezra Stiles and Timothy Dwight," Robert J. Imholt's "Timothy Dwight, Federalist Pope of Connecticut," and Walter Volkomer's "Timothy Dwight and New England Federalism."

One event that came up in multiple texts, but only briefly, was a religious revival that occurred among Yale students in 1802. Most scholars write of this event by citing a few well-known Dwight contemporaries, including Lyman Beecher, Benjamin Silliman, Gardiner Spring, and Heman Humphrey, who all praised Dwight for attacking infidelity on campus when he arrived in 1795, and thus directly causing the Revival seven years later. However, I realized that due to their extreme bias, as well as the fact that Dwight's biographies claim a period of infidelity continued among students until 1801, these accounts were not sufficient in giving evidence of the Revival or explaining why it

occurred. Particularly problematic was the scholarship that bought into the “Beecher myth.” Some historians take these early, biased documentary accounts as fact in their description of Dwight, such as Charles Roy Keller in *The Second Great Awakening in Connecticut*, William Clebsch in *From Sacred to Profane in America: The Role of Religion in American History*, and Perry Miller in *The Life of the Mind in America: From the Revolution to the Civil War*. But other historians point out the problems of extreme filiofetism and hyperbole, including Richard Birdsall in “The Second Great Awakening and the New England Social Order,” Richard Shiels in “The Second Great Awakening in Connecticut: Critique of the Traditional Interpretation,” and David Kling in *A Field of Divine Wonders: The New Divinity and Village Revivals in Northwestern Connecticut, 1792-1822*.

In order to learn more about the causes for the Revival, I began studying Dwight’s actions, as well as Yale in general, from 1795-1802. For background information, I mainly used Charles Cuninghame’s biography, as well as Brooks Mather Kelly’s *Yale: A History*, Franklin Bowditch Dexter’s *Biographical Sketches of the Graduates of Yale College with Annals of the College History*, Ralph Henry Gabriel’s *Religion and Learning at Yale: The Church of Christ in the College and University, 1757-1957*, James Luce Kingsley’s *A Sketch of the History of Yale College in Connecticut*, James B. Reynolds’s *Two Centuries of Christian Activity at Yale*, and Anson Phelps Stokes’s *Memorials of Eminent Yale Men*.

I then turned to primary sources containing evidence of the Revival, some of them far less biased than the more famous, frequently cited accounts. Most of these sources were housed in Manuscripts and Archives, with the exception of C. A. Goodrich’s “Narrative of Revivals of Religion in Yale College, from its Commencement to the Present Time,” which contains an eyewitness account from Reverend Dr. Porter of Farmington, a junior at the time. Sources in the Archives include historian of Yale Class of 1802, David D. Field’s *Brief Memoirs of the Members of the Class Graduated at Yale College in September 1802* and the Church of Christ at Yale Records, which include specific dates and names of converts during this time. There were also letters written regarding the revival, such as those by Silliman, Field, and Dwight; newspapers articles that spread word of the event, most notably one featured in the *Connecticut Evangelical Magazine*; journals and notes from recitations that demonstrated heightened religious sentiment; and even a Constitution by the Class of 1803 calling for continued religious fervor among its signers.

After finding evidence of the Revival, I began searching through Manuscripts and Archives and Beinecke Library to try and discover *why* the Revival occurred. I wanted to analyze the specifics of what was happening on campus during the period from 1795-1802. First I looked at the details of a case in 1797 concerning President Dwight’s dismissal of Professor Josiah Meigs for the latter’s pro-Republican, pro-French beliefs. This led me to the “Yale Corporation Records” and the Yale Corporation and Prudential Committee Minutes, which I read through for the entire period from 1795-1803. I then moved from administration records to those that displayed actual student sentiment. I started reading through the Minutes and Library Catalogues of Yale’s three student

societies – the Linonian Society, the Brothers in Unity Society, and the Moral Society. These societies' debates revealed a generally liberal sentiment on campus. I also started searching through student diaries, letters, and notes of recitations and classroom debates, including those of Jeremiah Evarts, Daniel Haskel, Moses Bradford, Horace Holley, Jesup Couch, and Samuel Farmar Jarvis. In addition, I tried to find any primary material that could have affected student life during these pivotal years at Yale. Other sources included a Phi Beta Kappa oration by Charles Chauncey, and records of student misconduct in the "Student Unrest at Yale" Collection.

As I began understanding student sentiment regarding liberalism and religion at this time, and perceiving some of Dwight initiatives that demonstrated his slow democratization, I began studying his rhetoric, his ideology, and his place in Connecticut society more closely. I read several of his sermons, including *The Nature and Danger of Infidel Philosophy: Addressed to the Candidates for the Baccalaureate in Yale College*; *The Duty of Americans, at the Present Crisis, Illustrated in a Discourse*; *A Discourse on Some Events of the Last Century, delivered in the Brick Church in New Haven*; and his *Travels in New England and New York*. I also researched political and religious currents in Connecticut at this time to see what could have affected Dwight during this period. For this purpose I looked at Richard Purcell's *Connecticut in Transition: 1775-1818*, David Waldstreicher and Stephen Grossbart's "Abraham Bishop's Vocation; or, the Mediation of Jeffersonian Politics," K. Alan Snyder's "Foundations of Liberty: The Christian Republicanism of Timothy Dwight and Jedidiah Morse," and newspapers from the period. Through my research of student accounts in Manuscripts and Archives and analysis of Dwight, I was able to gather enough information to formulate my own argument of what was happening on campus from 1795-1801 that ultimately prompted the Revival of 1802.

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