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Testing Tocqueville: The Political Theory of the “Mayflower Compact” and Its Legacy

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Submitted in Partial Completion of the
Requirements for Commonwealth Honors in Political Science

Bridgewater State University

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Chapter One:

Introduction

The question of religion's place in American political thought and practice continues to be a divisive issue. Critics of religion's importance (Pangle 1988; Zuckert 1996) point to the centrality of natural rights liberal thought in *The Declaration of Independence* while proponents of religion's importance frequently employ Alexis de Tocqueville's account of religion in America in support of their arguments (see Allen 1998; Kessler 1992; and Tessitore 2002). In *Democracy in America*, Tocqueville (2000, 35) identifies the date of America's founding as 1620 and, in doing so, argues that "there is not one opinion, one habit, one law, I could say one event, that the point of departure does not explain without difficulty. Those who read this book will therefore find in this present chapter the seed of what is to follow and the key to almost the whole work" (Tocqueville 2000, 29). In other words, key to understanding America's successful democratic experiment are the political principles of Puritan New England. Central to this account is religion and America's ability to combine the spirit of religion with the spirit of freedom (Tocqueville 2000, 43-44). For Tocqueville, New England's ability to reconcile these traditionally adversarial spirits serves as the key aspect of "New England's principles" which "spread at first to the neighboring states; later, they gradually won out in most of the distant, and in the end, if I can express myself so, they penetrated the entire confederation. They now exert their influence beyond its limits, over the whole American world" (Tocqueville 2000, 31-32). It is ultimately Tocqueville's contention that these principles spread first through New England before finding their way to the rest of America.

Tocqueville's claim that the religiously inspired political thought of New England came to characterize American political thinking more generally speaks directly to what scholars refer

to as the continuity thesis. The continuity thesis addresses the relationship between the religiously inspired political theory of early colonial America and the political thinking of America's Revolutionary and Constitutional periods. While a more extensive discussion of the strong or pervasive form of the continuity thesis is provided below, it suffices here to state that this form of the continuity thesis argues that the political ideas of the Revolution have their origins in Puritan thought (Morgan 2003). Here, Charles McCloughlin (1961) argues that America's revolutionary principles can be traced back to the English Puritans while Stanley Gray (1930) and Susan Power (1984) conclude that America's political principles of both the colonial and revolutionary eras are committed to returning to the ancient principles of Christianity.

The second version of the continuity thesis affirms continuity with the provision that the second American beginning is a secularized version of the first (see Morgan 1967). Lutz (1988) offers this thesis in his identification of the move from covenant to compact (see also Elezar 1980).¹ The third form of the continuity thesis is the eclectic thesis, which posits that the political and social theories of Puritan New England are among several of the ideas and attitudes of the revolutionary generation. Other bodies of thought include classical (Aristotle) and modern republicanism (Machiavelli and Harrington), Lockean liberalism, and the British common law tradition of Coke and Blackstone (see Bailyn 1967).

Finally, there is the minimal continuity thesis. This thesis contends that there is little to no similarity between colonial and revolutionary American thought. Thomas Pangle (1988)

¹ A distinction can be made between a covenant on the one hand and a compact on the other. Both are based on the consent of those taking part and both create a new community. The community created by a covenant differs from that created by a compact in that the relationships established were believed to be stronger, deeper, and more comprehensive largely because of the covenant's religious foundations. That the covenant is originally a religious concept is evident in the fact that a compact requires only the consent of those taking part whereas a covenant requires this consent and the sanction of the highest authority (see Lutz 1998, xvi-xvii; Lutz 1988, 17-18).

rejects all attempts to understand the political thought of the American founders as the continuation of Christian thought. Pangle does not deny that American leaders were influenced by Christianity, he only argues that this influence was extrinsic to their internal thoughts. The founders spoke in Christian terms because they had to accommodate themselves to a Christian citizenry. As Zuckert (1996, 148-201) shows, American clerics of the eighteenth century blended Christianity and Locke's natural right theory. Instead of utilizing Christian doctrines intact, eighteenth-century theorists modified earlier Puritan politics to fit a Lockean framework (Zuckert 1996, 171).

The purpose of this project is twofold. First, this project tests the veracity of Tocqueville's contention and, second, in doing so this project clarifies the place of religion in American political thought. After providing a detailed account of the strong form of the continuity thesis, this chapter provides an overview of the methodological approach used in this study. This chapter concludes with an overview of the three chapters that follow.

Strong and Pervasive Continuity

As previously mentioned, the strong form of the continuity thesis follows Alexis de Tocqueville in maintaining that Puritan political thinking shapes American political thought. This argument assumes that the religiously inspired political thought of the Puritans first spread throughout the Commonwealth and New England before reaching the rest of the country. Consequently, 1620 serves as the year of America's founding with the establishment of Plymouth Colony and the signing of the *Mayflower Compact*. This section of this chapter focuses on two examples of the strong form of the continuity thesis. First, given this study's use of the methodological approach recommended by Eric Voegelin, Kendall and Carey's *The Basic Symbols of the American Political Tradition* (1970) is focused here as the most relevant example

of scholarship arguing for the strong continuity thesis as both studies employ Voegelin's approach.² Second, Barry Shain's (1994) more recent *The Myth of American Individualism* is considered as its breadth of analysis responds to some of the concerns raised below about the conclusions provided in Kendall and Carey.

Kendall and Carey

Kendall and Carey develop the strong continuity thesis by analyzing five documents over the first 150 years of America's history: *The Mayflower Compact*, *The Massachusetts Bodies of Liberty*, *The Fundamental Orders of Connecticut*, *The Virginia Declaration of Rights*, and *The Declaration of Independence*. In these five documents, Kendall and Carey look to identify core symbols of the American political tradition and discuss both the relationships between the symbols and how they develop over time. They ultimately identify three symbols held to characterize American political thinking: 1) America understood itself as a Christian people and nation; 2) the centrality of popular deliberative governments; and 3) an emphasis on a good political order. These symbols indicate that the central element of American political thought is the idea of a virtuous people (understood in Christian terms) who deliberate in popular assemblies on the common good. Importantly, Kendall and Carey (1970, 31) claim that this means that American political thought should not be understood in terms of enlightenment liberalism with its emphasis on natural rights and individualism which is held to replace the communal, religiously inspired thought of colonial American thinking according to the minimal continuity thesis (see Pangle 1988; Zuckert 1996). This means that the minimal form of the continuity thesis does not accurately characterize American political thought more generally.

² A detailed account of Voegelin's approach is provided in the next section.

Kendall and Carey's analysis of the functionality of the Massachusetts General Court serves as a good example of both their argument and what the strong form of the continuity thesis entails. According to their analysis, the Massachusetts General Court begins to specify what is implicit in the *Mayflower Compact*. The *Mayflower Compact* explicitly identifies its signatories as Christians and their signatures obligate them to lead the life of a good Christian. This means that they have covenanted with one another in the presence of God to "subordinate to the transcendent truth of the soul and society, and because that by signing they signify their subordination, as persons, to that truth" (Kendall and Carey 1970, 56). This being said, there remains a number of important practical questions in need of consideration. For example: Are there characteristics beyond obedience to the will of God that characterize good Christians?; Who is eligible for community membership?; What are the responsibilities of membership?; and What is the role of the law and how is to be enforced? The responsibility of answering these and similar questions is placed in the hands of deliberative assemblies composed of good Christians.

By setting things up this way, the earliest American political communities sought to reconcile the tensions between the natural law of God and the positive law of man. Guided by the principles of Christianity as revealed in Scripture and composed of good, virtuous Christians, colonial American assemblies set out to establish laws that would not only ensure the promotion of God's glory and the Christian faith, but that the community members would exhibit characteristics of good Christians like humanity and civility (Kendall and Carey 1970, 56). This, and the robust political responsibilities placed on full community members helps to explain why documents like the *Laws and Liberties of Massachusetts* (1641) maintain that it is a breach of the covenant and one's responsibility as both a Christian and community member to neglect the education of children (see Lutz 1998, 104-06). With a community composed of devout

Christians pursuing political ends almost exclusively framed in religious terms, the earliest American communities believed that such an ordering, with the grace of God, would both guarantee the existence of communities able to satisfy the requirements of Scripture as well as their perpetuity.

Despite the evidence presented and the conclusions drawn, Kendall and Carey's argument is open to two important criticisms. First, they only discuss five documents. This means that many documents are overlooked that could either add to their narrative or contradict it. For example, Kendall and Carey make no mention of *The General Fundamentals of Plymouth* (1636). This document is important because it represents an early effort on the part of Plymouth to develop what is implied by the *Mayflower Compact*. The question one wants to consider here is whether or not this document develops the symbols present in the *Mayflower Compact* in the same way Kendall and Carey develop them in their analysis of the Massachusetts General Court. That Kendall and Carey neglect the development of symbols within particular political communities constitutes the second criticism. They, like Tocqueville, simply ignore this possibility.

An effort to fill out the argument of Kendall and Carey is provided by Donald Lutz (1988, 1998). Whereas Kendall and Carey may have been overly exclusive, Lutz may have erred to the other extreme by being overly inclusive. Lutz (1998) analyzes 80 documents in his effort to provide an accurate portrait of American political and constitutional thought. The volume of his sample means that great attention cannot be given to every single document which renders his analysis overly general. This is evident in the fact that his analysis is done largely with an eye to classifying them as covenant, compact, or contract. In fact, Lutz identifies the movement from covenant to compact and ultimately to contract as a secular process (Lutz 1988, 34). In other words, while the essential components of constitutional government remain constant, one

important element does not—reliance on God as a witness that authorizes the actions of the political community. Thus, when a broader sample is looked at, one finds support for the secular form of the continuity thesis.

Besides confusion over what it means to secularize a document, Zuckert argues that the secular form of the continuity thesis does not correctly interpret the authority on which the documents rely. While Zuckert correctly contends that Lutz would argue that later documents appeal to “reason and revelation,” Zuckert maintains that these documents rely only on an appeal to reason (Zuckert 1996, 128). In support of this argument, Zuckert draws a distinction between the Christian God appealed to in the earliest American documents and the God of Nature invoked in the first paragraph of *The Declaration of Independence*. The former appeal to the God of revealed theology which is to say the laws of God as they pertain to matters of salvation and grace. The *Declaration*, on the other hand, appeals to the laws of nature’s God. These laws of nature are discoverable by reason unlike the laws of God which are known in non-rational or non-natural ways like revelation (Zuckert 1996, 25). Taken together, it seems that one must look somewhere between the exclusivity of Kendall and Carey and the inclusiveness of Lutz. A more moderate approach is necessary so as to be able to engage individual texts in a meaningful way. Enough texts are also required so as to ensure that any conclusions are representative of American political thinking more generally.

Barry Shain’s *Myth of American Individualism*

Like Kendall and Carey, Barry Shain rejects the liberal and civic republican interpretations of American political thought. Shain’s reading of 18th century American political thinking categorizes this era as Calvinist: “Most [Americans] were more interested in possessing everlasting life through Christ’s freely given grace by serving their religious and geographical

communities and their families, and by attending to agricultural matters” (Shain 1994, xvi). Essentially, Shain argues that Americans are primarily concerned with their spiritual lives and their farms which can be attributed to the fact that most Americans lived in “morally demanding agricultural communities” (Shain 1994, xvi). It is ultimately these small, religious communities that shape the political, social, and moral norms of the American people. Thus, American political thought should be seen as having a Reformed-Protestant foundation (Shain 1994, xvii) which is a normative theory that emphasizes “America’s Protestant, democratic, communal localism, however, is its most enduring political tradition” (Shain 1994, xviii).

In making this argument, Shain focuses on the concept of the common good and finds in American political thinking “public-centered limitations on the individual’s autonomy or individuality” (Shain 1994, 3). The restrictions placed on the individual allow Shain to conclude that the common good is correctly understood in communal terms where America’s political institutions are derived from its Protestant foundations (Shain 1994, 17). The latter is important to understand the former as the political institutions facilitate the public good. Therefore, it can be understood that the 18th century understanding of the good was communal and Protestant rather than individualistic and liberal.

The major implication of this argument deals with the place of the individual in American political thinking. According to Shain, “The Revolutionary generation’s understanding of the individual and his or her substantively constrained area of choice was not ‘negative’” (Shain 1994, 117).³ He argues that it was “positive.” Positive liberty of the individual can be described

³ Here, Shain follows the lead of Berlin (2002[1969], 166-217) who, in his famous essay “Two Concepts of Liberty,” identifies negative liberty with the absence of obstacles, barriers, or constraints. Positive liberty, on the other hand, speaks to purposeful acting of an individual or community toward the goals defined by a particular community.

as the individual participating in the process that will determine the way in which their freedom will be controlled (Shain 1994, 118). Rather than freedom from obstacles, barriers, or constraints, positive liberty should be understood as the freedom to lead a prescribed form of life (Shain 1994, 118). For 18th century Americans, this means the life of a good Christian. Again, one sees the importance and dominance of community and religion. Americans, at the time, wanted the individual self to be controlled by the family and community (Shain 1994, 120).

Shain asserts that America was a place shaped by reformed-Protestant theology and spiritual Christian liberty. He finds that Christian liberty was similar to more secular forms of liberty. He writes, “they too were characterized by an insistence on voluntary acceptance of a life of righteousness” (Shain 1994, 193). Original sin also plays a vital role in Americans’ idea of liberty, and was present in their political thought. For 18th century Americans, the only way to counter this was to live in “morally intrusive” communities. This led to 18th century Americans being condemned to live in a society where ancient Christian ethics were to order the rational of communal life, which would then limit the range of individual freedom. This placed Americans, according to Shain, in a difficult position as “They were also pulled in the opposite direction” of their religious lives “by material and social forces and certain intellectual currents that demanded higher levels of unstructured personal freedom and a greater acceptance of human selfishness” (Shain 1994, 194). Despite this pull, Shain contends that the 18th century idea of human fulfillment continued to emphasize America’s religious foundations as it is only “through death and the loss of their worldly selves in Christ” that the individual fulfills his or her intended purpose (Shain 1994, 321).

The value of Shain’s argument lies in his reorientation of what question students of American political thinking should ask. Rather than focusing on intellectual influence, a better

approach is to consider the question of what type of relationship between the individual and the community as favored and sought (Shain 1994, 13-14). Whereas Shain finds continuity between the 17th and 18th centuries, Barkalow (2004) presents evidence of a changing understanding of the relationship between the individual and the community in his study of 17th and 18th century American political writings. Focusing on the nature of political obligation, Barkalow argues that American political thinking moves away from the strong form of the continuity thesis and its Protestant foundations toward the limited form of the continuity thesis where the individual is freed from restrictive communal restraints.

Whereas Shain focuses on the relationship between individual and community at a general level, Barkalow's grounding of his analysis on a particular understanding of political obligation allows him to consider this relationship in practice. Thus, Barkalow's study is more sensitive to the changing contexts American political communities operate in. This explains, in part, why the strong form of the continuity thesis explains American political thinking prior to 1740. Beginning in 1740, and in response to a changing political and social landscape, Americans begin to adopt two important political changes. First, they begin to separate the civil authority from the religious authority and, second, they come to understand their political foundations in terms of a compact rather than a covenant (see also Lutz 1988 & 1998). Together, these two changes have the effect of altering the relationship between the individual and his or her community. Freed from the restrictions of the Protestant community identified by Shain, the individual is free to define and pursue his or her own interests. At the level of political theory, it is this changing understanding of political obligation that allows for the development of liberal political thinking in America.

Methodology

Avoiding the pitfalls of Kendall and Carey, Lutz, and Shain requires a sample of documents that is neither limited or expansive. In developing the political theory of the *Mayflower Compact* in the next chapter, one must begin by first identifying relevant texts. To do this, I focus on documents from Plymouth as it is here that one would expect to find the fullest spelling out of the meaning of the *Mayflower Compact's* key principles. When these documents prove unhelpful, only then will documents from other communities be considered. In analyzing texts from these communities, attention will be given to clarifying particular concepts or symbols present in both sets of documents. Once this is done, it becomes possible to test for the document's influence on the political thought of communities founded after Plymouth.

The research question's concern with the possibility of changing understandings of key political concepts over time requires a methodology that takes both conceptual change and history seriously. Throughout this project, the method of textual analysis provided by Eric Voegelin is used. His almost anthropological approach to the study of political thought focuses on every political society's "attempts at self-interpretation, at self-understanding" (Kendall and Carey 1995, 20-21). According to Voegelin, political societies consider and answer core questions of the human condition through the creation of symbols (Kendall and Carey 1995, 23). Thus, for this project, I am able to treat the *Mayflower Compact* as a symbol. The challenge faced by the investigator is that the meaning and understanding of the original symbol is not set in stone. Instead, societies engage in a process of developing "symbols; perhaps enriching or impoverishing them, perhaps giving them new twists, perhaps emphasizing this symbol at the expense of that one, or even perhaps dropping old symbols and replacing them with new ones" (Kendall and Carey 1995, 24). When evidence is found in the political and historical documents

focused on in this study to suggest that societies differentiate who they are and what they value from the original symbol, there is evidence to suggest the possibility of conceptual change and it becomes the task of the political investigator to determine the nature and extent of this change.

Chapter Overview

Chapter Two develops the critical test of Tocqueville by building the political theory of the *Mayflower Compact*. As the foundation for the political and social life of Plymouth Colony, the *Mayflower Compact* has long been viewed as America's first political document (Kendall and Carey 1995). The challenge faced here is the brevity of the *Mayflower Compact*. Consisting of only 199 words, it is necessary to supplement the actual text of the *Mayflower Compact* with other texts. After developing the political theory of the *Mayflower Compact*, the second chapter tests for its presence in 17th century communities founded after Plymouth. In particular, this study focuses on Scituate and Taunton as well as the development of these political symbols within Plymouth and Massachusetts Bay. Chapter Two concludes by assessing the implications of its results for how one should understand the place of religion in American political thought.

Chapter Three moves the analysis into the 18th century. Here, one continues to see American political thinking struggle to reconcile the tension between its religious commitments on the one hand and its non-religious commitments on the other. In the early 18th century, Benjamin Coleman and Joseph Sewall respond to the continued decrease in religiosity within the colony. They are concerned that this decrease will result in a deterioration of the state and incur the punishment of God. Giving into the passions of the world instead of properly caring for their souls, Coleman and Sewall argues that Americans should return to a slightly modified understanding of the principles of the 17th century. As the analysis moves toward the middle of the 18th century, Elisha Williams articulates a solution that moves American political thinking

away from strict adherence to the political theory of the *Mayflower Compact* and its marriage of politics and religion. Williams argues for a complete separation of the public and private sphere where the civil government has no authority in church governance and vice versa. Williams moves American political thinking away from Puritan thought, and towards secularization. In doing so, he introduces a new symbol into the canon, Lockean Liberalism. What matters here is that Williams ushers in a break in American political thinking. The break indicates that the minimal continuity thesis may be the best explanation for American political thinking.

The last chapter of this project returns to Tocqueville in order to reconsider his assessment of religion in America based on the analysis and argument presented here. Focusing on the connections between religion and the mores that support democracy, Tocqueville's analysis suggests that the origin of this relationship suggests that their origin is found in 1620 Plymouth. For Tocqueville, the roots of American political thinking and the ability to reconcile freedom and religion can be found in puritan political thinking. Unlike Tocqueville, this study finds a tension inherent in puritan political thinking that exists within Plymouth itself. Once the next generation moves out of Plymouth, and the colony becomes more diverse, the tension between private and public comes to the surface and characterizes American political thinking more generally. Whereas Tocqueville argues that America is able to reconcile this tension, the interpretation of American political thinking presented here suggests that efforts to reconcile this tension remains an ongoing struggle in the 17th and 18th centuries until arguments for the strict separation of religion and politics appear in the 18th century. This development suggests that American political thinking cannot be understood in terms of the strong form of the continuity thesis.

Chapter Two:
The Political Theory of the *Mayflower Compact*
and its 17th Century Legacy

The brevity of the *Mayflower Compact* suggests that it is necessarily incomplete. This is suggested by the fact that while the document speaks about the ends of government, it never specifies how the proposed government is to be constituted or how it will be structured. The *Mayflower Compact* only provides that they “Covenant and Combine our selves together into a Civil Body Politick, for our better ordering and preservation, and furtherance of the ends aforesaid [promote both the glory of Goad and advance the Christian faith]: and by virtue hereof do enact, constitute, and frame, such just and equal Laws...” (Lutz 1998, 32). Thus, one needs to look elsewhere for this information. Initially, one can do this by looking at other texts from Plymouth including the *Plymouth Oath of Allegiance and Fidelity*, *the Plymouth Agreement*, *Pilgrim Code of Laws*, and *the Puritan Laws and Liberties*. When additional documents are considered, it is possible to identify and develop the key political concepts present in the *Mayflower Compact*. Analysis demonstrates that the concepts include popular sovereignty and Christians deliberating together regarding the proper ends of government.

The *Mayflower Compact* provides for popular sovereignty through the express consent of the people on board. By signing the document, these individuals agree to form a civil body politics at a later date and to serve as members of this body. Popular sovereignty is also evident in the *Plymouth Oath of Allegiance and Fidelity* (1625), where new members of the community were required to expressly obligate themselves to the community (Lutz 1998, 34). In obligating themselves to the community, members were obligating themselves to more than obedience to

the political dictates of the community. They also obligated themselves to the moral precepts of the community. These precepts or values are commonly found in the ends of the political community and in the assumptions made about those admitted into the communities. Thus, when one considers the *Mayflower Compact's* concern with promoting the glory of God, advancing the Christian faith, and the fact that those taking the *Plymouth Oath of Allegiance and Fidelity* do so “as a true christian,” one may conclude that one is also obligated to adhere to the religious values of the community (Lutz 1998, 34; see also 64).

While the *Mayflower Compact* and other documents call for a robust form of popular sovereignty, the problems inherent in participatory politics quickly require a narrowing of popular sovereignty. This is evident in the shift away from express toward tacit consent.⁴ As the colony becomes larger and more diverse, the direct influence the people have on government is reduced. While early documents require full community members to meet regularly to attend to the business of the community and would fine those failing to attend, one finds a loosening of this requirement over time. In the *Cambridge Agreement* (1632), all full members of the community were expected to participate in the business of the community and those failing to do so would be fined (Lutz 1998, 45). Two years later, the *Cambridge Agreement on a Town Council* (1634) minimizes the political role for most members of the community by providing that seven men would be selected to serve as selectmen (Lutz 1998, 48-49). That members of the

⁴ The distinction between express and tacit consent finds one of its clearest statements in John Locke's *Second Treatise*. There, Locke stipulates that while express consent is freely and directly given by an individual, tacit consent does not require a direct expression. Instead, tacit consent begins and ends with the enjoyment of property which is to say that tacit consent obligates one to the community and its laws as long as one enjoys the benefits of the security it provides. In contrast, one who expressly consents to the authority of the community is under perpetual obligation to the community even if they cease to enjoy the protections afforded to them by the community (see Locke 1992, 347-49).

community could still be fined for not voting for the offices of selectmen clearly suggests that early colonial American communities were struggling with the requirements of direct, popular government. On this front, some communities were explicit about this concern. The *Massachusetts Bicameral Ordinance* (1644) begins by justifying the move to a bicameral legislative body in these terms: "...after long experience, we find divers inconveniences in the manner of our proceeding in Courts by magistrates & deputies sitting together, & accounting in wisdom to follow the laudable practice of other states who have layed groundworks for government & order in the issuing of business of greatest & highest consequence" (Lutz 1998, 90). What matters here is that the move from participatory to representative government reflects a conscious response on the part of particular communities to a changing environment. In Voegelin's terms, this change represents a change in the symbol used as an answer to the question of who these particular communities are.

While not every community committed to a bicameral legislature, the common feature of the reduced scope of popular sovereignty is the idea that the people express their authority indirectly. Thus, the *Cambridge Agreement of October 4, 1652* comes to view the role of the people in terms of instructing their elected officials on how they should make decisions (Lutz 1998, 141). This is a far cry from deliberating together. Once their representatives have been instructed, community members are free to return to private matters. Similarly, the previously mentioned *Massachusetts Agreement on the Legislature* (1634) provides that the people retain only the electoral powers as the key political powers once held directly by the community are transferred to the General Court (Lutz 1998, 50).

While this is happening, the documents examined here show that authority is not simply drawn from the consent of the people or from God as required by the covenant. In addition,

authority is also found in earlier documents. For example, the second paragraph of the *Pilgrim Code of Laws* one sees that the consent of the people is no longer the exclusive foundation of the government. In this document, the *Mayflower Compact* and other patents authorize the actions of the government of Plymouth colony. While these documents are authorized, in part at least, by the consent of the people, the fact that the documents themselves are viewed as authoritative indicates that Lutz (1988, 1992, 1998) is correct in arguing that these documents are proto-constitutions.

Despite the subtle shifts, a constant element in the Plymouth documents and elsewhere is the idea that members of these political communities view themselves as Christians. Evidence of this has already been provided in the ends of government pursued by these communities and in the oaths taken. While this much is clear, it remains to be determined what constitutes a good Christian. Beyond actively promoting the glory of God and a concern for justice, the *Mayflower Compact* says almost nothing on this topic which is not really surprising given the homogeneity of the religious community. When one considers other communities, it is possible to tease out what it would mean to be a good Christian in colonial Massachusetts. In addition to the two qualities mentioned above, one finds in documents from Salem, Watertown, and Dedham use of the biblically important image of walking in the path of the lord. The *Salem Covenant of 1629* proclaims that members are to “walke together in all his [God’s] waies, according as he is pleased to reveale himself untoe us in his Blessed word of truth” (Lutz 1998, 35). Seven years later, residents of Salem will use similar imagery in the *Enlarged Salem Covenant* (Lutz 1998, 58). In the *Watertown Covenant* (1630), members will “promote his glory by submitting to the requirements of Scripture” which is another way of saying that members will “walke before him, and serve him, without Feare in Holiness and Righteousness, all the Days of our Lives” (Lutz

1998, 38; see also 39). Residents of Dedham will “by all means labor to keep off from us all such as are contrary minded, and receive only such onto us as may be probably of one heart with us, [and such] as that we either know or may well and truly be informed to walk in a peaceable conversation with all meekness of spirit ...” (Lutz 1998, 68). The prevalence of this imagery suggests that understanding what it means to walk in the path of the Lord is key to determining what it means to be a good Christian.

Barkalow (2004, 494-96) considers the importance of the walking imagery found in documents like those identified above. According to him, use of walking “indicates continuous action, or a habitual lifestyle. Walking also implies a notion of progress” (Barkalow 2004, 494). Given the nature of the religious ends of colonial American communities, one may conclude that the understanding of progress employed here is the progress individuals make in their spiritual lives in response to the commands of Scripture. This is evident when Paul warns the faithful that “if you live according to their flesh you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live” (Romans 8:13). Thus, it is through the Spirit and one’s faithful obedience to the commands of Scripture that one leads the life of a good Christian.

Those capable of faithful obedience to the commands of Scripture will enjoy the fruit of the spirit (Galatians 5:22-23). The fruit of the Spirit are characteristics of all good Christians and, as such, characteristics of all good citizens. According to Scripture, these virtues include: 1) Love (John 15:13, Romans 5:8, 1 John 3:16-17); 2) Joy (1 Peter 1:8, John 16:20-22, Romans 14:17, Philippians 4:4); 3) Peace (John 14:27, Romans 8:28, Philippians 4:6-9); 4) Longsuffering (Ephesians 4:2, Colossians 3:12, 1 Timothy 2:24), 5) Kindness (Matthew 11:28-29, 19:13-14, 2 Timothy 1:15-16); 6) Goodness (Romans 5:7, Galatians 6:10, 2 Thessalonians 1:11); 7) Faithfulness (Lamentations 3:2, Philippians 2:7-9, 1 Thessalonians 5:24, Revelations 2:10); 8)

Gentleness; and 9) Self-control (1 Corinthians 9:25, 2 Peter 1:5-6). When a community is composed of good Christians walks by the Spirit and manifests His fruit, there is no need for external laws to produce the attitudes and behaviors that please God (see, for example, Romans 8:4). By attending to the moral requirements of God's law, civil authority and civil law need only play a limited role as the community's conformity to the requirements of Scripture allows them to enjoy both Christian and civil liberty (Barkalow 2004, 494-95).

When popular sovereignty and being a good Christian are combined, one arrives at the central concept identified by Kendall and Carey: good Christians deliberating together on the good of the community. One originally finds this in the *Mayflower Compact* which provides that members will "from time to time" meet to consider "the general good of the Colony" (Lutz 1998, 32). In addition to establishing the political structures that will come to govern the community, the *Mayflower Compact* intends for the assembly to engage in an ongoing discussion of how best to advance the general good of the colony. Thus, the *Plymouth Oath of Allegiance and Fidelity* stipulates in the oath taken by elected officials that they "... shall labor, to advance, & furder the good of this colony, & plantation" (Lutz 1998, 34). The good of the community, here and elsewhere, is understood in terms of both the religious or moral good of the community and the physical good of the community. Evidence of the former has already been provided in terms of promoting the glory of God and advancing the Christian faith (see Lutz 1998, 32, 38, 145-46). The latter is indicated by the emphasis placed on living in a "comfortable society" where liberty and property rights are secured (Lutz 1998, 68; see also 58-59, 99, 124-25, and 144). The twofold nature of the ends pursued in these communities indicates that the colonial assemblies were tasked with reconciling the City of God and the City of Man.

That colonial American communities were aware of this task is evident in what it said about the relationship between religion and politics. Here, the *Laws and Liberties of Massachusetts* (1647) is particularly illustrative. In what is essentially the document's preamble, one finds an extended discussion of the extent to which theological ideas and principles serve as the theoretical basis for government. Consequently, as "seen as God had set up Politicall Government among his people Israel he gave them a body of lawes of judgment both in civil and criminal cases" (Lutz 1998, 96). This passage makes two points abundantly clear. First, God authorizes government and, second, is the author of the laws of man. The latter should not be taken literally as what this passage really means is that the laws of man must be consistent with the requirements of Scripture which entails that it is the responsibility of political assemblies to ensure that their laws ("deductions" and "rules" are "gathered from the word of God" (Lutz 1998, 99). The consequences of not successfully reconciling the two are potentially fatal as failure to do so is tantamount to rendering the political community "a Ship without rigging and steeridge" that will quickly be dashed upon the rocks (Lutz 1998, 96). By requiring the marriage of religious and political authority, the *Laws and Liberties of Massachusetts* explicitly provides for the means by which, to use Tocqueville's terminology, the spirit of religion is combined with the spirit of freedom" (see Tocqueville 2000, 43-44). This is evident in the belief that the "frame [of] our civil Politie, and lawes" must accord with the "rules of his most holy word whereby each do help and strengthen other (the Churches the civil Authoritie, and the civil Authoritie the churches)" (Lutz 1998, 97). By institutionalizing this symbiotic relationship, colonial American communities should be able to avoid the "snare" of distinguishing between the laws of God and the laws of man (Lutz 1998, 99). In doing so, "both prosper the better without such emulation, and contention for privileges or priority as have proved the misery (if not ruine) of both in some

other places” (Lutz 1998, 97). Only when this is achieved is it possible for a community to truly flourish with flourishing understood here in terms identical to the understanding of why a Christian adheres to the requirements of Scripture—for the sake of conscience (Lutz 1998, 99).⁵

Assessing the Legacy of the *Mayflower Compact*

Having established that the political theory of the *Mayflower Compact* focuses on popular sovereignty where citizens collectively deliberate on the proper ends of government and do so as good Christians, it is now possible to ascertain the influence of the *Mayflower Compact* on 17th century communities established after the founding of Plymouth in 1620. Within the context of the continuity thesis and the methodological approach taken here, the following hypotheses present themselves: a) If the political symbols undergo no meaningful differentiation support is provided for the strong version of the continuity thesis; b) If the political symbols are secularized, support for the secular version of the continuity thesis is found; c) If additional symbols are added to the original symbols, one is presented with support for the eclectic version of the continuity thesis; and d) If the original symbols are abandoned and replaced by a new set of symbols one finds support for the minimal continuity thesis. These hypotheses are tested through an analysis of the earliest town documents from Scituate and Taunton as well as through an analysis of how political and moral principles develop within Plymouth and Massachusetts Bay.

⁵ It is important to note here that the *Laws and Liberties of Massachusetts* only mentions obedience for the sake of conscience. In support of this conclusion, the text calls the reader’s attention to Romans 13:5 which paints a slightly different picture. There, Paul tells the reader that one should be subject to the authority of the political community out of conscience and out of a concern to avoid the punishment of the civil authority. That conscience, by itself, proves inadequate reinforces the consequences of our fallen nature and suggests that reconciling the City and God and the City of Man might prove more difficult than America’s earliest colonists thought.

Scituate

When looking at the earliest documents from Scituate and Taunton, one is immediately struck by the fact that these documents deal almost exclusively with property. At one level this is not surprising given the federal nature of the Plymouth Colony where the regulation of property was one of the express responsibilities of each town (Philbrick 2006, 175). At another level, this exclusive focus suggests that the real focus of these communities may be on something other than promoting the glory of God and the principles of the Christian faith. This possibility is suggested by the following from Scituate in 1636 where it is provided that “the town be allowed to make such orders in their township necessary for their convenient and comfortable living, provided they have recourse to Plymouth in case for justice” (Bangs 1999, 55). Besides calling one’s attention to Plymouth’s federal structure, what is important here is the emphasis on convenient and comfortable living. Such an emphasis seems at odds with the Pilgrims’ recognition of the fact that the life a good Christian is one characterized, in part at least, by longsuffering (see Ephesians 4:2; Colossians 3:12; and 1 Timothy 2:24).

It may be the case that the early emphasis on property represents a response to their difficult living conditions. According to Philbrick (2006, 84), the Pilgrims had to quickly revise their initial plans for their settlement in response to the high death toll. Making matters worse was the fact that the land surrounding the original settlement was poor thus making the need to find and cultivate better land essential to the survival of the community (Philbrick 2006, 184). Barely able to satisfy the needs of the 102 persons who landed on November 9, 1620, the arrival of the *Fortune* in 1621 made an already grim situation more so as the passengers on this vessel were not provided with provisions for the settlement (Philbrick 2006, 124). On top of all this, the

Pilgrims owed those who financed their trip to the New World a considerable amount of money.⁶ These facts explain why the *[Puritan] Laws and Liberties* (1658) expressly provides for the paying off of the debt owed to the colonies' first financiers (Lutz 1998, 149). Thus, an argument can be made that the emphasis on property and property rights simply reflects some of the community's most pressing concerns.

While this is certainly true, the fact that the individual towns were authorized to render justice in the area of property disputes indicates that property and property rights were growing in importance. Recall that originally all questions concerning property disputes were to be sent to Plymouth for resolution. By 1654, it was expressly provided that "Every town is to provide a book for recoding lands presently possessed by anyone without evidence; each town is to appoint five [examiners] to hear evidence of claims" (Bangs 1999, 56). Not twenty years later, each town is to resolve controversies regarding property. The provision's concern with lands possessed "without evidence" indicates that a clearer record of private property was necessary. That the various towns composing Plymouth were empowered to hear and resolve these cases indicates that these types of controversies were very common and too great a burden for the seat of justice in the community to deal with alone. That the examiners were to rule based on the principles of justice was understood as was the belief that justice was consistent with the principles of Christianity (see Lutz 1998, 32, 34, 39). What matters is the fact that property and property

⁶ In order to finance their trip to the New World, the Pilgrims essentially entered a joint stock company with the Adventurers. In exchange for the financing of the voyage, the Pilgrims would work four days a week for seven years (two days a week for themselves) with the revenues generated used to pay off their debt. As Philbrick (2006, 20-21) details, this initial agreement proved unsatisfactory for the leader of the Adventurers who desired the revenue for six days of work. Complicating matters was the fact that Robert Cushman negotiated these terms on behalf of the Pilgrims without consulting the members in Leiden.

ownership, both aspects of the city of Man, took on greater importance and, in doing so, take away from the community's primary concern with the city of God.

Further evidence of a move away from religion is the fact that the emphasis on property is nowhere balanced by religion in these communities. This is to say, religion's ability to exert an upward pull on the base desire to acquire property and wealth is, at best, an assumption. That religion exerted such a pull on Plymouth's first generation is clear, but what about successive generations? According to a 1673 record from Scituate, property rights for the children of its earliest inhabitants were guaranteed: "All male children born and living in Scituate, children of ratable inhabitants in 1647 or their successors, have rights of common; female heirs who dwell in Scituate have the same rights" (Bangs 1999, 62). What distinguishes the second and third generations of these towns is their preoccupation with private property. By 1660, most Massachusetts colonies faced decreasing church membership because the focus of the community had shifted to the material rewards of this life and away from those of the afterlife. Responding to the insatiable "demand for fish, timber, grain, and cattle in Europe, the West Indies, and beyond," the descendants of the first Pilgrims chose to forsake the city of God for the city of Man (Philbrick 2006, 199).

This shift in priority worried Governor Bradford. Concerned that the towns cared more for "enriching themselves" than the religious principles of Plymouth, Bradford worried that this would lead to the "ruin of New England" (Philbrick 2006, 185). The emphasis on the acquisition of property as a means of obtaining wealth stood in contrast to the Pilgrim's initial vision of a "compact, self-contained community of fellow worshippers" (Philbrick 2006, 186). The ability to reinstate this vision proved difficult as the growth of Plymouth proved to be a great obstacle to the moral purity of the community. Thus, in response to the growing concern with wealth and the

perceived problems of premarital sex, adultery, sodomy, and buggary, Bradford ordered his subordinates in 1655 to “improve the spiritual state of the colony” or resign from office (Philbrick 2006, 186-87). Thus, one finds in the example of Scituate the development of a tension between the religious beliefs and values of the Pilgrims and their growing concern with material matters. While the first settlers did not ignore their physical needs, these needs were of secondary importance to their spiritual needs. A little more than thirty years after landing in Plymouth, one finds evidence of a change in this relationship where the spiritual and physical needs of persons are equalizing or, with additional time, the latter replacing the former as the dominant concern of the community and its members.

Taunton

The findings for Scituate accurately describe the situation in Taunton as well. In both towns, the earliest documents deal exclusively with property rights.⁷ The first document from Taunton, *The General Court of Plimoth establishing the boundary lines of Taunton*, has the effect of clarifying the town’s now larger boundaries. The decision announced in this document is in response to a request from the residents of Taunton to increase the size of the town. While certainly a response to changing demographics, this request also speaks to greater concern with physical demands and desires and less of a concern with spiritual matters. In order to satisfy this desire for more land, it is necessarily the case that the desired land would have to be purchased from the native population. The *Deed, Ousamequini to Thomas Prince, Thomas Willet, Myles Standish, Josiah Winslow, et all Land South of Rehoboth to Taunton River* (1653) provides for

⁷ There is a good chance that both towns are still struggling with the consequences of Governor Bradford’s (1624) decision to change the understanding of property in Plymouth. Moving away from community owned property, Bradford decided that each household would privately own the plot of land assigned to it. Consequently, they would be able to keep whatever it grew and, in response to this change, members became more willing to work harder.

the removal of the indigenous populations from the area in question and grants the land to the partners. Per the legal requirements of the day, all native land purchases required prior approval from the General Court. The reason for this, according to Plymouth authorities, was to ensure clear titles while protecting natives from unscrupulous persons (Philbrick 2006, 170). In reality, this requirement allowed Plymouth to keep prices artificially low which forced natives to sell their land at below market value. This policy effectively allowed the Pilgrims to cut the natives out of New England's emerging real estate market. Given this state of affairs, it is thus not surprising to also find clear provisions establishing that these lands would be inherited by "their heirs forever" (1651). Thus, based on the available evidence from Taunton, one finds evidence of a growing tension between the moral precepts stemming from the *Mayflower Compact's* religious principles and the physical, day-to-day considerations of a political and economic nature. To get a sense of how ingrained these tensions were and how colonial communities might have gone about resolving them it is possible to look at individual communities across time. Two examples of this (Plymouth and Massachusetts Bay) are considered below.

Plymouth

Within Plymouth there is evidence to suggest, as expected by Voegelin, that symbols are altered over time in response to changing political and historical circumstances. Evidence of such as change is found in both Scituate and Taunton. When one looks at Plymouth, one also finds evidence of a political community actively changing its own self-understanding. Here, members of the community were expected to directly engage in the governance of the community. Recognizing that these requirements were unnecessarily burdensome, Plymouth quickly provided for representative government in the *Plymouth Agreement* (1636) (Lutz 1998, 60). More telling is the fact that no mention is made of the King of England in the *Plymouth Oath of*

Allegiance and Fidelity (1625) suggesting that citizenship is understood in terms of allegiance to Plymouth alone (see Lutz 1998, 33-34). Yet, in the *Plymouth Agreement* (1636), members of Plymouth explicitly identify themselves as British subjects who will eventually argue that they possess the rights of all English subjects (Lutz 1998, 60). That the Pilgrims could not identify as subjects of the crown initially is a consequence of the fact that they landed in Massachusetts and not Virginia as originally intended. This change in location rendered void their original charter from the crown. Thus, it is not until a letter of patent is granted on 13/January/1629 that the Pilgrims could legally identify as British subjects. This is important because the rights they would go on to claim would be granted to them by the English government. This fact supports the conclusion of Kendall and Carey that the liberal doctrine of natural right is not a constituent aspect of early American political thought.

Of greater interest are the differences between the *Pilgrim Code of Law* (1636) and the *[Puritan] Laws and Liberties* (1658). In comparing the two documents, one is initially struck by the fact that the *Laws and Liberties* explicitly references the Bible whereas the *Pilgrim Code of Law* does not. Why is this the case and what does it mean? An initial answer to these questions is that the references to the Bible simply reflect their self-understanding as a Christian people. While plausible, this explanation seems incomplete. To the extent that they continue to be a Christian people and referencing the Bible is simply an expression of this, it seems reasonable that this would have been done in the earlier document as well. Thus, it seems that the references to the Bible found do more than assert the community's self-understanding.

To get at the missing element, the larger concerns of the community need to be considered. When looking at the *Pilgrim Code of Law*, one recognizes that a fundamental concern of the document is loyalty to the community. This is evident in the oath of the governor,

the oath taken by all freemen, and the oath of residents (Lutz 1998, 63-65). The same concern permeates the *Laws and Liberties*, but what differentiates the two documents is that the *Laws and Liberties* does not simply rely on the required oaths. Instead, this document uses Biblical references (1 Peter 2:13 and Romans 13:2) as responses to perceived moral drift in the community. 1 Peter is quoted as follows: “Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord’s sake” (Lutz 1998, 143). Placing this passage in its larger context, one finds that the passage itself serves as a reminder to the Pilgrims that they “are a chosen generation,” a “holy nation,” and “the people of God” (1 Peter 2:9-10). As such, they are reminded of the necessity of abstaining from “fleshly lusts, which war against your soul” (1 Peter 2:11). When placed into its larger context, the reference to 1 Peter found here suggests recognition of the fact that the people of Plymouth are growing morally and religiously lax. This is the same pattern found in Scituate and Taunton discussed earlier. It is in response to this that the people of Plymouth are reminded to submit themselves to the law, but also to emphasize “good works” (1 Peter 2:12) and to remind them that their liberty should not be used as a “cloak of maliciousness, but as the servants of God” (1 Peter 2:16). Thus, inclusion of Biblical references in the *Laws and Liberties* is a response to the community’s continued struggle to reconcile the demands of religion with the desires of man.

Massachusetts Bay

A similar picture is found in Massachusetts Bay. While the documents from Massachusetts Bay are more explicit than the Plymouth documents in terms of limiting political power (see Lutz 1998, 71, 73-77), all of the documents speak to the struggles associated with the tensions between the requirements of religion and human desires. In the Massachusetts Bay example, this is most evident in the list of capital offenses. In the *Massachusetts Body of*

Liberties (1641), twelve capital crimes are identified: 1) worshipping another God; 2) witchcraft; 3) blasphemy; 4) murder; 5) manslaughter; 6) taking another's life through guile (such as poisoning); 7) bestiality; 8) homosexuality; 9) adultery; 10) kidnapping; 11) bearing false witness; and 12) treason (Lutz 1998, 83-84). Each of these crimes is punishable by death and justified by specific references to the Bible. These references indicate that each of these laws conforms to the commandments of Scripture which constitutes the very definition of good and wholesome laws (Lutz 1998, 144; see also Nehemiah 9:13). What matters here is the fact that this list of capital offenses increases by three in six years with in *The Laws and Liberties of Massachusetts* (1647). In addition to the twelve crimes just mentioned, one finds here the addition of the capital offenses of not respecting one's parents, rebellious sons, and rape (Lutz 1998, 102-03).

Why were these not included in the 1641 list of capital offenses? The simple answer is that there were no laws to this effect. This answer, however, raises the question of why was this the case and why was it necessary, in a matter of six years, to add these to the list of capital offenses? It is doubtful that these were simply omissions as the Bible is clear that these crimes are crimes against God. Thus, a more plausible explanation is that these particular crimes represent a response to three particular concerns faced by the community. For all its piety, Massachusetts Bay was struggling with disrespectful children and rebellious sons. More importantly, it seems to have been a community tempted more by the pleasures of the flesh than by the word of the Lord. As with Scituate, Taunton, and Plymouth, one finds additional evidence suggesting that colonial American communities struggled to alleviate the tensions between religion on the one hand and the desires/preferences of the people on the other. While these communities continued to rely on religion to reconcile the two, Barkalow (2004) indicates that

religion's ability to limit, reform, and shape the sinful individual is limited. In fact, he suggests that by 1740 American communities move away from a reliance on religion and seek to unleash the productive capacity of the individual. The argument and analysis presented here, identify tensions in colonial American self-understanding that facilitate the development of liberal individualism identified by Barkalow (2004).

Conclusion

The argument and analysis presented here provide provisional support for the strong form of the continuity thesis. Consistent with the expectations of Kendall and Carey (1995) and others, one finds that colonial Americans self-identified as good Christians who deliberated together in order to pursue both the religious and non-religious ends of the community. Along with the political principles of representative government, popular sovereignty, federalism, and the rule of law, this self-understanding constitutes the core element of the political theory of the *Mayflower Compact*. When viewed in its entirety, one finds that religion serves as both a means and an end in colonial American thought. Here, the religious ends of the community (promoting the glory of God and the principles of Christianity) can only be achieved by a community of the faithful. It is only in this situation that it is possible to reconcile the requirements of faith with the desires and objectives of man.

For a while at least, Plymouth and other colonial colonies were successful in their efforts at this reconciliation. Philbrick (2006, 141) states that early Plymouth “was a place of exceptional discipline, a community where two years of strong leadership...had convinced even the Strangers in their midst that it was in their best interests to work together.” Unfortunately, these communities were unable to maintain this relationship. As the analyses of Scituate, Taunton, Plymouth, and Massachusetts Bay demonstrate, within a single generation one finds

evidence indicating that colonial American communities forsake the religious ends of the community in favor of the material objects associated with the body. In choosing the material desires associated with the body over the moral objectives associated with religion, one is presented with evidence showing that the objectives of colonial American communities are shifting away from the idyllic vision of a rural English town where a community of believers could pursue their faith in common and in peace. This is not to say that the materialism associated with the minimal continuity thesis and Lockean liberalism best characterizes the thought of 17th century Americans. One cannot draw this conclusion given the limited period of time focused on here (the 17th century) and the argument that the liberal individual does not emerge as an element of American political thinking until the 1740s (see Barkalow 2004). It is, however, possible to conclude that an inability to reconcile this tension is one of the factors that contribute to the emergence of liberal individualism in American political thinking.

As for Tocqueville, the conclusions reached here suggest that his treatment of religion in American thought cannot be associated with the political theory of the *Mayflower Compact*. Instead of treating religion as both a means and an end, Tocqueville seems to value religion exclusively as a means for achieving democratic ends. Early in *Democracy in America*, Tocqueville (2000, 35) describes Puritanism as both a political theory and a religious doctrine. What seems to matter most for Tocqueville is the former and not the latter. This is suggested by the fact that he calls his reader's attention to the positive consequences of religion. While religion may serve as a means to enlightenment, its greatest value lies in its ability to "make men live in peace and prepare them gently for death" (Tocqueville 2000, 286). Through its ability to limit the human imagination and its influence on both mores and laws, religion makes democratic government possible (see Tocqueville 2000, 279-80, 284-85). Thus, Tocqueville's

understanding of religion in America seems closer to the view that develops out of the political theory of the *Mayflower Compact*. Answering the question of what this vision looks, however, cannot be done through an analysis of the 17th century alone. It is first necessary to consider the relationship between 17th and 18th century American political thinking which is the topic addressed in the next chapter.

Chapter 3: Religion and Politics in the 18th Century

Moving out of the heart of Plymouth, 17th century residents of the colony quickly emphasize their private concerns that focus on the needs and desires of their body and give less attention to the moral requirements of being a good Christian. The shift in emphasis away from religious duties to one's self and the community are challenged by an emphasis on property introduces a tension between religion and the individual that characterizes both the political thinking of early America and political practice. The exclusive focus on the 17th century taken in the previous chapter limits one's ability to generalize the conclusions of the previous chapter to American political thinking more generally. To do this, it is necessary to consider how 18th century American political thinking responds to the tension inherent in 17th century American political thought.

As the colonies move into the 18th century, how political thinkers respond to the tension at the core of American political thinking serves as the focus of this chapter. If the strong form of the continuity thesis accurately describes American political thinking, 18th century thinkers would understand this tension to be potentially detrimental to society. In response, one would expect 18th century writers would seek to return to the first principles of the community and the political theory of the *Mayflower Compact*. The eclectic form of the continuity thesis suggests that 18th century Americans would respond to this tension by bringing together multiple intellectual traditions in an effort to reconcile religion and the civil authority as well as the individual and the community. The secular form of the continuity thesis hypothesizes that 18th century thinking would employ many of the solutions provided in the 17th century, but do so in a secular language so as to appeal to the changing attitudes of the American people. Finally, the

minimal form of the continuity thesis predicts that Americans will move away from the religiously inspired political thinking of the 17th century and come to emphasize liberal political thinking.

Given that religion continues to be the dominant lens through which 18th century politics is presented; it makes sense to focus on the strong form of the continuity thesis. In responding to a perceived lack of religiosity amongst the community, it makes sense that early 18th century writers would employ the jeremiad.⁸ As shown in the first section of this chapter, the strong form of the continuity thesis accurately describes the political thought of the early 18th century. Having said this, however, it is important to note that 18th century writers differentiate 18th century thought from its 17th century counterpart in two important ways. First, they shift responsibility for the good of the community off of the people as a whole and place it exclusively on the leaders of the community. Previously, it was the responsibility of the whole community to lift religion up. Now, the leaders must be the most virtuous, and the people's responsibility is to follow their leaders and God. The second solution is returning to the first principles, where Christianity is both the means and end of the community. As shown here, the early 18th century writers understand what they are doing as being consistent with the political theory of the *Mayflower Compact*.

As the century unfolds, political thinkers like Elisha Williams develop new solutions to the tension at the heart of American political thinking. As shown in the second section of this chapter, Williams redefines the roles of religion and government. The former is relegated to the private sphere whereas the latter has authority only in the public sphere of politics. Separating

⁸ The jeremiad is a literary device used by authors to bitterly lament the state of society and its morals in the most serious of terms. Jeremiad's always contain a prophecy of society's immanent downfall unless the community regains its moral standing in the eyes of God (see Murphy 2009).

the city of God and the city of man, Williams explicitly follows the argument of John Locke. In doing so, Williams' formulation of American political thinking points to a move away from the strong form of the continuity thesis to the minimal form.

Sermons of the Early 18th Century

At the beginning of the 18th century, thinkers like Benjamin Coleman and Joseph Sewall were concerned with the state of the community. The way in which these thinkers address the perceived loss of religion in America and the solutions they propose are similar. Both call for more government intervention and for religion to be brought back into the public sphere. Some responsibility is taken off of the people, and more responsibility is placed on the leaders of the community. As in the 17th century, the means and ends of the community remain religious and the foundation of government come from the Lord.

Coleman on Religious Slippage and Divine Punishment

Given the colony's slippage from its religious foundations, Coleman's main concern is that the colony avoids divine punishment. Drawing on scripture, Coleman warns, "She observes how the strong are soon weakened, and the weak are soon strengthened, when God pleases" and "*He Bringeth low and lifteth up...*" (Sanadoz 1998, 11 & 12). More concerned with commercial life and the pleasures associated with the body, Coleman urges his listeners that God is watching them and that they run the risk of bringing upon themselves his divine sanction. In making this argument, Coleman affirms the belief of 17th century American political thinking that views the ends of government primarily in terms of the souls of the community. Ultimately, if the community wants to please God and avoid punishment they must emphasize "a religious righteous administration" as doing so "restores a dissolving state" (Sandoz 1998,14). Coleman sees the ends of government to create a state that is religious, and if this religion starts to fade or

if their slippage, it is the governments job to uphold and enforce the religious values. Similarly, Coleman also accepts the 17th century position that religion is both a means and an end. Not only is it a means to salvation, but a means to reaping the rewards of the Lord and avoiding his divine punishment. It is an end in the sense that the ends of the community remain fundamentally religious in nature with an emphasis on salvation and the human soul.

Coleman's concern with the deterioration of the state is a common theme in 17th and 18th century American political writings. This deterioration is due to a perceived decrease in religion in the community. Coleman reasons that in consequence of this decrease in religiosity, God is responsible for the rise and fall of persons, families, and countries that do not hold up His virtues (Sandoz 1998, 11). The root cause of the fall from religion is identified by Coleman as an inordinate emphasis being placed on the human passions which is associated with the wants and desires of the body. He writes that the source of the community's current problems can be traced to the inability to regulate our passions: "If their passions shake 'em and they clash with one another; the house totters, the high arches above..." (Sandoz 1998, 17). For Coleman, it is the conflict of our passions that destabilizes the political community and ultimately serves as the source of its eventual collapse.

Responsibility for preventing the disastrous consequences of the passions are the magistrates. Coleman contends that the good of the community depends on its leaders, "and the favour of God toward them...do greatly depend on the pious, righteous, and faithful government meant which they are under" (Sandoz 1998, 19). For Coleman, it is the qualities of the leaders of a community that serves as the key to faithful government, or, government that pursues the proper religious ends of the community. In this sense, the leaders of the community serve as a check on the majority of the community who seem to be primarily concerned with material

things associated with the body. Thus, it is only necessary for leaders to exemplify the qualities of fortitude, patience, resolution, firmness, and strength of mind (Sandoz 1998, 17). When combined with the attributes of the spirit of power as well as mind, the magistrates ultimately serve as the pillars of the community and prevent it from collapsing. Thus, it is the political leaders who serve as the foundation of a good government rather than the members of the community. Coleman's solution, thus represents a shift away from 17th century political thinking but this is a solution one started to see evidence of in the later parts of the 17th century.

The qualities Coleman identifies as characterizing good leaders are religious in nature. One of the key aspects of his sermon is to use the Bible to illustrate what a good leader ought to be. He first uses the example of Solomon: "...They represented the strength of Christ and his stability, to bear the weight of the government laid upon him..." (Sandoz 1998, 15). Coleman views civil leaders as having divine responsibilities and looks to the Old Testament for how leaders should bear this burden. Given the seemingly overwhelming responsibility, leaders should first accept the strength of Christ. In addition to this, those who lead should possess the most superior virtue of the community: "So those in power and magistracy are to be supposed, men adorn'd with superior gifts, powers and beauties of mind" (Sandoz 1998, 15). Coleman supports this argument by using virtuous biblical leaders to exemplify the qualities leaders must possess. On this front, Coleman uses the examples of Moses, Joshua, Samuel, Jehojada, Hezekiah, and Nehemiah (Sandoz 1998, 11). He cites all of these examples inform that society needs many different types of leaders with different virtues to further the ends of government. Coleman writes, "He gave to David integrity, and to Solomon wisdom; and both were pillars of his framing" (Sandoz 1998, 18). If leaders in the colony have similar and diverse issues as these examples, then the character of the community would remain virtuous as this would create a

strong foundation. He uses this symbol to express that God grants different leaders different virtues, and that each brings something to the government.

Coleman's emphasis on leadership and argument that it is leaders and not the community in its collective capacity that should possess superior wisdom and knowledge marks a major shift from the beginnings in Plymouth (Sandoz 1998, 15). In the 17th century, all persons bore the responsibilities of leadership. Moreover, not believing that any one person was more capable of discerning the will of God, 17th century Americas emphasized the collective wisdom of fellow Christians deliberating together on the proper ends of the community and how best to achieve these ends. For Coleman, this is no longer the view of American political society as the responsibility for identifying and pursuing the proper ends of government fall exclusively to community leaders. This is why leaders need to be the, "wisest, most skilled, have most prudence, discretion and judgement for the public good" (Sandoz 1998, 15). They also must have integrity, uprightness, fruitfulness, and they must rule in fear of the Lord (Sandoz 1998, 16). Leaders must have, "a spirit of peace and love, meekness and humility, candour and gentleness; whereby persons are ready to unite their counsels, and act in concert with one another; paying a just deference one to another and preferring one another in honor; glad to receive light from any one, and well pleased to reflect it from; all pursuing one end, as the many pillars in a great house stand quietly near to one another, and all help bear it up..." (Sandoz 1998, 16-17). Throughout his sermon, Coleman reasons that it is necessary for these virtues to be dispersed amongst all of the community's leaders. It is only collectively that the community can be properly supported.

Coleman's emphasis on leadership explains his concern with resolving tensions between leaders and groups of the community in all areas of life, but especially religious matters. That Coleman is concerned with the relations between different magistrates is seen in his concern with

“Both superior and inferior magistrates” who share the responsibility of ministering “abundantly to the stability and tranquility of the state...” (Sandoz 1998, 16). The distinction between superior and inferior magistrates is important as it suggests that the common burden is not shared equally. While all virtuous leaders have a place in society, it is ultimately the most virtuous (the mountains) who bear greater responsibility than those who are of less virtue (the hills). Coleman makes this argument when he writes: “*The mountains shall bring Peace to the People, and the little hills by righteousness*” (Sandoz 1998, 16). What matters is that each level of leadership knows and understands the nature of its responsibility. Moreover, each level must not attempt to extend itself beyond its proper responsibility as doing so will destabilize the foundation of the community. The best way to prevent this from happening, according to Coleman, is a policy of humbling the leaders, and reminding them that God has the ultimate knowledge (Sandoz 1998, 13). Coleman reasons that it is important for leaders to remain humble. This humility reminds them that He is the true source of their authority and that they are merely instruments of His divine will.

In making this argument, Coleman presents his argument as being consistent with the original symbols of Plymouth Colony and 17th century American political thinking. He admires the virtue, devotion, and humbleness of Plymouth. He writes, “*Fathers of our country* let me freely say to you, that the devotion and virtue of our humble, but illustrious ancestors (the first planters of New-England), laid the foundation of our greatness among the provinces: and it is this that must continue and establish it under the define factor & blessing. Emulate their piety and godliness...” (Sandoz 1998, 22). Despite recourse to these symbols, it is evident from the analysis and argument provided above that Coleman has differentiated his understanding for these principles from their original understanding. Just how big is the difference between

Coleman and the 17th century? An argument can be made that one sees a slight shift away from Plymouth, and that it is a modification for the changing times. Following Voegelin, it makes sense for a people to alter or modify their original symbols in response to their historical development as a people who continue to advance, grow, and become more diverse. 1730 Boston is different than 17th century Plymouth. It has a different economy, is more diverse, has a larger population, and faces different challenges. It is in response to these changing circumstances that Coleman slightly shifts one's understanding of the principles of the *Mayflower Compact*. This is most evident is Coleman's emphasis on leadership. While still understanding the community in religious terms, Coleman places the responsibility for meeting the religious ends of the community squarely on the leaders of the community. This differentiates his political thinking from that discussed in the previous chapter which placed this responsibility squarely on the shoulders of all members of the community. Whether or not one can generalize Coleman's reformulation of America's 17th century political and moral principles can be determined through analysis of another early 18th century sermon.

Sewall and Early 18th Century American Political Thinking

As Massachusetts Bay Colony moves into the 18th century, one can see the reaction to the slippage in religion, and the emphasis on economic life rather than religious life. In this sermon, Sewall makes it clear that a community is only great with God. Not only will a community be tainted without God but no, "greatness or worldly glory will be any security against God's destroying judgements" (Sandoz 1998, 30). Not only do the people need to be actively worshiping God, but if they do not nothing will save them.

Sewall implies he wants recourse to the fundamental Christian values found in the Bible. He wants people to live in accordance with the Bible, and I would argue the Old Testament more

so than the New Testament. This is relevant because the values of the Old Testament, and those of the new Testament are not the same. The people should obey God, heavily and actively repent, be sensible, and be humble before the Lord (Sandoz 1998, 31). In addition to this, people should emphasize religion and a concern with the afterlife more than their earthly existence. Sewall writes, “tho’ their bodies should be destroy’d, their souls might be sav’d in the day of the Lord” (Sandoz 1998, 31). Later in the sermon, Sewall suggests that if they do not, the leaders need to redirect them. Ignoring the body and focusing on the soul is the main objective citizens should have. If they do not, the whole community will be punished by God.

While Sewall is clear that he believes Massachusetts Bay Colony to have fallen to sin, he remains hopeful that divine punishment can be avoided if only they repent. He writes, “And accordingly when they repented God turned from his fierce anger and gave them deliverance” (Sandoz 1998, 32). He acknowledges that they are not completely lost, and enough repentance can still save them. Sewall’s solution to the tension found in the 17th and early 18th centuries is the marriage between politics and religion. How do the communities of New England grapple with their new found political freedom, and the want of rearing pious protestants? These tensions come from the diversity of the colony and the difficulty of taming the wilderness in New England.⁹ The consequence of resolving this tension in the 17th century was that religiosity had decreased in the colony. Sewall’s solution is repentance, to return to the pious Christian community that first settled New England, the community that the people who fled to New England so desperately wanted in England.

⁹ On the larger, psychological implications of this for how New England Puritans thought of themselves see Perry Miller’s *Errand Into the Wilderness* (1984, especially 1-15).

Sewall indicates that religion is no longer in the public sphere. This was seen in 17th century Plymouth where the diversification and hardship of the colony led to a decrease in church attendance. With diversification, there were now many different religions in the colony, and these factions did not always get along. Regarding a decrease in religiosity, people dedicated more time to their economic life than religious, which is natural considering it was necessary to tame the land and people heavily depended on their labor to make a living. It is the duty of the community to remedy this and refocus their attention to God: “If we have neglected the duties of those relations which we sustain towards men, in public or private life; we must now with care and diligence discharge them” (Sandoz 1998, 37). Sewall’s argument is similar to that of Coleman with both arguing that the colony must return to those early years where the congregation was the center of political life. This is, of course, not the full picture of political life in Plymouth, but it is how Sewall understands early life in Plymouth. What matters is that Sewall understands and defines citizenship in the 17th century language of being a good Christian who walks, “humbly with thy God” (Sandoz 1998, 38). If this is not the case, there must be a sacrifice for the congregation to be atoned (Sandoz 1998, 42).

Sewall’s solution to the problems in the colony lies with the people: to learn that true religion lays the surest foundation of a people’s prosperity, avoiding iniquity, being sensible of the destroying evil of sin, and understanding the necessity of true repentance, and for all to be exhorted to turn everyone from his evil way and engage in the work of reformation (Sandoz 1998, 43). The first one, laying religion as the foundation, is necessary because “Righteousness exalted a Nation, Prov. 14. 34” (Sandoz 1998, 42). It is important that the foundation of the government be obedience to God. Without this obedience, the community will be punished. Without this obedience, the colony will not be great. The second usage, avoiding iniquity, is

vital or it will be the ruin of the people: “Sin in the body politick, is like some foul and deadly disease” (Sandoz 1998, 43). With sin in the body politick, there would be no justice, no peace and no glory. This is why it is vital for Sewall that sin is kept at bay, and the only way to achieve this is with piety, with every man keeping God as his focus. Religion is a means for Sewall to keep the community safe and just, free from the passions that could corrupt man. It is also an end to receive glory from God and to keep the community pure. In the 17th century the community moved away from religion, and conflict arose. Sewall’s solution is to bring religion back to the forefront.

The third, destroying sin, is necessary because “one sinner destroys much Good, Eccl. 9. 18.” (Sandoz 1998, 44). When sin corrupts the people, they will be punished. These are the problems that plague the community. The solution, the fourth usage, is to turn everyone from their evil way, which is necessary to keep the community pure and in God’s good favor. These are the duties of the community. In the 17th century every man was responsible for the economic and civil state of the community. As shown in the previous chapter, 17th century political thinking struggles to balance the interests of the soul with the interests of the body. Confronted with the steady decline of religion in the 18th century, Sewall has recourse to the image of the public deliberating on and deciding its future. For him, we responsible for our own salvation. Just as in the 17th century the only way for the early settlers to save themselves from corruption and falling apart was to take civic responsibility. One can see this with the signing of the *Mayflower Compact* where every eligible man in the community had to take on a civic responsibility. While the solution is not exactly the same, one can see the basic understanding the citizens must take responsibility and charge for the state of their body politick.

Despite this re-emphasis, Sewall also speaks to the role of the leaders, which differentiates Sewall from his 17th century counterparts and serves as a common aspect of 18th century political thinking. He states that “they who rule over men must be just, ruling in the Fear of God; and requireth you to lead in the work of reformation by your example, and by the right use of that power with which he hath be trusted you” (Sandoz 1998, 46). Sewall urges the leaders to rule in the fear of God in order to further the reformation, and they will do this by also leading by example. Sewall calls for religion to be a part of public life, and for the leaders to have say on the worshipping of the people they govern. In addition, he also believes that the answer to tyranny lies with God, “into such paths of righteousness ass shall lead to our deliverance and safety; that we may neither oppress one another...” (Sadnoz 1998, 42). Leaders must also lay justice and equity as the foundation to their rule, have fatherly compassion, and keep the unity of spirit and bond the peace (Sandoz 1998, 48). They must do more than lead the pious life that is required of the average citizen.

Sewall understands the leaders are the tools of deliverance (Sadnoz 1998, 49). They have a separate set of responsibilities than the average citizen and in order to fulfill these responsibilities they must have higher level of virtue. One does not see this distinction in the 17th century. While religion was present in Plymouth colony, it was not necessary to worry about deliverance because religious slippage had not yet begun. But as the colony grows, and people move farther away from the center of the community, it is necessary to remind them that religion should be their highest priority. In reminding people of this, Sewall speaks to the close relationship between religion and politics. In fact, it is not a stretch to say that for Sewall religion is a constituent element of one’s civic duty. He writes, “when call’d to give your vote, consider seriously what is right in the sight of God, with is no respect of persons, or taking of gifts; and

act accordingly” (Sadnoz 1998, 49). People should consider God when voting, and not accept bribes as God would not look favorably at this. Citizens should also, “Be ready to sacrifice private views and personal interest to the public good” (Sadnoz 1998, 49). Community members must be willing to sacrifice personal freedoms for the good of community and that the public good is more important than the individual good. Sewall understands the public good as good Christians as humble servants of the Lord, with the most virtuous at the helm. And that the responsibility of these leaders is to further these ends, and the responsibility of the people is to elect the most virtuous among them. He does not want the individual to corrupt the society and therefore puts more emphasis on religion than the individual because religion is what will keep the government and people good.

Early 18th Century American Political Thinking: An Overview

One can see that early 18th century thinking can be categorized by a strong reaction to the decrease in religiosity. Thinkers are concerned with safeguarding religion in the public sphere. Coleman wishes to avoid divine punishment; in this concern he calls for a religious administration. This makes it necessary for the leaders to be the most virtuous among the people, a distinction that was not present in 17th century Plymouth. Coleman moves away from a Christian community deliberating for the ends of government, and instead calls for Christian leaders deliberating for the ends of government.

Sewall makes a similar argument to Coleman’s. He is concerned with the deterioration of the state, and the punishment that will accompany this deterioration. Sewall, similarly to Coleman, call for recourse to the original symbols of the Old testament and the founders of Plymouth Colony. The thinkers of the early 18th century, however, ascribe to a different puritan political thinking. So while it is not completely the same as the puritan political thinking that

defines 17th century Plymouth, it is not completely different. Thus, it is possible to look at early 18th century American political thinkers as engaged in what Voegelin refers to as the process of differentiation.

Transitioning Away from the Political Theory of the *Mayflower Compact*

Elisha Williams' sermon is entitled *A Reasonable Plea for The Liberty of Conscience and the Right of Private Judgement, in Matters of Religion, Without any Controul from human Authority*. In 1744, the politically ambitious Williams asserted that the civil authority had no right to infringe upon God's authority in the church. He believed government's authority is not from God as it had been previously, but from people's need to leave the state of nature of their own volition. By originating government in the liberal account of social contract theory, Williams indicates that the origin of government is entirely artificial whereas the religiously inspired understanding of the covenant provides government with a natural foundation. In other words, government is natural in the sense that it is required by God as an essential element of man's efforts to lead the life of the good Christian. By invoking Locke, the social contract, and drawing a firm distinction between the civil and religious authorities, Williams fundamentally moves one away from 17th century political thinking and its emphasis on religion towards the secularism associated with classical liberalism and the minimal continuity thesis.

Williams' sermon introduces a new symbol into American political thinking—John Locke. Following Locke, Williams argues that the ends of government consist of the protection individual rights and included in this is the right to property. He writes, "The great end of civil government, is the preservations of their persons, their liberties and estates, or their property" (Sandoz 1998, 58; compare with Locke 1992, 323). This statement indicates that Williams is concerned with the authority of the civil magistrate to infringe on the rights of the individual.

Given this concern, it is thus necessary for Williams to limit the civil authority to the regulation of property. This marks a significant departure from the ends of 17th century and early 18th century political communities. One sees Williams taking the strict position that religion should reside in its own sphere and this position marks a critical conceptual change in American political thinking on the relationship between politics and religion.

Unlike Coleman and Sewall who are critical of science and reason, Williams is not. His openness to scientific reasoning opens his thought to the influence of non-religious writers like John Locke who Williams employs as an authority on the topics of the origin of government and the proper ends of government. Thus, one of the key differences between Williams' sermon and the other sermons examined in this study, is its underlying theoretical justification of the political community. While Williams continues to employ religious rhetoric, his argument for the origin of government is purely Lockean. Unlike the sermons of Coleman and Sewall that rely exclusively on the Bible as the foundation for the political community, Williams has recourse to the social contract theory of Locke. This is evident when Williams writes that "Reason teaches us that all men are naturally equal in respect of jurisdiction or dominion one over another" (Sandoz 1998, 56). Here, Williams echoes Locke's thoughts on equality in the state of nature. Locke writes, "A State also of Equality, wherein all the Power and Jurisdiction is reciprocal, no one having more than another: there being nothing more evident" than the fact that man "shall be equal one amongst another without Subordination or Subjection..." (Locke 1992, 269). With this addition, Williams revises one's understanding of the relationship between the civil and religious spheres of society. Rather than overlapping as in the 17th and early 18th centuries, Williams argues that they should be separate and distinct with each having authority in its own sphere.

Similar to the previous two sermons, Williams is concerned with the actions of government and community leaders. Where he differs from Coleman and Sewall is with regard to how best to address the problem. Where the other two attempt to restore leaders, and by extension to whole community, to religious fundamentals, Williams seeks to limit the civil authority by drawing a clear distinction between the ends of government and those of religion. The former concerns the physical existence of man and the latter his moral existence. Previous understandings of the relationship between politics and religion are wrong for Williams as they open the door to the civil authority's efforts to regulate the religious lives of individuals. Such regulation, Williams fears, has become too burdensome and it is therefore necessary to reassess the extent of civil authority. Williams asserts that the private sphere of religion and the public sphere of politics should be separate. He writes, "Nor have the ecclesiastical officers' authority to determine in these cases for particular Christians; because it is not within their commission" (Sandoz 1998, 70). In previous arguments, there is no distinction between the sphere of politics and religion. For Williams, the public sphere is to be ruled by the civil government and the private sphere by religion. The civil government cannot involve itself in the business of religion and vice versa. Williams writes, "But the last thing included in this corollary is, that civil rulers have no authority to determine for Christians the *form of church government...*" (Sandoz 1998, 71). Williams' argument thus follows that of Locke almost perfectly. On the distinction between the two spheres, Locke argues that it is necessary to "distinguish exactly the Business of Civil Government from that of Religion, and to settle the just Bounds that lie between the one and the other. If this be not done, there can be no end put to the Controversies that will always arising, between those that have, or at least pretend to have, on the one side, a Concernment for the Interests of Mens Souls, and on the other side, a Care for the Commonwealth" (Locke 2010, 12).

The proper objects of the civil authority, according to Locke, concern the “providing, preserving, and advancing of their own civil interests” which are defined as “life, liberty, health” in addition to the “possession of outward things” like money, lands, houses, furniture, and the like (Locke 2010, 12). With this in mind, the civil authority “neither can nor ought in any manner be extended to the salvation of souls” as this is the proper concern of religion (Locke 2010, 13, 15).

Williams does not see the need for the government to control religious matters that are not stated in the Bible. Essentially, if it is not stated in the Bible it is the freedom of the congregation to decide, not the civil government. Williams uses the example of kneeling or standing while praying. Essentially it does not matter as long as the congregation is praying in accordance to what the Bible does say as it omits any mention of whether one should stand or kneel. He writes, “*The right of private judgement, and liberty of worshipping God according to consciences, without control from human laws. A privilege more valuable than the civil right of the Magna Carta*” (Sadnoz 1998, 117). This is a big claim. Williams understands the right of worshipping God and interpreting the word of God as a privilege more important than those rights given in the Magna Carta. The right of people to worship, interpret and exercise their religion is the most important right one can have and the best means of securing this right is the strict separation of the civil and religious authorities.

Williams states that the only need for government and the only ends should be to do those things that could not be provided in the state of nature. The most important of these being one’s ability to secure and enjoy private property (Sadnoz 1998, 58). In making this argument, Williams follows Locke on what is missing in the state of nature and, consequently, what explains the insecurity of property. According to Williams, there are three things missing in the state of nature: 1) the need of a known and settled law, 2) they need of a judge to interpret the

law and disputes over the law, and 3) an authority to enforce the law (Sadnoz 1998, 60; compare with Locke 1992, 280) As with Locke, Williams believes that people leave the state of nature and originate government in order to secure and enjoy one's property. This means that Williams' understanding of civil power is limited. He reiterates that the main responsibility of the civil government is the protection one's property, and the responsibility of the church is one's soul. Again, Williams once again follows Locke who argues that the civil authority is not to concern itself with the human soul as this is the rightful jurisdiction of religion (Locke 2010, 15). In addition to this, the choice on how one practices religion and how one submits to the authority of God is not the business of the government. As man has reason enough to decide for himself, "the members of a civil state do retain their natural liberty of right of judging for themselves in matters of religion..." (Sadnoz 1998, 61). To allow give up this right to the civil authority would be inconsistent with the proper ends of political society.

In following Locke and making this argument, Williams departs from his predecessors in emphasizing and relying on human reason. Previously, human reason was seen as limited or too corrupt to be relied on for the organization of the political community. This is why society previously needed the godliest men to lead to show an example of how to be virtuous. Williams, in contrast, believes, "For the freedom of man and liberty of acting according to his own will...is grounded in his having freedom, which is able to instruct him in that law he is to govern himself by, and make him know how far he is to left to the freedom of his own will" (Sadnoz 1998, 56). Man has the reason to leave the state of nature, and therefore should have the freedom to decide most things in his life. In addition, "And reason tells us, all are born thus naturally equal, i.e. with an equal right to their preservation; and therefore to such things as nature affords for their subsistence" (Sadnoz 1998, 57). This is where civil authority begins and ends. It is ultimately

this clear distinction, by clarifying the proper relationship between civil and religious authority, that simplifies things and makes self-government possible.

This, in turn, prevents society from degenerating into tyranny. Williams writes, “There are too many arbitrary governments in the world, where the people don’t make their own laws. These are not properly speaking government but tyrannies; and are absolutely against the laws of God and nature” (Sandoz 1998, 59). Tyrannies do not simply violate civil laws, but the laws of God and nature as well. It is ultimately this concern that shapes and informs Williams thoughts on the relationship between the civil and religious authorities in society. Williams indicates that religion alone is an inadequate safeguard for religious and civil liberty. It is thus necessary to provide additional safeguards, like the separation of church and state. In making this argument, Williams differentiates himself from previous thinkers who all argues that a proper emphasis on religion is all that is required to secure freedom and happiness. For Williams, one cannot rely on the Bible alone. In making this argument, Williams anticipates Jefferson who argues for the separation of church and state in his “Letter to the Danbury Baptists” (1802), James Madison who calls into question the utility of religion in “Federalist #10,” and the First Congress of the United States who authored the Free Exercise and Establishment Clauses of the First Amendment. With a firm wall of separation between the civil and religious authorities, Williams’ understanding of the role of religion in society is more Lockean than Tocquevillian. For Tocqueville, the relationship between religion and politics is a causal one where the private norms associated with the family and religion animate and shape the public realm of politics. In other words, religion makes democracy safe and this explains why Tocqueville is less concerned with individual souls than he is with its consequences for democratic governance.

Conclusion

Despite the limited sample size of the 18th century documents examined here, one is presented with evidence of a shift in American political thinking away from the strong form of the continuity thesis toward the minimal form of the continuity thesis. Common to both 17th and 18th century political thinking is the struggle with the question of where to place religion in American society. In the 17th century this was easier because it was more homogenous, and the population was smaller. As Plymouth got bigger, economics became more important in the public sphere. By the early 18th century, one finds thinkers addressing this tension in ways that deviate from the political theory of the *Mayflower Compact*. In particular, one finds less responsibility placed on the citizens for achieving the ends of the community. For example, 18th century communities rely less on oaths as a means of securing obedience to the religious ends of the community when compared to their 17th century counterparts. Moreover, primary responsibility for the good of the community is shifted from the people as a whole who were to deliberate on the proper ends of the community and the best means for achieving these ends and placed squarely on the leaders of the community.

The most radical change is from the early 18th century to the late 18th century. Here, Williams does not simply quote John Locke. Rather, he employs the Locke's logic on the origin of government and Locke's understanding of the proper relationship between the civil and religious authorities in the community. By limiting religion to the private sphere, Williams divorces the two authorities that that animated 17th and early 18th century political thinking and practice. In this way, he anticipates the separation of church and state. Williams also moves American political thinking away from the communal understanding of rights highlighted by Shain (1996) and embraces the liberal understanding of individual rights. The reasons for all of

this is found in Williams' concern with tyranny and the threat posed by heavy government intervention into the private lives of the people. These concerns are absent in the analysis of the early 18th century.

Having said this, it is necessary to revisit the different forms of the continuity thesis. If the strong continuity thesis held true, then we would see the same exact puritan political thinking informing the thinking throughout the generations of American political history. This is clearly not the case. While the symbols of Plymouth do not completely disappear, and they are even revisited, thinkers may not interpret them properly. They also are not present at every stage. If the eclectic form characterized American political thinking then one would see the early puritan thinking present, but combined with other sources. This does not characterize Williams' sermon because the early political thinking does not inform his thinking at all. It is absent. It is also not the secular form of the continuity thesis. If it were, then one would see language like seen in the *Mayflower Compact*, just with the absence of God. God would be completely moved from the equation. But all the thinkers see God as playing a role and Williams uses completely different language than used in Plymouth. He places more importance on the individual than on the common good that defines Plymouth. The conclusion would be that the minimal continuity thesis is the most accurate way in which to describe the legacy of the *Mayflower Compact*.

Chapter Four:

Conclusion

The question remaining is whether or not Tocqueville's assertion was correct, and to what extent the *Mayflower Compact* influences American political thinking? Tocqueville's main assertions includes America's ability to combine the spirit of freedom and the spirit of religion (Tocqueville 2000, 43). The other assertion is that this becomes possible through the development of mores (Tocqueville 2000, 53). In order to fully assess Tocqueville's argument, it is necessary to determine the manner and extent to which he correctly interpreted the political theory of the *Mayflower Compact* in arriving at his understanding of its legacy for American political thinking and practice.

Tocqueville places high importance on the mores within a society. Without the proper set of mores, democracy will not be successful. Mores are the means by which democracy is able to function. Tocqueville writes, "In America...sovereignty is not hidden...it is recognized by mores, proclaimed by the laws" (Tocqueville 2000, 53). For Tocqueville, American mores do more than simply serve as the foundation of American political life. Rather, they animate and promotes the ends of government without obstacle. That this is the case is evident in one of most important mores for Tocqueville; the sovereignty of the people which has its origin in townships (Tocqueville 2000, 54). This result of this more is acceptance of the idea of popular sovereignty where "The people reign over the American political world as God over the universe" (Tocqueville 2000, 55). Thus, to a certain extent Tocqueville's understanding of popular sovereignty can be seen as having its origins in the idea of a community of individuals deliberating together on the proper ends of government. What Tocqueville's account of popular sovereignty does not speak to, however, is the emphasis the political theory of the *Mayflower*

Compact places on the requirement that those gathered to deliberate the ends of the community be good Christians. Does Tocqueville understand Americans in these terms?

That Tocqueville acknowledges Plymouth as the birthplace of American mores suggests that he does view Americans in terms of being a Christian people. For Tocqueville, to understand the origin is to understand the people. He writes, “I do not doubt that we could discover in them the first cause of prejudices, habits, dominant passions, of all that finally composes what is called national character” (Tocqueville 2000, 28). Essentially one must understand the political thinking of Plymouth Colony to understand the American political thinking more generally and the political thinking of Plymouth Colony is rooted in Puritanism. On this, Tocqueville recognizes that Puritanism plays both a religious and political role in American society:

“Puritanism, as I said above, was almost as much a political theory as a religious doctrine” (Tocqueville 2000, 35). Thus, for Tocqueville, Puritan political thinking characterizes both what came to be known in the latter half of the 18th century as the private sphere of religion and the public sphere of politics. As shown here and elsewhere (see Barkalow 2004), starting in 1840s American political thinking and practice engages in the process of divorcing religion from politics. This suggests one of two possibilities. The first is that Tocqueville misinterprets the legacy of the Puritan political thinking in America while the second is that his understanding of this legacy is more nuanced than his original formulation of the relationship suggests.

America comes to accept the conclusion that religion’s place in American society is separate from the civil government. But Tocqueville understands religion as a driving force of democracy. It influences the people to make democracy possible, as it is the foundation of the American mores. Tocqueville’s emphasis on the relationship between religion and mores suggests that he accepts the separation of civil and religious authorities that started in the second

half of the 18th century. Tocqueville sees the public sphere as independent from religion, but relies on it just the same (Tocqueville 2000, 279, 283). Despite religion's relegation to the private sphere, it plays an essential role in a democracy. He writes, "Freedom sees in religion the companion of its struggle and its triumphs, the cradle of its infancy, the divine source of its rights. It considers religion as the safeguard of mores, and mores as the guarantee of laws and the pledge of its own duration" (Tocqueville 2000, 44). As this passage suggests, religion operates through the private domain of mores in shaping the beliefs and attitudes of Americans. It does so by limiting the imaginations of Americans. For Tocqueville, American law is seen as permitting everything while "religion prevents them from conceiving everything and forbids them to dare everything" (Tocqueville 2000, 279). Thus, religion prevents freedom from degenerating into license. For Tocqueville, the value of religion lies not in the realization of the religious ends of the community, but in religion's ability to make freedom safe. In other words, religion serve as a private means that secures the public end of freedom and successful democratic government. This is Tocqueville's understanding of how Americans are able to balance the spirit of freedom and the spirit of religion. When one thinks of Tocqueville's use of balance here, one immediately thinks that he gives religion and freedom equal weight. This is not the case. Instead, Tocqueville values religion for its ability to secure the secular ends of the political community. Throughout *Democracy in America*, Tocqueville's fundamental concern is with democracy and the institutions and values that will secure democracy. Like the argument and analysis presented here, Tocqueville's political thought moves away from the strong form of the continuity thesis. Whether or not his thought can be classified as falling into the category of the minimal continuity thesis is beyond the scope of this project, but what matters for the argument presented here is that when one looks in greater detail at the argument Tocqueville makes about religion in America

one recognizes its similarity to the understanding of the relationship between the religion and political in the late 18th century as presented in Chapter Three.

So, what is the legacy of the *Mayflower Compact* given the evidence presented here in support of the minimal form of the continuity thesis? Its importance lies in the fact that it shapes and informs our political memory. As Tocqueville states, “Peoples always feel [the effects of] their origin” and even to this day, Americans still feel the pull of the *Mayflower Compact* and its political, social, and religious principles (Tocqueville 2000, 28). The *Mayflower Compact* has taken the position of one of the poles in the continuous debate in American regarding the relationship between politics and religion. Thus, it continues to serve as an important symbol of how we think of ourselves as both a people and a nation.

A critic, however, may ask why the *Mayflower Compact* should continue to exert such a pull given, as argued here, that America considered and moved away from the principles of the *Mayflower Compact* before it became a nation. As the analysis of the late 18th century and Tocqueville demonstrate, religion is not jettisoned in American political thought. Rather, it is removed from the public sphere and placed in the private sphere. Maybe understanding why this came to be the case is a question in need of one’s attention more than the question of how one should understand the relationship between government and religion. The structure of the argument made here, with its focus on how the symbols of the *Mayflower Compact* change over time, serves as an example of what such an inquiry may look like. In considering this question, one must keep in mind that religion continues to play an important, albeit indirect, role in American politics. It is this fact that explains why the *Mayflower Compact* and its principles continue to fascinate the American mind and resonate for American politics almost four-hundred years after its adoption.

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