"A Species of Treason & Not the Least Dangerous Kind": The Treason Trials of Abraham Carlisle and John Roberts

On November 4, 1778, the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania hanged Philadelphia Quakers Abraham Carlisle and John Roberts for collaborating with the enemy during the British occupation of Philadelphia (November 1777–June 1778).1 The substantive charges against Carlisle consisted of holding a commission in the king's army and giving intelligence to the British. Roberts faced charges of acting as a guide for the British, encouraging others to enlist in the British cause, and conveying intelligence to the enemy.2 While at first glance the execution of two traitors during wartime may not appear especially noteworthy, the circumstances surrounding the cases of Carlisle and Roberts suggest otherwise. Of the approximately 130 people named under the “Act for the Attainder” who voluntarily surrendered to the authorities of the Commonwealth, only these

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1 Pennsylvania Packet, Nov. 5, 1778. Carlisle and Roberts were prosecuted under “An Act for the Attainder of Diverse Traitors,” which the Pennsylvania Assembly passed in late 1777 in an attempt to deter people from aiding the British occupation forces. According to the law, persons named in public proclamation had forty-five days to turn themselves over to a justice of the peace. After that time, if captured, the accused faced trial as traitors and, regardless of whether they had been apprehended, suffered the loss of all their property. Proclamations issued by the Supreme Executive Council on May 8, 1778, named both Carlisle and Roberts, who turned themselves over to the authorities soon after the patriots returned to Philadelphia.

two elderly Quakers suffered the maximum punishment permissible by law. The exceptional nature of the case was not lost on the people of the state. The Pennsylvania Packet, which had reported the capture of “the infamous Tory” John Roberts, printed a request that the judges’ notes on his case be published to satisfy popular curiosity. The weight of public interest moved government officials as well as newspaper publishers. When confronted with petitions signed by seven thousand citizens, the Supreme Executive Council announced that it would review the two men’s cases because they had become “highly interesting not only to the criminals but also to the public.”

Today what stands out about the cases of Carlisle and Roberts is the inability of contemporary scholarship to fully explain the diverse cross section of people who signed petitions seeking clemency for the two men. Historians, for the most part, have viewed revolutionary politics in Pennsylvania as a contest between the supporters of the state’s radically democratic constitution of 1776 and their conservative opponents, and have argued that membership in these groups was determined by a combination of religious and class-based factors. The supporters of the constitution have been described as either predominantly Scots-Irish Presbyterians or members of the laboring or artisanal classes, while their opponents have been portrayed as primarily Anglican or members of mercantile or professional classes. Members of both of these groups appear among those who argued

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3 Young, “Treason and Its Punishment,” 306. Of those proclaimed, 349 never surrendered; 91 surrendered on time and were discharged; 25 surrendered on time and were not discharged, including Roberts and Carlisle; 13 surrendered late but none were executed; 13 were captured, three of whom were executed, two without trial, one by court-martial. See Anne M. Ousterhout, A State Divided: Opposition in Pennsylvania to the American Revolution (New York, 1987), 319–23.


for clemency for Carlisle and Roberts. Prominent opponents of the state's constitution such as Benjamin Rush, Benjamin Wynkoop, Thomas Fitzsimons, and Daniel Clymer signed the petitions, as did seven members of the Committee of Privates, the ultra-radical voice of the working and lower sorts. So did fifty of the signers of a “Coffee House Declaration” demanding vigilance and retaliation against suspected Tories, and at least twenty men who had been held prisoner by the British. In other words, the split between the supporters and opponents of the execution did not reflect the political, ethnic and religious, or class-based divisions that historians have used to explain Pennsylvania politics and ideology during the American Revolution.

If the controversy over the decision to execute Carlisle and Roberts was not simply an extension of class or ethnic politics, what accounts for the tremendous public interest surrounding the fate of these two men? Historians have explained this unlikely convergence in favor of Carlisle and Roberts as an indication that George Bryan and Joseph Reed, the two men most responsible for enforcing the verdict of the court, had lost touch with the people of Pennsylvania. In the process, they have dismissed as misguided or disingenuous the claims made by these two men that the execution of the two Quakers was necessary for the safety of the state. This paper questions


the appropriateness of this assumption by examining the trial and execution of Carlisle and Roberts in the context of revolutionary ideology. When seen from this perspective, Reed and Bryan's decision to enforce the full letter of the law was the logical consequence of their understanding of the relationship between the individual and the state, while the arguments for clemency contained in the petitions reveal the existence of a competing vision of the same relationships.9

We can best understand the conflicting notions of republican citizenship expressed by the supporters and opponents of the execution by placing their arguments in the context of the millennial rhetoric of the Great Awakening and the resultant debates over individual and collective salvation.10 The rationally minded Old Light opponents of the Awakening were deeply skeptical of the ability of individuals to distinguish the genuine feeling of conversion from the giddy impulse of emotion, and insisted that only the application of reason to an individual's accumulated experiences and adherence to traditional church doctrine could lead to salvation. The evangelical supporters of the revivals, the New Lights, held no such inhibitions about the ability of the individual to recognize the Holy Spirit. They insisted that genuine conversion was possible, even if it came about suddenly and without proper preparation, and that encouraging these “New

9 Richard Ryerson, on the other hand, has taken an ideological approach to the trials, arguing that we should look at the actions of Reed, Bryan, and the Supreme Executive Council of Pennsylvania from the perspective of their republican ideology. These men acted, according to Ryerson, not simply as calculating or vengeful politicians but as “fearful patriots, defending a precious vision of a transforming society.” Ryerson, “Republican Theory,” 121. In this paper, I hope to build on Ryerson’s initial argument and discuss both how the radical ideology configured the ideal relationship between the citizen and the state and how this view of politics differed from those of other members of Pennsylvania society.

10 J. C. D. Clark, The Language of Liberty: Political Discourse and Social Dynamics in the Anglo-American World (New York, 1994), has recently argued that we should attempt to reinsert the republican ideology of the American Revolution into the sectarian context from which he argues it emerged. This paper is an attempt to do exactly that with regard to the lingering effects of the Great Awakening.
Birth" experiences was the primary task of the churches. As the people of Pennsylvania began to embrace republican principles, they faced a remarkably similar problem. They had to differentiate between those individuals who truly embraced the principles of the Revolution out of a firm commitment to the common good, and those who came to them suddenly and only out of a desire to promote their own interests. As Pennsylvanians sought to resolve this problem of republican politics, they embraced the rhetoric of the Great Awakening as it had been used to distinguish between the regenerate and unregenerate. Rational-minded republicans, haunted by the possibility that vice might be mistaken for virtue, insisted that only rigorous enforcement of the state's laws could ensure the survival of the republic—regardless of the emotion of the moment. Their evangelically inspired opponents, confident that the people could distinguish between virtue and vice, held open the possibility that even traitors could be reborn as loyal citizens and believed that examples of such transformations could convert other lost souls into full-fledged members of the republican community in Pennsylvania. It was this split between rational and evangelical versions of republican ideology that animated Pennsylvania politics during—and probably well beyond—the trials of Carlisle and Roberts.

The influence of the Great Awakening and religion in general on American revolutionary and republican ideology has received considerable attention from historians. Contemporary scholars, however, have not fully


13 The two best-known discussions of the relationship between the Great Awakening and the American Revolution are Heimert, Religion and the American Mind, and Nathan O. Hatch, The Sacred Cause of Liberty (New Haven, 1977). Works that discuss religion in general, including the Awakening, include Ruth Bloch, Visionary Republic: Millennial Themes in American Thought, 1756–1800 (New York, 1985); Patricia Bonomi, Under the Cope of Heaven (New York, 1986); Rhys Isaac, The Transformation of Virginia, 1740–1790 (Chapel Hill, 1982); Ernst Lee Tuveson, Redeemer Nation (Chicago, 1968); David
considered how the conflicting impulses of the Awakening in particular, and sectarian discourse in general, promoted different interpretations of republican ideology among the supporters of independence. Although recognizing that sectarian differences continued to divide Americans during the Revolution, historians have not adequately connected the controversies created by the Awakening to evolving republican ideologies.\textsuperscript{14} The division between New Lights and Old Lights has sometimes been viewed by scholars as the basis for the division between loyalists and patriots, but this approach has recently come under considerable criticism.\textsuperscript{15} Consequently, most historians have minimized the differences between the New and Old Lights in the formation of revolutionary ideology, and instead focused on the impulses that the Awakening created in the population as a whole.\textsuperscript{16} Ruth Bloch, among others, has argued that religious differences created ideological differences among Americans, but suggests that this happened in the 1790s as a result of differences over the French Revolution and the disillusionment of the Federalist clergy with popular politics.\textsuperscript{17} Thus while historians have provided considerable insight into the relationship between religion and ideology in the American Revolution, much work remains to be done to refine our understanding of how these ideological differences manifested themselves and to discover when and where they exerted their influence.\textsuperscript{18}

Revolutionary Pennsylvania, especially Philadelphia during the first years of the war, offers a fruitful starting place for this project. Religious beliefs and rhetoric appear to have colored how many Pennsylvanians understood the conflict with Great Britain. Owen Ireland has argued that the millennial

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\item With regard to Pennsylvania, see Ireland "Ethnic-Religious Dimension," and "Crux of Politics." With regard to this phenomenon in the American Revolution as a whole, see Clark, \textit{Language of Liberty}.
\item On the distinction between Old Lights and New Lights as Loyalists and Patriots, see Heimert, \textit{Religion and the American Mind}; Maxon, \textit{Great Awakening}, and Clark, \textit{Language of Liberty}. For a criticism of this division, see Bonomi, \textit{Under the Cope of Heaven}, 161.
\item Bonomi, \textit{Under the Cope of Heaven}, Bloch, \textit{Visionary Republic}.
\item Bloch, \textit{Visionary Republic}, 150–233.
\item Christopher Looby, \textit{Voicing America: Language, Literary Form, and the Origins of the United States} (Chicago, 1996), has argued that we should take a greater look at the contradictions within patriot ideology, although he emphasizes that it produced a dynamic tension that drove the Revolution forward. My argument, of course, is that the tensions created by differing interpretations of republican ideology created serious stumbling blocks for the patriots, which, as the controversy surrounding the execution of Carlisle and Roberts suggests, were not always easily overcome.
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impulse of Presbyterianism was one of the driving forces behind the radical party in the state. The millennial impulse extended beyond the Presbyterians to include a diverse array of religious groups. Anglicans, Baptists, and a few Quakers, according to William Kashatus, embraced the American Revolution as “a quest for world transformation” akin to the struggle their ancestors had waged in the English Civil War. In addition, Pennsylvania experienced a sustained and divisive religious awakening that divided all of the principal sects in the 1740s and 1750s and continued to divide important groups such as the Presbyterians on the eve of the Revolution. In fact, the lingering differences among the Presbyterians repeatedly undermined efforts to create a unified political party capable of challenging the Quaker party which had dominated Pennsylvania politics in the colonial era. The community in which the executions of Carlisle and Roberts occurred was one in which religion deeply influenced how people understood the political events that shaped their lives. It was also a community that recently had—and in one case was still—divided on sectarian questions. A critical examination of the impact that conflicting views of salvation and redemption had on republican ideology seems essential to a meaningful understanding of the executions and of radical politics in revolutionary Pennsylvania.

In the early phases of resistance to the British government, Pennsylvanians—especially those who would become members of the radical party—rushed to embrace the opportunity that the Revolution offered “to begin the world over again,” to use Thomas Paine’s words. To allow the people to take full advantage of this opportunity, the radicals who drafted the new state’s constitution set about to ensure that political power remained with the people and not with the corrupt few who had previously governed Pennsylvania. They accomplished this in part by extending the franchise to all taxpaying male citizens and by devising a government that consisted of an

21 For a discussion of the Great Awakening in Pennsylvania, see Maxon, Great Awakening. For a discussion of its lingering effects on Presbyterians, see Foster, Pursuit of Equal Liberty, 14–26.
22 Foster, Pursuit of Equal Liberty, 56.
annually elected unicameral legislature and a weak executive branch. To prevent the people from being deceived by designing men who used "smooth manners and apparent logic" as "a shield for convenient interpretations and other ruses to keep the people out of power," those who sought public office were required to swear by an oath of allegiance not to alter or amend the constitution. In order to further distinguish between virtuous citizens and those who sought to subvert the common good, the radicals passed a series of test acts, starting in the winter of 1777, requiring all white male inhabitants over the age of eighteen to renounce their allegiance to Great Britain, to do nothing prejudicial to the freedom and independence of Pennsylvania, and to report any and all treasonous acts they discovered. Anyone who refused to swear the oath lost his right to serve on juries, sue for debts, buy, sell, or transfer land, vote or hold office, and own firearms. The radicals not only sought to begin the political world of Pennsylvania anew, but also to create a way for people to identify and distinguish between the genuine friends of the Revolution and those who did not fully embrace its principles.

The radicals were under no illusions concerning the consequences of their insistence that people subscribe to the conditions of the test acts as a prerequisite for participation in the economic and political life of the state. They publicly acknowledged that those who did not take the oath of allegiance would suffer drastic consequences for their recalcitrance, and they insisted that while this was lamentable it was also necessary and just. In an article entitled "Seasonable Thoughts" the author, writing under the pseudonym "Camillus," observed that "I feel as a man for the many families in Pennsylvania whom strict and necessary justice in punishing idleness, neutrality and disaffection in the present controversy will render miserable, and therefore before the time for repentance and reformation is over, I beg leave to call upon the Tories of all classes and characters to come in and claim the protection of the United States." The radicals held out an open hand to those who willingly embraced American independence, but offered only a future of misery to those who did not repent their errors and reform


26 *Pennsylvania Packet*, May 13, 1777.
their political opinions according to the standards of the test acts. The rulers of the state could not and would not, "Camillus" insisted, be swayed from their duty by the prospect of suffering by those who refused to comply with the laws. The radicals used the act to create a stark division between those who embraced the possibilities of revolution and were worthy of membership in the republican community, and the corrupt and misguided souls who deserved whatever unpleasant fate awaited them.

The insistence on unwavering loyalty to the state's constitution and enforcement of the test acts implies the ascendency of a rationally inspired vision of republican citizenship, one driven by the fear that the people would be deceived by interested and designing men, and the consequent need to establish stringent requirements for membership in the political community. The unwavering attitude adopted by the radicals, however, more accurately reflected the difficult straits that supporters of the constitution found themselves in as a result of domestic opposition and external invasion—not ideological unity. Convinced that the newly formed constitution was seriously flawed, moderate and conservative supporters of independence demanded in the fall of 1776 that the government call a new convention to revise the document. When the newly elected legislature did not respond to their pleas, moderates and conservatives began a boycott of the state government that would last until the fall of 1778. They hoped that by refusing to hold elective office or to accept appointments as judges they could render the government inoperable and force the radicals to call a new convention and revise the constitution. At the same time the opponents of the constitution were organizing their boycott, the British, moving south through New Jersey, appeared to be poised to invade the state. The threat of external invasion and internal subversion convinced the radicals that they had no choice but to embrace a starkly dichotomous view of politics in which all those who did not support their government were immediately suspect.

When viewed in this context the stringent requirements of the test acts appear to be extreme but necessary measures to preserve the Revolution and the republic it had created.

The concerns of the radicals, and their need to act as a unified party, intensified in the fall of 1777 when Sir William Howe led the British army


into Pennsylvania and succeeded in capturing Philadelphia. From the perspective of the loyal supporters of the constitution, and of many advocates of independence in general, the people did not respond well to this development. The radicals not only observed a resurgence of support for the Crown among the disaffected; they also observed that many of their erstwhile patriot allies remained in the city during the occupation, continuing to live and do business under British military rule. The radicals began to question the patriotism of their fellow citizens, and fearing that the Revolution was in danger of being subverted, they became even more convinced that frank attestations of loyalty in the form of test oaths were necessary.

The radicals interpreted the resurgence of both real and perceived disaffection as an indication that the bulk of the people had lost their sense of civic-mindedness, self-sacrifice, and dedication to the polity upon which the success of the Revolution depended. As a result, they increased their efforts to disenfranchise those who refused to swear loyalty to the state and to remind others of their duty to uphold the common good. In April 1778, the assembly modified the original 1777 test act to increase the penalties imposed on those who refused to sign the oath of allegiance. Radicals justified this decision by referring to what they perceived to be the self-interested motives of those who sought relief from the penalties imposed by these laws. The Pennsylvania General Assembly, for example, rejected a petition from the state's Moravian residents asking to be relieved from the obligations of the test acts because similar claims to neutrality had been used by Tories to undermine the Revolution. The committee responsible for reviewing the petition justified their decision by pointing out that: "[M]any persons amongst us, preferring a slavish dependence on the British King, from prejudice, expectation from lucrative offices, or the most unworthy motives, and screening themselves from the notice of Government, by a professed neutrality, have, nevertheless, as soon as opportunity offered declared themselves in favour of our Enemies, and became active against the

31 The new act required any person employed in medicine, law, or teaching to take the oath or pay a £500 fine. Nonjurors also had to pay double taxes and faced up to three months in jail if, when summoned by a justice of the peace, they refused to take the oath. If they still refused to sign the pledge the court also had the power to confiscate their property in order to pay any back taxes and fines. Ousterhout, State Divided, 191.
Liberties of America." Rather than simply withdrawing from the conflict, professed neutrals had screened "themselves from the notice of government" so that they could reap the private rewards and "lucrative offices" offered by the British. In the face of such displays of disloyalty to the state, the radicals felt, perhaps justifiably, that they needed to take stronger action to exclude these people from membership in the polity if the Revolution was to succeed.

The radicals singled out the Society of Friends as an example of an interested minority that used claims of neutrality to subvert the common good. The actions of the Quakers during the British invasion of Pennsylvania, they argued, had proved that the Friends' claim of neutrality was a smokescreen for Tory sympathies. One radical, calling himself "Belisarius," offered as proof of the Friends' disaffection the "Journals of British officers, extolling their alacrity as spies, guides and informers; [and] authenticated proofs of our own officers and men misdirected, and otherwise betrayed into the enemies hands."

Similarly, radicals claimed that the Quakers objected to the test acts not on religious grounds, as they professed, but because the acts effectively disenfranchised them and removed them from power. An anonymous author pointed out that the Friends "seem to forget the test act passed by the Assembly of Pennsylvania in the year 1723," a law he alleged to have been passed by the Quaker party to prevent their opponents from voting or holding office. From the radicals' perspective, the only possible explanation for the Quakers' actions in this regard was that their claims of neutrality and their protests over religious discrimination were attempts to subvert the Revolution. After all, Belisarius argued, there were "thousands of men of the most liberal, patriotic sentiments, descendants of..."
Quakers who reject and disclaim your pretended representation of them, and wholly disapprove of your conduct throughout the present controversy.\textsuperscript{35}

The radicals' attempts to secure the future of their republic involved not only identifying the openly disaffected or disloyal, but also ensuring that otherwise loyal supporters of the state had not lost track of their obligations to the common good. When the reestablishment of patriot control over the state did not result in the speedy identification and prosecution of those suspected of collaboration, the radicals cast about for an explanation. They eventually came to the conclusion that known Tories were escaping prosecution because the people were not paying sufficient attention to their civic duty to preserve the republic from its enemies. A "Coffee-House Declaration" published on July 25, 1778, stated that since the British had evacuated the capital, people "notoriously disaffected to the American cause" had "manifested an unbecoming and insolent spirit, and more especially have endeavored to suppress all evidence and discovery of the oppressions of the friends of America." As a result, the loyal supporters of the Revolution who signed the document declared their commitment to making "a proper discrimination between the friends and enemies of America and to remove every improper bias from the minds of our fellow citizens, who from a misapprehension of the duty they owe their country, and inattention to their oath of allegiance, have been so far misled to suppose their appearing as witnesses against such offenders ... dishonourable."\textsuperscript{36} The closing passage of the declaration reflects the radicals' belief that their republic was in danger. Not only had numerous Tories managed to reap benefits from their

\textsuperscript{35} Pennsylvania Packet, Aug. 15, 1778. The radicals had considerable circumstantial evidence to support this claim. As Richard Bauman points out, some members of the Society of Friends had actively supported the measures of resistance toward the king and Parliament prior to the outbreak of hostilities. In particular, Thomas Mifflin, Clement and Owen Biddle, and Timothy Matlack, he argues, "were visible, active, and widely known Quakers." In fact, he argues, the suspicions of the patriots were not completely unfounded. According to Bauman, "the public denunciation of the Revolutionary movement by the Society was actually the expression of a relatively small group of Quaker politiques, and was imposed on the Society through the force of their influence." As further evidence of the inconsistency of the society's actions, the Whigs also pointed out that while the Quakers officially professed neutrality they expelled those Friends who helped the Americans and took no such actions against those who aided the British. Richard Bauman, For the Reputation of Truth: Politics, Religion, and Conflict Among the Pennsylvania Quakers 1750–1800 (Baltimore, 1971), 146, 152, 157; Ryerson, Revolution is Now Begun, 154. For a general discussion of the role Quakers played in the early phases of the resistance to Great Britain, see Bauman, Reputation of Truth, 128–34; Ryerson, Revolution is Now Begun, 43, 45, 52, 64, 74.

\textsuperscript{36} "Coffee-House Declaration," Pennsylvania Packet, July 25, 1778.
aid to the British, their crimes had gone unpunished, primarily as a result of the failure of the people of the state to understand their responsibilities as citizens. Thus the republic was threatened not only by Tory efforts to overthrow it, but also by the people's reluctance to identify and punish those who had sought to subvert the Revolution.

The start of the election campaign in the fall of 1778 and the resurgence of opposition to the radicals and their constitution from within the patriot ranks only compounded radical fears that the republic was in jeopardy. For the first time since the winter of 1777, conservatives and moderates offered themselves as candidates for statewide office. Their willingness to return to government, however, did not signify a slackening of their opposition to the constitution of 1776. Contributors to the *Pennsylvania Evening Post* and *Pennsylvania Packet* used the radicals' continued demands for enforcement of the test acts as an illustration of the constitution's failure to "establish and secure the liberties of America." They also pointed to the disastrous military events of 1777-78 as proof that the radicals had proven themselves incapable of managing the war effort, and proposed casting out the radicals and their frame of government as the only solution to these problems. Furthermore, the moderate and conservative opponents of the constitution approached the task with considerable vigor, in the profound belief that they could oust the radicals from power. These sentiments appeared clearly in a letter penned by Jasper Yeates, a prominent opponent of the constitution, in which he portrayed the upcoming elections as an opportunity to capture control of the state:

Matters have come at length to that pass that it becomes every good man to turn out, and endeavour to procure proper representation for the county he lives in. The many violations of the Constitution by the late Assembly have given the people at large the most general uneasiness and disgust, and strike the most ignorant with the propriety of an exertion at the ensuing election . . . Every moment's delay is attended with danger. In the city of Philadelphia and other counties, every nerve will be strained to effect a change of men and measures.

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The start of the election campaign brought with it not only renewed assaults on the government and the constitution, but also an emboldened opposition that saw itself poised to oust the radicals from power.

The radicals responded to the community's reluctance to identify and punish those who had aided the British and to the increasingly aggressive stance taken by their political opponents with a concerted effort to enforce the test acts in the summer of 1778. Quakers again figured prominently in the radicals' illustration of how failure to enforce these laws would open the door for the sort of subterfuge described in the *Packet*. On October 6, another unnamed contributor to the *Pennsylvania Packet* contended that those who had not agreed to the oath "are chiefly of the sect called the Quakers" and that "these are the men you would have us intrust with carrying on the war with Great Britain." Anything but a rigorous enforcement of the state's election laws, argued radical authors, would hand power to the people most likely to oppose the Revolution and the changes it had brought to Pennsylvania society. From the radicals' perspective, the safety of the republic hinged on ensuring that only those who had demonstrated their unwavering support for the constitution should enjoy the benefits of membership in the community.

The outcome of the elections of 1778, however, suggests that not all Pennsylvanians subscribed to the opinion that the survival of the Revolution depended on the vigorous enforcement and prosecution of its laws against the disaffected. In a campaign that focused largely on the desirability of rigorous enforcement of the test acts the radicals suffered a stinging rebuke at the polls. Though the conservatives did not manage to unseat their radical opponents, as Yeates had believed they would, they did make substantial gains in the assembly. The election of prominent anticonstitutionalists such as George Clymer and Robert Morris, in the words of David Brunhouse, "constituted a significant invasion of the overwhelming Radical power." From the perspective of those who saw the test acts as an absolute necessity for the survival of the republic, the results could only enhance their fears that the Revolution was in danger of being subverted from within. The conservatives in the assembly did nothing to dispel such notions when they

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41 *Pennsylvania Packet*, Oct. 6, 1778.
immediately challenged the election results in Chester County and demanded a plebiscite on the future of the constitution.\textsuperscript{43} It was in this polarized environment—with the radicals under attack from moderates and conservatives, and the radicals decrying the large number of the disaffected who enjoyed the benefits of citizenship without having had to endure the hardships of war—that Carlisle and Roberts came to trial. Not surprisingly, their cases quickly became entangled in the increasingly acrimonious debate over the state's constitution, the rigorous enforcement of the test acts, the treatment of the disaffected, and, by extension, the preservation of the Revolution in Pennsylvania.

While the radicals generally shared a belief that disaffection from the Revolution represented a serious threat and required resolute action to prevent it, they disagreed on how best to proceed. To the rationally minded patriots, the solution to the problem of disaffection lay in a rigorous and unwavering execution of the test acts and the state's laws against treason. Joseph Reed, the prosecutor in the Carlisle and Roberts cases and later president of Pennsylvania's Supreme Executive Council, was originally a political moderate who had reservations about the state's constitution. The actions of the anticonstitutionalist party and the resurgence of the disaffected following the evacuation of Philadelphia, however, convinced him that "the patriot cause in Pennsylvania was in danger of collapse" and he became an adamant supporter of the radical position.\textsuperscript{44} As a result, when Reed began the prosecution of suspected Tories, he did so not simply to see that the laws were enforced, but because he believed that they must be enforced if the republic were to survive the dangers posed by its internal and external enemies.

Other Pennsylvanians echoed Reed's concerns that the resurgence of disaffection and the opposition from conservative patriots represented a significant threat to their government and the Revolution.\textsuperscript{45} As before, they stressed that the danger to the state came not only from an open attack by the British or their Tory allies, but also from the inability of the citizens of the state to accurately judge who were their friends and who were their enemies. The Pennsylvania General Assembly, for example, received petitions from both Lancaster and Chester Counties complaining that many


\textsuperscript{44} Roche, \textit{Joseph Reed}, 144.

\textsuperscript{45} Ryerson, "Republican Theory," 124.
who had not openly supported the Revolution had been allowed to occupy positions of political and economic power. An author, writing in the Packet on September 15, 1778, echoed similar fears that a lack of vigilance on the part of voters would allow the British to accomplish by subversion what they had failed to achieve through force of arms: “The present time calls for particular vigilance; our country is invaded by open enemies; traitors among ourselves are secretly sapping the foundations of our liberties; and England in despair is sending the artful men to endeavour to destroy, by fraud, the beauteous fabric of our independence, which her force has been unable to overthrow.” According to this logic, the most significant threat to the survival of the Revolution came from people who either pretended to support independence or who affected neutrality. The surest way to prevent traitors from “secretly sapping the foundation of our liberties,” the radicals argued, lay in the vigorous enforcement of the laws demanding loyalty to the state as a precondition to participation in the polity.

Rationally minded radicals viewed the sudden rise of the conservatives’ political fortunes and the failure to identify and punish those who had supported the British during the occupation of Philadelphia as an indication that the people could no longer distinguish between a genuine attachment to the common good and a facade inspired only by immediate self-interest. As a result, the enemies of the state were beginning to subvert the laws and government upon which the success of the Revolution depended. Reed, in a letter to the Supreme Executive Council, expressed his concerns in exactly these terms, noting that the actions of “the Tories & designing Whigs” revealed that they were “evidently aiming at” throwing the state into “Anarchy & Confusion.” Other like-minded radicals explained the conservative party’s electoral success as an indication of the degree to which the disaffected had infiltrated Pennsylvania’s government. A petition from York County complained that “the first District of which York Town is a part” ignored the act requiring proof that voters had taken the test within the specified time frame before allowing them to vote. Consequently, “the


47 Pennsylvania Packet, Sept. 15, 1778; see also Sept. 26, and Oct. 10, 1778.

persons of that District have had it in their power to Elect Officers for the whole County. Though we believe that when the face of Publick Affairs wore the most Dangerous and Gloomy Affect no District in the County afforded fewer men for the Common Defense than they." Failure to respond to this threat, the petitioners argued, would "be Setting up a Dangerous precedent Encouraging the Trampling upon Authority & bringing Civil Government which is so Essential to our Safety and happiness into Contempt." If the state were to survive, another petition insisted, the people needed to accept that "in this Great Struggle, he who is not with us is against us," and act accordingly.

In this increasingly tense atmosphere the debate over the treason law and its enforcement became an indication of just how far the people had strayed from the path of republican virtue. The radical author "Z" attacked his conservative counterpart "Hamden" for advocating the abandonment of the most recent test act. Soon, "Z" argued, "we shall . . . hear a violent outcry raised against them [the government] for taking away the lives of those Tories, who have joined the enemy and led them through the country to ravage and murder the unarmed citizens." A similar argument came from "An Elector of Philadelphia," who wrote that the anticonstitutionalist party would allow Tories to "imagine the laws passed against their traitorous practices are disapproved of by the freemen of this state."

As the trials of Carlisle and Roberts approached, some members of the radical party were becoming more concerned with the ability of their opponents to seduce the people into believing that toleration for dissent was consistent with the best interests of the state. As in the past, they responded to this threat by demanding that both the government and the people reinforce the distinctions between the friends and enemies of the Revolution. In this context, the petitions requesting clemency for the only two individuals convicted of treason in the aftermath of the British occupation would have reinforced the fears of Reed and other radicals that the Revolution was being subverted from within.

49 "Petition of the People of York County to the Supreme Executive Council," Oct. 26, 1778, JRP-NYHS.
50 Ibid.
51 It is interesting to note that the only two "traitors" facing death at the time this article was written were Roberts and Carlisle. Additionally, Roberts was accused of acting as a guide for the British. Pennsylvania Packet, Oct. 3, 20, 1778.
The concerns voiced by Reed, the petitioners from York County, and "Z" over the need to enforce the laws of the state in general and the treason laws in particular reached a crescendo in the debate over the executions of Carlisle and Roberts. In a letter to the Supreme Executive Council on the matter, Reed pointed out that, if, upon referral, the legislature granted clemency "the Voice of the People will certainly justify Council in any Act of Mercy," but added the caveat, "provided their own Conscious [sic] & Judgement are satisfied that it is the Voice of the People, & that such a Measure tends to the Happiness of the State, for otherwise neither Clamour, Fear of Offense, or Hope of Favour ought to influence the judgement of the Patriotick Senator." In this case, Reed's advice mirrored the warnings that other radical writers had directed to the population as a whole: the council needed to ensure that its decision reflected the interests of the state and not their private concerns as individuals. Obeying "the voice of the people," of course, did not mean adhering to the wishes of the majority of the population, but to those of the public-minded citizens who had not succumbed to the seductive rhetoric of the conservatives. The question facing the council was not, according to Reed, whether there was a popular outcry in favor of the two men, but rather who was behind the movement and stood to gain from its success.

In the same letter, Reed proceeded to offer his own explanations for the outpouring of support for the two men and its relationship to the voice of the people and the happiness of the state. According to the prosecutor, the reluctance of the people to accept the necessity of the death sentence for the two Quakers arose from a seemingly innocuous source, sympathy with the condemned, that in actuality had devastating consequences for the health of the republic:

We have had but one Trial yet & the Party acquitted very much to the Dissatisfaction of the Whigs who think him very culpable & a very dangerous Fellow. The Court begin to think their Charges give too much Countenance to Acquittals, I have thought so from the beginning tho it is an error on the favourable side—but we all appear to have forgot that popular Humanity (tho not ment. in our Treason Laws) is a species of Treason & not the least dangerous Kind.53

53 Joseph Reed to Supreme Executive Council Oct. 23, 1778, JRP-NYHS.
Deceived by their emotions, judges and juries found themselves moved by a spirit of "popular Humanity" that inclined them, contrary to reason, to refrain from exercising the full power of the law of treason. This reluctance, Reed insisted, was in itself a species of treason, and tended to subvert the good order of the state. In the above case such thinking had resulted in the release of an individual who the people—that is, the radicals—saw as a "culpable and dangerous fellow," and had thereby rendered a verdict that did not promote the happiness of the state. The trial to which Reed referred did not represent the only example of the influence of "popular Humanity" on the juries of the state. In Philadelphia alone the courts acquitted no fewer than eleven suspected Tories during the six weeks surrounding the trials of Carlisle and Roberts. Reed reasoned that if the council were truly interested in ensuring that the "voice of the People" was obeyed, and in promoting the "happiness of the State," they must set about "performing some of the arduous duties of Magistrates," and ensure that the penalty called for by the law was enforced.

In a letter to General Nathaniel Greene written the day after the execution, Reed stated even more forcefully his view that an undue emphasis on emotion and sentiment was leading people to mistake the two Quakers' vices for virtues. Failure to recognize this fact, which he believed reason plainly demonstrated, threatened to undermine the Revolution. Reed insisted that he could "plainly see that there is a settled fixed System to subvert the Whig Interest" in Pennsylvania. The conspiracy appeared in the "unhumbled" behavior of the Tories and the emergence of an attitude in which "Treason, Disaffection to the Interests of America & even assistance to the British Interest is called only Error of Judgment, which Candour & Liberality of Sentiment will overlook." Reed described the men as "two of the most notorious" of "the great Number of Pilots, Guides, Kidnappers, & other Assistants of the British Army." Failure to execute two such notorious criminals, he argued, would forever cripple attempts to enforce the laws of

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54 Charles Page Smith, in James Wilson, Founding Father, notes that Wilson secured the acquittal of Joshua Molder, John Taylor, and Joseph Malin in that time frame. In addition to these individuals, the Pennsylvania Evening Post noted that the courts also refused to convict George Cook, Peter Deshong, Jacob Meng, Thomas Yarely, John Thomlinson, Richard Tomlinson, John Poor, and William Davit. The only other individual found guilty of treason during this period was John Ellwood, who eventually had his conviction reversed on the grounds of mental infirmity. Smith, 121; Pennsylvania Evening Post, Oct. 9, Nov. 6, 1778; Pennsylvania Packet, Dec. 31, 1778.

the state: "none could be more guilty, but these being rich & powerful (both Quakers) we could not for shame have made an example of a poor rogue after forgiving the rich." The whole case was an illustration of the efforts of the enemies of the Revolution to subvert it by undermining the doctrinal or legal foundations upon which it depended. Reed concluded that the only solution to this problem lay in a regular enforcement of the treason law against all those whose loyalty could not withstand the strict scrutiny of the courts, and the suppression of the deceitful sentiments of popular humanity.

"Rectifier," a contributor to the *Pennsylvania Packet*, adopted a less forceful tone than Reed had done in his private correspondence, but nonetheless drove home the same essential point: that the survival of the republic depended on the vigorous enforcement of the treason law to prevent the inevitable decline in popular virtue. This author argued that pardoning Carlisle and Roberts was wrong because such an act would render "all laws uncertain" and dangerously "relax the springs of government." In addition, he informed his readers, the petitioners' "application to Council" was "not proper or constitutional." After explaining why the council could not grant the request of the petitioners, even if it wanted to, "Rectifier" observed that the "authors of the Constitution must have considered murder and treason as crimes of the deepest dye, and therefore they were resolved to place a check on council in pardoning these instances of violence." In states "of the democratic kind," he insisted, "an exact execution of the laws is the highest exercise of mercy; and that virtue and firmness in witness, jurors, judges, and the executive authority, will in the issue lessen these irksome occasions of cutting off members of the state." Furthermore, he argued, making an exception in the cases of Carlisle and Roberts would establish a precedent such that "immediate punishment, so necessary to keep the offence and suffering in view together, in order to deter others will be generally impracticable." According to "Rectifier," if the treason law was not vigorously enforced public virtue would inevitably decline to the point that the state itself would collapse. Consequently, executing Carlisle and Roberts was not only legal, it was necessary if the government sought to preserve itself and the Revolution.

The persistence of virulent anti-Toryism among some supporters of the constitution—and the resultant attacks on the persons and property of suspected British sympathizers—indicates that many of Reed’s political allies shared his views. In his notes in John Fanning Watson’s *Annals of Philadelphia in the Olden Days*, Jacob Mordecai, who lived in Philadelphia at the time, recalled that prominent republican James Wilson’s role as Carlisle and Roberts’s defense attorney led to the militia attack on Wilson’s house the following year. Thus it appears that while not all radicals shared Reed’s feelings, Reed was not alone in interpreting the state’s failure to convict suspected Tories as a sign of a flagging spirit among the people. Taken to its logical conclusion, this belief would have meant that the happiness of the state required the execution of Carlisle and Roberts; failure to carry out the sentence would have been playing into the hands of those who sought to subvert the Revolution.

Steven Rosswurm, among others, has suggested that Joseph Reed and George Bryan should have been appeased by the large number of radicals who signed the petitions calling for mercy, and realized that the state faced no danger from Carlisle and Roberts. Such an interpretation, however, fails to take into account the variant of republican ideology that framed how both men, and other members of the radical party, viewed politics in revolutionary Pennsylvania. As the article by “Rectifier,” the petitions from York county, and the actions of the mob against James Wilson had made clear, many supporters of the constitution felt that the survival of the republic hinged on enforcing its laws in all cases whatsoever. Consequently, the failure to enforce the state’s treason laws, even on humanitarian grounds, represented, in Reed’s words, “a species of treason, & not the least dangerous kind.” Reed’s concern becomes even more understandable in the context of the radicals’ belief that the greatest threat to the republic was the possibility that the people would be seduced away from the path of republican virtue by


those who affected to differ from them only in small matters. The willingness of their fellow radicals to make an exception in this case signaled that they had been deceived by their own sympathies and interests and that gradual subversion of public spiritedness had already begun. This conviction would have been reinforced because the guilty parties were Quakers, who as a group, according to radical polemicists, had repeatedly demonstrated their willingness to sacrifice the public good to promote their private interests. From the perspective of Reed and Bryan, the upsurge of support for the two Friends among their own political allies would have indicated that the people no longer possessed the virtue necessary to preserve their government from decay. It therefore fell to the council to take on the responsibility of upholding the common good through a vigorous enforcement of the state's laws.

Those who signed the petitions challenged the assumption of Reed, Bryan, and their supporters that the safety of the state required the vigorous enforcement of its treason laws. They argued that the departure of the British from the state had changed the nature of the struggle to create a viable republic and made the execution of Carlisle and Roberts unnecessary. While it would be tempting to explain the sudden emergence of these ideological differences as being the result of the split between radical and conservative patriots that had characterized revolutionary politics in Pennsylvania since 1776, the number of people sympathetic to the radical position who signed the petitions suggests otherwise.

For the opponents of the execution the central issue facing the Supreme Executive Council was not the need to guard against the inevitable future decline of the people, but the desirability of facilitating and encouraging the rebirth of the disaffected as patriots. As one petition explained, the council should pardon Carlisle and Roberts because they "at least ceased to commit farther injuries against their Country, and evidenc'd their Repentance by voluntarily throwing themselves upon it's [sic] Mercy are to be distinguished from those who remain obstinate in their Crimes and still remain perpetuating Treasons against these States." By emphasizing the two men's repentance the petitioners hoped to remind the council that individuals, despite their past errors, could, under the right circumstances, be redeemed. Consequently, the state had an interest in treating them in a manner that

recognized the individual transformation they had undergone. Some petitions took the argument even further, pointing out that if the council accepted the legitimacy of the political and social awakening experienced by the two Quakers, then others might follow their example. "A Memorial in Favour of Abraham Carlisle," signed by three members of the radical Committee of Privates and twenty-two signers of the "Coffee House Declaration" contended that Carlisle, if pardoned, would, "by a course of Behavior contrary to that which he has lately observed, furnish the humane with an example to be pointed to on future Occasions, that a Pardon sometimes conduces more than Punishment, to the interest of the Public as well as to that of the Individual." 62 A similar petition sent in favor of John Roberts argued that he had "by a solemn Act, previous to his imprisonment, voluntarily renounced his former Connections & Attachments, and declared himself a subject of hope, and believe if the opportunity is afforded him, that he will hereafter exert his many good Qualities in favor of the cause he has now adopted, and will become a useful Member of the Community." 63

The possibility of redemption, rather than the inevitability of corruption, that characterized the petitions led their authors to focus on the qualities of the individuals involved instead of relying on the laws to determine virtue. In the process, the petitioner emphasized that membership in the polity hinged not on laws or doctrines but on a demonstrated willingness to support the common good typical of the New Light evangelical style. 64 The petitions carefully pointed out that Carlisle and Roberts shared their countrymen's interest in most regards, and that their support for the British arose not from any deep-seated commitment to their cause but from individual weaknesses that could be forgiven, if not overlooked. A "Memorial in Favor of Abraham Carlisle," signed by twenty-two subscribers to the "Coffee-House Declaration" and three members of the Committee of Privates, informed the Council:

64 Charles Maxon has argued that one of the defining characteristics of evangelical religion in the Middle Colonies was the New Lights' substitution of an "inner experience" as the test for membership among the elect rather than adherence to established doctrine. The "inner experience" manifested itself by a "new passion for the service of God through the service of man." Maxon, Great Awakening, 141.
Your petitioners have reason to believe that his Acceptance of an Appointment under the Enemy, to watch one of the City Gates, was the Effect rather of an undue Attachment to his own Safety and Interest, perhaps of an Opinion that he would thereby be of Service to his Fellow Citizens, than of a malicious and deliberate Intention to aid and assist the Enemies of the United States, in their pernicious system of Oppression, Tyranny & Barbarity. If he did hurt to some, he did good to a much greater Number, and of this greater Number many of Your Petitioners compose a part.\footnote{"Memorial in Favor of Abraham Carlisle," \textit{Pa. Arch.}, ser. 1, 4:55.}

Petitions signed by a similarly diverse cross section of the political spectrum in support of John Roberts echoed these sentiments. They reminded the council that Roberts acted only out of “Prejudice & Attachment to the late government” and not from a “Malevolence and a wicked disposition.” Other petitions sent by former prisoners of war recounted how the elderly Quaker had interceded on their behalf, securing their release from jail and returning stolen and plundered property.\footnote{\textit{Pa. Arch.}, ser. 1, 4:28; "Memorial of the Beneficiaries of John Roberts, \textit{Pa. Arch.}, ser. 1, 4:36–37; "Petition of William Young &c. In Favor of John Roberts," \textit{Pa. Arch.}, ser. 1, 4:38–39; "The Petition of John George &c.," \textit{Pa Arch.}, ser. 1, 4:40–41.} The emphasis in these petitions was not on the legality of the actions of the accused men, something no plea for mercy disputed, but on the idea that the men’s characters should be taken into consideration without regard for their position on the Revolution. By this standard, Carlisle and Roberts deserved mercy because they had attempted to promote the common good even while serving under the enemy, and had sworn their loyalty to the state of Pennsylvania despite having differed with their fellow citizens on the question of independence.

The petitions argued that focusing on the possibility of individual rebirth and defining citizenship in terms of the common good writ large would provide the foundations for a stronger republic than would a policy of strict adherence to the laws. The authors of a set of “Memorials in Favor of John Roberts and Ab’m Carlisle” contended that “the Power and Vigour of Government is as much evinced by the Act of exercising Mercy as by directing Punishment; and the former has the advantage of convincing the World that the Conduct of these States has not proceeded from Resentment, but from the purest Principles of Liberty and Lenity.”\footnote{"Memorials in Favor of John Roberts and Abraham Carlisle," \textit{Pa. Arch.}, ser. 1, 4:7, 21-22.}

Another petition began by admitting that “in every civilized state the public
safety requires the punishment of Treasons and treasonable practices," but went on to say that the case of Abraham Carlisle was one "in which the Executive Power may exercise mercy without endangering the State":

When we recollected his former character & credit, and contrast them with his present deplorable condition, and the miseries that hang over an innocent family, we feel emotions of compassion which we wish to communicate to those whose influence can alleviate or avert the Evil; And when we remember that "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy," and that this is the voice of Heaven, whose mercies towards this Country have been so eminent and conspicuous, we wish to merit the continuation thereof, by exercising moderation & forgiveness one towards another.68

According to this petition, the justification for the rigorous enforcement of the treason law arose not out of a timeless need to enforce loyalty to the state and ensure compliance with its laws but out of the immediate circumstances in which the people found themselves. In this case, the public's interest in promoting forgiveness and moderation outweighed its concerns over the strict enforcement of its laws and obedience to its constitution. Consequently, the security of the republic and the success of the Revolution—whether measured in terms of international support or a millennial desire to cultivate the favor of the divine—would be most effectively promoted by granting a reprieve to the two convicted Quakers.

We cannot entirely dismiss the possibility that some of the controversy surrounding the trial and execution of Carlisle and Roberts arose from the desire of the political opponents of Reed, Bryan, and the radical party to embarrass those sitting in the state government. The conservative Jasper Yeates, for example, informed one correspondent that "all good Men" supported an "Act of oblivion" for Carlisle and Roberts, and implied that by refusing to issue such an act the radicals would again demonstrate their inability to rule wisely or well.69 On the other hand, conservative polemicists attacked the most recent test oath and castigated the assembly for granting a raise to those who served the government and for abusing its power, yet made no mention of the plight of the two Quakers.70 At least in part, the

hesitance of the opposition to embrace the cause of Carlisle and Roberts may have reflected a commonsense approach to the problem. After all, it is unlikely that the Supreme Executive Council would have postponed the execution if the most vocal advocates of delay had been their political opponents. At the same time, however, the conservatives’ reaction to the constitution of 1776 and their subsequent electoral rhetoric shows that many in this party understood the relationship between the law and the state in terms identical to those expressed by the radical supporters of execution.

At the root of the disagreement between the radicals and the conservatives lay the latter’s rejection of the constitution of 1776, a document they perceived as detrimental to the liberties and freedoms of the people of Pennsylvania. Their decision to boycott state politics in 1777 and 1778 in the hopes of forcing their opponents to call a new convention arose in large part from their belief that lack of an upper house or strong executive would leave the state vulnerable to human weaknesses and frailties. This assumption about human nature and politics represented one of the cornerstones of the conservatives’ attack on the radicals in the election campaign of 1778. The author signed “Hamden” pointed to an act recently passed by the assembly reinvigorating the test acts as an illegal attempt to “abridge and alter” the constitution, and warned that “if an infringement of the constitution were submitted to in one instance, to what a dangerous length it may be carried.”

The issue facing the electorate was, simply, “[w]hether the Assembly may or may not violate the Constitution at their discretion, or whether we shall enjoy only as much of it as the Assembly shall think proper from time to time to leave us.” A second author, “A,” defended Hamden from his critics by insisting that “the only point worthy the attention of the public, is whether the act under consideration infringes any of the fundamental rights in the Constitution—Hamden contends it does; and if so, the conclusion he draws is certainly just.” These debates focused on the extent to which the present assembly had abused its power—with the likelihood that it would do so again—and the authority of the laws over immediate needs. While these arguments do not necessarily preclude support for clemency for Carlisle and Roberts, they clearly reflect “Rectifier’s” and Reed’s skepticism and belief in

71 Pennsylvania Packet, Sept. 26, 1778.
72 Pennsylvania Packet, Oct. 8, 1778.
the power of positive law rather than the petitions' optimism and faith in individual rebirth as the foundation of the republic.

At the very least, the sentiments expressed by "Hamden" and "A" suggest that the ideological discrepancies that appeared in the arguments for and against the execution cannot easily be explained within the radical/conservative dichotomy that dominates scholarship on revolutionary Pennsylvania. Whatever ethnic, religious, and class identities formed the foundations of these two parties, both—and perhaps especially the radicals—were further divided by differing understandings of the relationship between the citizen and the state in a republic.

The language and arguments employed by both sides in this controversy suggest that this ideological split across party lines had its roots in the conflicting impulses within the millennial tradition that underpinned much of the American Revolution. The arguments in favor of the execution reflected the Old Light fear of an inevitable decline in the morality and virtue of the population, and the belief that the worst impulses of the people needed to be restrained if the high hopes Americans held for their Revolution were to be fulfilled. Those who argued for leniency for Carlisle and Roberts suggested another, more optimistic version of republican ideology, by insisting, in the tradition of the New Lights, that individuals could redeem themselves from their past errors, and that the legitimacy of this experience could be seen in the individual's dedication to serving the common good. This view took the position that the state needed to temper its enforcement of laws in order to encourage and take advantage of the possibility of rebirth and redemption.

The value of focusing on the differences in republican ideology inspired by the split between New Lights and Old Lights becomes more apparent when we examine the religious sentiments of George Bryan and Joseph Reed. Bryan's most recent biographer argues that while Bryan was unquestionably a moderate on questions of religion he appears to have been primarily an Old Light in his sympathies, viewing with skepticism the "tokens of regeneration" offered by George Whitefield and other evangelicals. Although Reed was a member of the New Light-dominated Second Presbyterian Church in Philadelphia, we should not read too much

74 Diary of George Bryan, July 5, 1758, quoted in Foster, Pursuit of Equal Liberty, 16.
into his choice of congregations. While he was a member, the church was presided over by the moderate James Sproat whose teachings were sufficiently compatible with Old Light theology that George Bryan led an unsuccessful attempt to install him as the minister at the proposed Old Light-dominated Third Presbyterian Church. More importantly, the observations on theology and politics that Reed himself offered in his correspondence suggest a deep suspicion of New Light beliefs in ecumenicism and regeneration.

Reed viewed the contest between the supporters and opponents of the constitution and the Revolution along largely sectarian lines, a characteristic that defined Old Light Presbyterianism in Pennsylvania. In addition to viewing the Quakers as the source of opposition to both the constitution and independence—at one point he referred to the “Quaker style” as “the Mark of the Beast”—he also insisted that the Whigs were overwhelmingly Presbyterian. As he explained to William White, the Episcopal bishop of Philadelphia, it did not escape his “Observation that all the Abuse & Calumny levied against the Gentlemen who are &c have been in Office in the State is confined to those of one Denomination while gentlemen of other Persuasions, tho' equally concerned, are passed over unnoticed.” Reed's sectarian views led him to interpret religious divisions as more or less permanent sources of political instability. In a letter to William Bradford, for example, he observed that Pennsylvania's “Mixture of People &c of Religions must produce a Mixture of Interests which clash too much to suffer it long to be at rest.” Reed interpreted any sign that members of differing denominations were moving toward political cooperation not as an indication of the possibility of overcoming sectarian differences, but as a sign of corruption. In response to Bradford's report of a political alliance between

75 Roche, *Joseph Reed*, 32.

76 On Sproat presiding over the church and Reed's friendship with him, see Roche, *Joseph Reed*, 196; on Bryan's efforts in this regard, see Foster, *Pursuit of Equal Liberty*, 18–26.

77 On the contrast between the sectarian Old Lights in Pennsylvania and the more ecumenical New Lights, see Maxon, *Great Awakening*, and Lodge, “Crisis in the Churches.”

78 Joseph Reed to George Bryan, Dec. 7, 1782, JRP-NYHS.

79 Joseph Reed to William White, Jan. 30, 1783, JRP-NYHS. Reed's views on the nature of the political division were challenged by White, who remarked that he observed "among the Opponents of the late Administration many members of the Presbyterian Church &c my knowing many of its Advocates in the Churches with which I am connected. There never existed a dispute in this State or Province, in which these Societies were, as such, in opposition." White to Reed, Jan. 31, 1783, JRP-NYHS.
Presbyterians and Quakers, Reed observed "What will Interest not do? But the Particles I suspect are too repellent to hold long together. Quakers and Presbyterians, Whig & Tory." Clearly, Reed's understanding of religion did not encourage him to view the possibility of political rebirth as "a unifying principle" that "minimized accidental differences" among people, as did the doctrine of the New Light evangelicals. To the contrary it appears to have provided him with a framework which he used to make stark and almost irreversible distinctions between his political friends and enemies, and to restrict membership in the revolutionary elect to members of his faith.

Reed's views on the inability of Quakers and Whigs to put aside their differences also reflected a distrust of the possibility of sudden rebirth. The Quakers' failure to prepare themselves for membership in the postwar world of Pennsylvania politics by supporting the Revolution necessarily made their sudden willingness to work with Presbyterian Whigs suspect. During the Revolution he had expressed a similar skepticism on the possibility that Tories could be reborn as Whigs. With regard to Joseph Galloway, Reed had remarked, "there can be little Chance of Reformation in a Man of his Age." On the departure of the British he had observed that some of "those who have been mischievously active against us . . . have come out to sue for Grace," and noted with considerable skepticism the "new [emphasis in original] Converts to the Independence of America." While Reed may well have had good cause to suspect the possibility or sincerity of the changes of heart that he described, his skepticism nonetheless evokes the suspicions Old Light clergy expressed about the sudden and dramatic conversions described by the New Lights. This is a comparison that seems particularly appropriate in light of Reed's use of the religious metaphors of conversion, reformation, and grace to express the impossibility or insincerity of the sudden political transformations he described.

While the executions of Carlisle and Roberts may have brought the controversy to a close, in all probability it did not end the tension between the two competing versions of republican ideology. The radical party found itself increasingly divided in the years that followed the British withdrawal from Philadelphia, and although the radicals remained in power their control

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80 Joseph Reed to William Bradford, May 2, 1784, JRP-NYHS.
81 Maxon, *Great Awakening*, 142.
82 Joseph Reed to Charles Pettit, Feb. 25, 1775, Reed to Esther Reed, June 9, 1778, JRP-NYHS; Reed to Nathaniel Greene, Nov. 5, 1778, in *Collections, NYHS*, 6:251.
ebbed and flowed until their constitution was dismantled in 1790. While it would be an overstatement to say that the trial of the two Quakers caused that gradual erosion of unity and authority, it raises the possibility that the ideological divide it exposed played a role in the process. With the British gone from the eastern part of the state, the immediate threat of assault that had allowed the rational and evangelical factions within the radical party to coexist disappeared, opening up the possibility for dissension within its ranks. Gordon Wood has argued that a similar split between the advocates of rational laws and of individual reformation as the foundation of the republic animated much of the debate over the Federal Constitution in 1787. The appearance of a similar split in Philadelphia in 1778 over the decision to execute Carlisle and Roberts would seem to merit further research on the role of rational and evangelical ideologies in the rise and fall of the radical party in Pennsylvania. That some supporters of the execution—George Bryan in particular—opposed the Federal Constitution when Wood's formulation suggests they should have supported it only highlights the need to explore more fully the influences of the contradictory impulses of rational and evangelical modes of thought on republican ideology in the age of the American Revolution.

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