



Resistance to Tyrants, Obedience to God: Reason, Religion, and Republicanism at the American Founding

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Both reason and religion have been acknowledged by scholars to have had a profound impact on the foundation and formation of the American regime. But the significance, pervasiveness, and depth of that impact have also been disputed. While many have approached the American founding period with an interest in the influence of Enlightenment reason or Biblical religion, they have often assumed such influences to be exclusive, irreconcilable, or contradictory. Few scholarly works have sought to study the mutual influence of reason and religion as intertwined strands shaping the American historical and political experience at its founding. The purpose of the chapters in this volume, authored by a distinguished group of scholars in political science, intellectual history, literature, and philosophy, is to examine how this mutual influence was made manifest in the American Founding—especially in the writings, speeches, and thought of critical figures (Thomas Paine, Benjamin Franklin, George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, James Madison, Alexander Hamilton, Charles Carroll), and in later works by key interpreters of the American Founding (Alexis de Tocqueville and Abraham Lincoln).

Taken as a whole, then, this volume does not attempt to explain away the potential opposition between religion and reason in the American mind of the late eighteenth- and early nineteenth- centuries, but instead argues that there is a uniquely American perspective and political thought that emerges from this tension. The chapters gathered here, individually and collectively, seek to illuminate the animating affect of this tension on the political rhetoric, thought, and history of the early American period. By taking seriously and exploring the mutual influence of these two themes in creative tension, rather than seeing them as diametrically opposed or as mutually exclusive, this volume thus reveals how the pervasiveness and resonance of Biblical narratives and religion supported and infused Enlightened political discourse and action at the Founding, thereby articulating the complementarity of reason and religion during this critical period.

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