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The CRISIS: *or, The uncertain Doom of Kingdoms at particular Times,*

CONSIDERED

With Reference to GREAT-BRITAIN and her *Colonies* in their preſent Circumſtances.

A

SERMON,

Preached in

HANOVER, VIRGINIA,

OCTOBER 28, 1756;

A Day appointed by the SYNOD of *New-York*, to be obſerved as a *General Faſt*, on account of the preſent War with *France*.

By the Reverend

Mr. *SAMUEL DAVIES*, A. M.

With a PREFACE

By the Reverend Mr. THOMAS GIBBONS.

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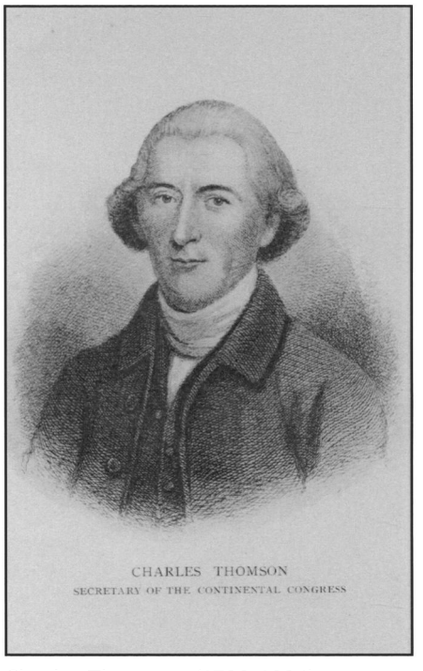
Pulpits of Revolution: Presbyterian Political Thought in the Era of the American Revolution

By Christopher Pearl

Presbyterian clergy played an important role in America's founding by providing their congregants with crucial political and religious ideas that served as the guiding sentiments of revolution. Published and unpublished sermons and sermon notes of Presbyterian ministers with congregations throughout the thirteen colonies show that the clergy embraced and expounded Enlightenment principles that informed revolutionaries as they declared independence from Britain and formed new state governments in the heady days of 1776. From the pulpit, ministers schooled their congregants about the state of nature, natural law, the origins of civil society, and the role and purposes of government. Importantly, they even taught their flocks the limits of obedience and the right of resistance and even revolution.

Addressing the members of the first Continental Congress assembled in 1774 at Carpenters Hall, a stone's throw from the Pennsylvania State House, the tall and slender Patrick Henry thundered that "Government is dissolved. . .We are in a State of Nature, Sir."[1] Those powerful words, echoing throughout the small chamber, marked the opening salvo of revolution. The British Empire, he argued, had broken a sacred contract and so government was at an end. Not only were those words radical—referencing as they did the state of nature and therefore the egalitarian potential of the natural rights of man—they were persuasive. Henry had a gift. The silver-tongued "son of thunder," although unknown to many of the delegates, had the power to move audiences and spur them to action. He could appeal to the passions, ideals, and thoughts of people from all walks of life.

Awed at Henry's oratorical acumen, Charles Thomson, the Secretary of Congress, assumed he was a Presbyterian minister "used to haranguing the people."[2] More than Henry's oratorical style reminded Thomson of a



Charles Thomson (1729-1824).

Presbyterian minister. Like the Presbyterian clergy Thomson learned from and listened to throughout his life, Henry used biblical allusions in his speeches to elucidate, justify, and push forward political ideals. And like those same ministers, Henry's politics were deeply religious and founded upon faith. For many, that made them far more potent. In some ways it is not surprising that someone would mistake Henry for a Presbyterian pastor, as many people on both sides of the Atlantic often linked the spirit of revolution to the Presbyterian religion.

It was a rather common refrain, for example, that the "violent Presbyterians" or the "Presbyterian Republicans" were behind the revolution, and that assumption had a great deal of merit.[3] During his stay in Philadelphia for the long sessions of the Continental Congress, John Adams gleefully noted in a letter to his wife that the Presbyterian clergy "engage in Politicks. . . with a fervour that will produce wonderfull Effects."[4] Thomas Jefferson likewise noted that "the Presbyterian spirit is known to be so congenial

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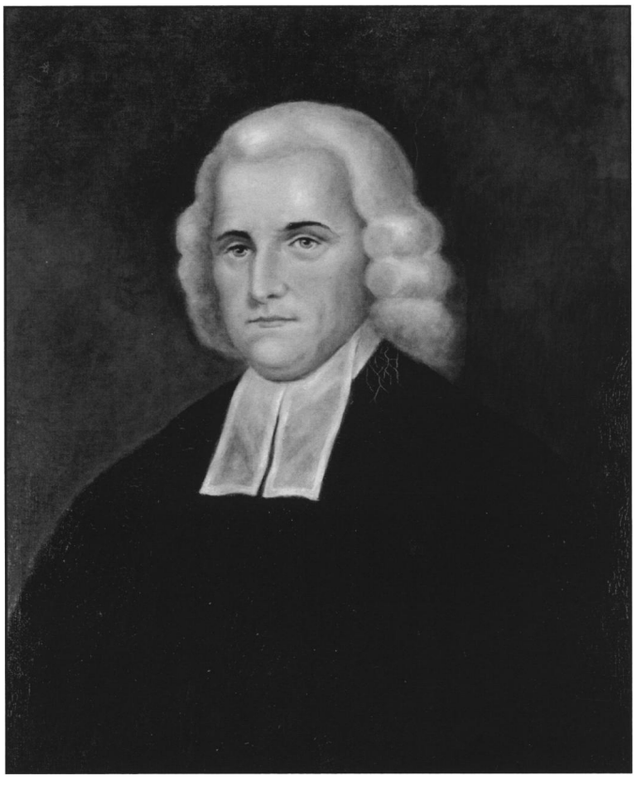
"William Tennent [standing] talking to Charles Beatty [kneeling] at the Log College." From the PCUSA Board of Christian Education 1937 slide set, "John Witherspoon: Preacher, Patriot, Educator," Presbyterian Historical Society.



Rev. Francis Alison (1705-1779). Oil on canvas portrait by unknown artist, Presbyterian Historical Society.

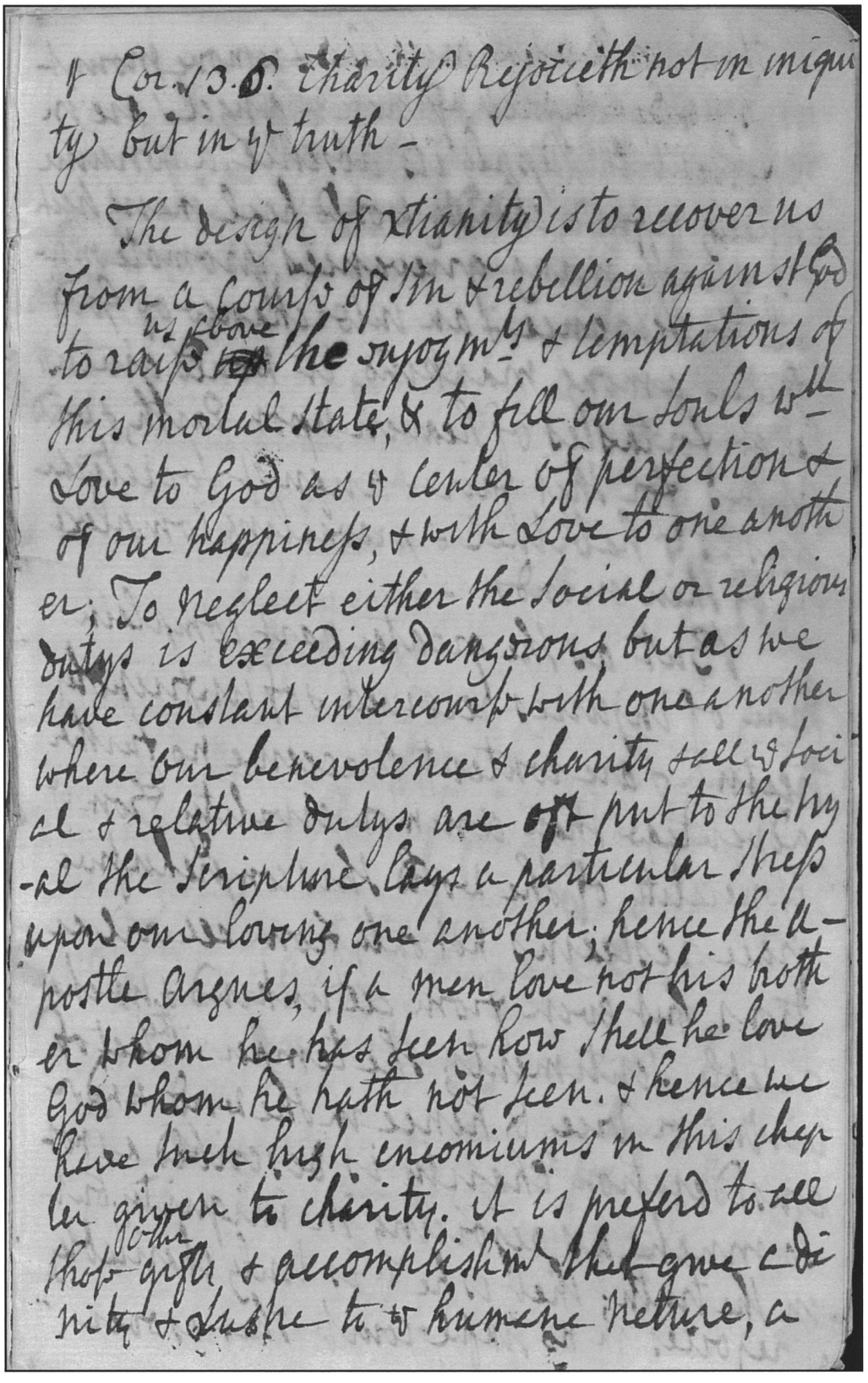
with friendly liberty."[5] On the opposite side of the revolution, a prominent loyalist in New Jersey surveyed the growing rebellion in the colonies and attributed it to the "damned, hot-headed Presbyterians who were aiming at Independence."[6] Similarly, Joseph Galloway, the old speaker of the house of Pennsylvania and staunchly loyal British subject thought that the Presbyterians were a "dangerous combination of men, whose principles of religion and polity were equally averse to those of the established Church and Government" of Great Britain.[7] From all perspectives, Presbyterians and their ministers seemed to be angling at revolution.

These contemporary comments suggest a significant correlation between the Presbyterian religion and politics in the revolutionary era. In fact, the words, actions, and ideas of Presbyterian ministers carried a great deal of importance and power for the founding generation. Throughout eighteenth-century British North America, the Presbyterian clergy provided a solid foundation in political thought to enraptured crowds, congregations, and even readers of their printed works, which informed and motivated colonists in the years preceding American independence. In their sermons, ministers outlined the contours of natural law, the state of nature, and the reasons for civil society. These ideas, similar to and sometimes drawing from Enlightenment principles, highlighted the reciprocal duties, roles, and responsibilities of individuals to each other as members of a community and with God. Such was God's Law, they argued.

Moreover, that law swept beyond the bounds of individuals and local communities; governments themselves, ministers intoned, were created by God to uphold and protect those social and Christian values and expectations. Thus God willed a due obedience to government. However, ministers also taught the limits of that allegiance and the right of resistance and even revolution. People had a duty to their neighbors and God to resist government when it deviated from its proper role and devolved into corruption, confusion, and anarchy. Patrick Henry's speech to Congress, then, followed a similar political and religious logic, and so did revolutionaries across America when they declared their independence from the British Empire in the heady days of 1776. For many of those revolutionaries, America's pulpits served as political crucibles, wedding political ideals to religious sentiments in a revolutionary age.

Among those influential Revolutionary-era ministers, Rev. Francis Alison played an outsized role. Alison, a mentor to Charles Thomson, was an influential educator during and after the Great Awakening, and he led the First Presbyterian Church of Philadelphia for a number of years. At the same time, other pastors spurred a growing chorus of theologically inspired protest, including Rev. William Tennent, founder of the Log College, and his son Rev. Gilbert Tennent; Samuel Davies, who led the College of New Jersey (later Princeton University); and Rev. George Duffield, who led Third Presbyterian Church in Philadelphia. One minister, Rev. Joseph Montgomery, served as a chaplain in the Continental Army and was later elected a delegate to the Continental Congress. These men and other contemporary Presbyterian ministers like them offered crucial intellectual support in the environment of political dissent leading up to the Revolution.

Francis Alison (1705-1779) had come to America in the mid-1730s with a master's degree from the University of Edinburgh. Alison received ordination and became the minister for the New London Presbyterian Church in what is now Chester County, Pennsylvania. The young pastor, an



1 Cor. 13. 6. Charity Rejoiceth not in iniqui
ty but in ye truth –

The design of xtianity is to recover us
from a course of sin & rebellion against God
to raise us above the enjoyments & temptations of
this mortal state, & to fill our souls with
love to God as ye center of perfection &
of our happiness, & with love to one anoth
er; To neglect either the social or religious
duty is exceeding dangerous but as we
have constant intercourse with one another
where our benevolence & charity call ye soci
al & relative duty are put to the try
-al the Scripture lays a particular stress
upon our loving one another; hence the a-
postle argues, if a man love not his broth
er whom he has seen how shall he love
God whom he hath not seen. & hence we
have such high encomiums in this chap
ter given to charity. It is preferd to all
those gifts & accomplishments that grace di
vinity & dignify ye humane nature, a

First page of Francis Alison's sermon, "Charity Rejoiceth," March 8, 1755. Francis Alison Papers, Presbyterian Historical Society.

"Paxtang Church, Oldest Church in Pennsylvania," undated. Postcard Collection, Presbyterian Historical Society.

expert in moral philosophy and the classics, also opened his own school for the education of youth. Provincials of varying religious sentiments recognized Alison's talents, and in 1752, at the age of 46, he became the master of the Latin School at the traditionally Anglican Philadelphia Academy. At the same time, he began his ministry at First Presbyterian Church in Philadelphia. Through these institutions of learning, Alison shaped the minds of many talented people and revolutionary luminaries. Alison mentored three signers of the Declaration of Independence: George Read, Thomas McKean, and James Smith. Two of those men, McKean and Smith, played prominent roles in forming the state of Pennsylvania's new government, and Read helped guide Delaware through the revolutionary state-building process.

In the classroom and from the pulpit, Alison schooled his students and congregants in the political foundations of law and government, which he believed were rooted in God's everlasting love. To start them on this political and religious journey, Alison explored the state of nature and natural law as created by God—a tactic also used by Enlightenment philosophers such as John Locke and Jean-Jacques Rousseau. Alison's ideas were not particularly unusual. Many ministers presented a similar vision of nature in their sermons and, like Alison, expounded on its implication for the social and political world. In fact, ministers throughout North America dedicated whole sermons to "Man's Primitive State"—the actual title one minister gave to a published sermon in 1748.[8] At the creation, ministers argued, God established a known law, God's Law, which outlined the individual's social responsibilities to the larger community to ensure happiness and safety for everyone. Rev. William Marshall, who led a congregation in Oxford, Pennsylvania, argued that since God had established these moral and spiritual responsibilities before the formation of any government on earth, God's Law served as the foundation "of the Law of Nature."[9]

While these social principles defined natural law, circumstances after the creation, particularly Adam and Eve's fall from grace and the beginning of original sin, changed humanity's actual nature. From that point forward, the individual could not be trusted to provide for the good of society, due to the

corrupting power of self-interest. God's Law now reckoned with Satan's policies, and the two fought for the control of individual souls. William Tennent, who sent many New Side ministers into the world from his Log College during the Great Awakening, often reminded his listeners, "All men by nature are sinful. . . there is none righteous, noe not one."[10] Thus God's Law became more than a moral code ingrained in nature, but an actual law that must be enforced and obeyed, to prevent unregenerate individuals from becoming rabid beasts of prey.

Man's essential duty under God's code after the fall concerned what Alison called the "Law of Charity," which outlined the social responsibilities of people to the larger community. For instance, while one could accumulate wealth and prosperity, the law of charity dictated that worldly gain should not be acquired by harming the general welfare, and neither should it be amassed to sate a self-interested appetite. What good is fortune, Alison asked his listeners, if it had no "publick good"? Yet regardless of the "Laws of Charity," Alison railed, "Some men are so bent on iniquity & such slaves to their corruptions that they have no compassion for mankind nor regard their calamities if they can but gratify their own desires." To "neglect either the social or religious dutys is exceeding dangerous," he warned.[11]

Alison presented a formula for his flock to remember their duties: each person should look out for the interest of "God, their neighbors & themselves," in that order.[12] While it is natural that the pastor would harken to the scriptural "Love thy neighbor," his ideas held far more egalitarian and radical potential. As Alison noted on more than one occasion, "the publick benefit of mankind demands a due proportion of what we possess." Everyone was called to provide for the welfare of the public, and in that view, even "Peasants may stand on a Level with a Monarch."[13] Radical sentiments indeed.

Alison was not alone in his vision of God's creation of humanity with certain duties to the community prescribed by God's Law. Presbyterian ministers of both Old and New Side persuasions—distinctions created during the Great Awaking—preached such views. Gilbert Tennent, the son of William Tennent and a prominent supporter of evangelical revivalism, filled his sermons with warnings against self-interest. "Man was made a sociable creature, to promote not only his own but the *public Good.*" Anyone who refused and placed their own interest ahead of the needs of the community was guilty of "*Self-love* which is criminal and vicious."[14] Out on the frontier—leading the Paxtang congregation in central Pennsylvania—Old Side Presbyterian minister Rev. John Elder stated, "The way of man is not in himself."[15] "Every man," another minister lectured, "is bound by the law of nature, not only to preserve his own life, liberty and property; but also that of others." The reason for this reciprocal protection of individuals in society was simple: "There is a natural relation between all mankind constituted by our glorious Creator, an universal brotherhood or fraternity." Therefore, he argued, "every one by the law of nature is every one's neighbor, and every one's brother, and consequently ought to be his *helper* and *keeper;* that is, he ought to use all lawful means to preserve his life, property and freedom, as well as his own."[16]

Sentiments like these did not just express humanity's natural relations and the relative equality of individuals before the law (in this case God's Law). They were central elements of the Enlightenment ideal of social virtue, informing a budding republican ideology permeating the political landscape of eighteenth century America. Ministers embraced and taught those political sentiments, giving them religious and therefore God-granted legitimacy.

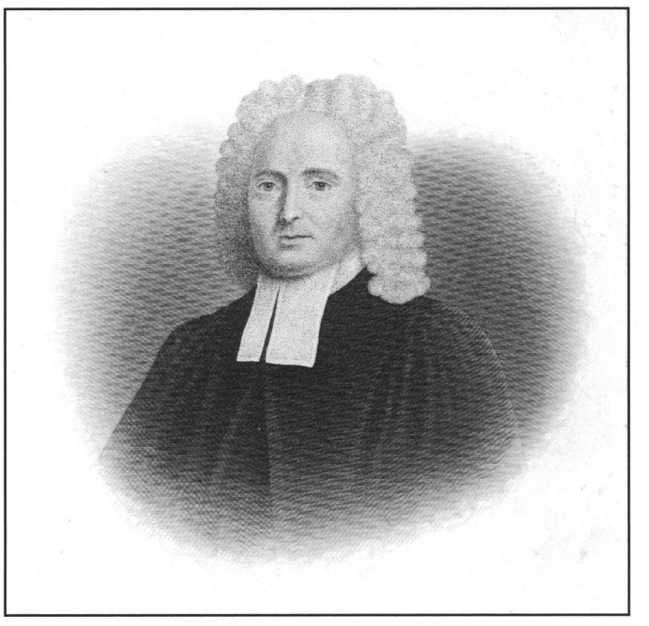
God's Law, laying out people's mutual responsibilities and proscribing the desires, passions, and actions of wayward individuals, informed clerical ideas of government. The state of nature, from the perspective of ministers, was a brutal place. Though God provided a code that people realized they should follow, Satan always waited in the wings, ready to destroy all with the corrupting influence of self-love. "Beware of Satan and your own corruption," ministers counseled.[17] Natural passions, ambitions, lusts, and even the desire for revenge motivated people, threatening the safety and happiness of society. Thus God's Law not only governed mankind, it also helped set up civil governments.

According to Rev. William Marshall, God had created three laws in the world: "moral, ceremonial, and judicial." The judicial concerned not just the church and its ministers, but civil governments on earth. That God had established a "judicial law" was proof enough, Marshall argued, that governments were the product of God's will to enforce "the moral Law, the perpetual Standard of Righteousness."[18] God, William Tennent exclaimed, relied on "his ministry in Church and State."[19] Without civil government, another Presbyterian minister claimed, people would be thrust into a state

close to that experienced "in the Antediluvian age, when there was no civil government at all in the world" and "the wicked destroyed the righteous, till there was none left but Noah and his Family." In short, "the world needed government to keep it in being to this day."[20]

How Presbyterian ministers saw the role of governments illuminates both our understanding of Presbyterian political thought and its importance for the American Revolution. While the idea that God willed a government into being suggests a kind of top-down, absolutist vision of statecraft, it existed alongside a sense of the contractual origins of government. Presbyterian ministers viewed government as a bottom-up formation of people coming together to combat the vagaries of the natural world. Presbyterian minister John Goodlet, echoing (and in this instance plagiarizing) John Locke's *Second Treatise of Government*, summed up such thoughts: "Civil society consists of a number of men, as reasonable creatures, who have consented to unite their force together, according to the law of nature, for the safety of the whole; having a common established law and judicature to appeal to, with authority to decide controversies between them, and to punish offenders."[21] The people, then, through divine inspiration, established governments by consent and compact. These two central principles justified American independence and underlined the volitional character of a new American citizenship.

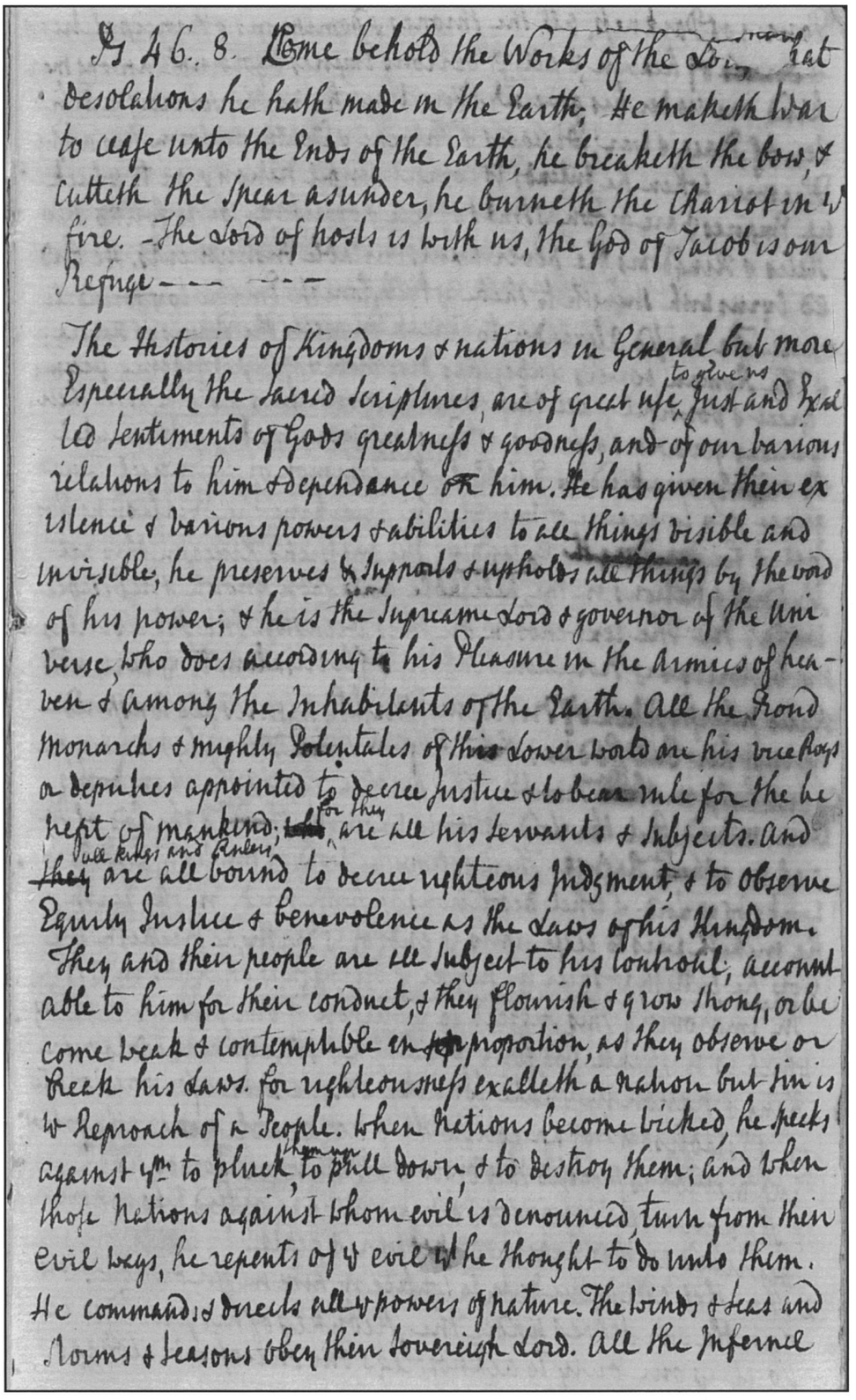
As a creature of consent, government only worked, and should only be obeyed, if it met the needs, interests and "welfare of the whole people."[22] In fact, according to Rev. Elisha Williams, rector of Yale College, government was not a top-down political structure following the great chain of being. Instead it was a "political society" of all the people where "*every one* even an *Infant* has the whole Force of the Community to protect him."[23] In the ideal state, government protected the public will for "publick safety," and ensured that everyone shared in "publick burdens."[24] These overarching ideas provided a powerful role for government in the daily lives of people. Not only did it protect the community from sinful self-interest, but it also provided positive benefits for society. God demanded righteousness, but also looked to make people happy. According to Rev. John Brown of Virginia, the ideal civil government provides for the "education of children, cultivation of arts & sciences, exercise & improvement of trades &



Rev. Samuel Davies (1723-1761).

manufactures & everything else that contributes to the good, pleasure and advantage of a civil life."[25] These were the benefits and burdens of civil society, necessary for happiness, and therefore ordained by God. For some, government and the ideals it enshrined had radical potential. William Marshall, for instance, thought that since government upheld God's Law for the good of the whole people, any kind of legal oppression, particularly chattel slavery, "is forbidden."[26]

Ministers consistently outlined for their congregants the proper roles, duties, and purposes of government, and they highlighted biblical figures that modern rulers should strive to emulate. King David served as the prime example of the ideal ruler, next to Jesus of course. Monarchs, masters, and magistrates should model themselves after that King of Israel, the great "*Servant* of the Public." David represented the perfect leader because he, according to Presbyterian ministers, upheld and embodied the central mandates of God's Law. Samuel Davies, pastor in Patrick Henry's Hanover County, Virginia church before leading the College of New Jersey, believed the greatness of David rested in his public spiritedness, his unceasing effort to provide for what "was conducive to the publick Good." "His Royal Prerogative," Davies opined, "was an Obligation to serve; and his Authority but a Power of doing more extensive Good." Even depictions of David, then, fit not only the model of God's Law, but also the nature of a government by consent. David did



Ps 46. 8. Come behold the Works of the Lord what
desolations he hath made in the Earth, He maketh war
to cease unto the Ends of the Earth, he breaketh the bow, &
cutteth the Spear asunder, he burneth the Chariot in the
fire. -The Lord of hosts is with us, the God of Jacob is our
Refuge - - - - - -

The Histories of Kingdoms & nations in General but more
Especially the Sacred Scriptures, are of great use, to give us Just and Exalted
Sentiments of Gods greatness & goodness, and of our various
relations to him & dependance on him. He has given their ex
istence & various powers & abilities to all things visible and
invisible, he preserves & Supports & upholds all things by the word
of his power; & he is the Supreame Lord & governor of the Uni
verse, who does according to his Pleasure in the Armies of hea-
ven & among the Inhabitants of the Earth. All the Great
Monarchs & mighty Potentates of this Lower World are his Vicegerents
or deputies appointed to decree Justice & to bear rule for the be
nefit of mankind; for they are all his Servants & Subjects. And
they are all bound to decree righteous Judgment, & to observe
Equity Justice & benevolence as the Laws of his Kingdom.
They and their people are all Subject to his Controul, account
able to him for their conduct, & they flourish & grow strong, or be
come weak & contemptible in proportion, as they observe or
Break his Laws. for righteousness exalleth a nation but sin is
a Reproach of a People. when Nations become wicked, he seeks
against them to pluck, to pull down, & to destroy them; and when
those Nations against whom evil is denounced, turn from their
evil ways, he repents of the evil he thought to do unto them.
He commands & directs all the powers of nature. The winds & Seas and
Storms & Seasons obey their Sovereign Lord. All the Inferior

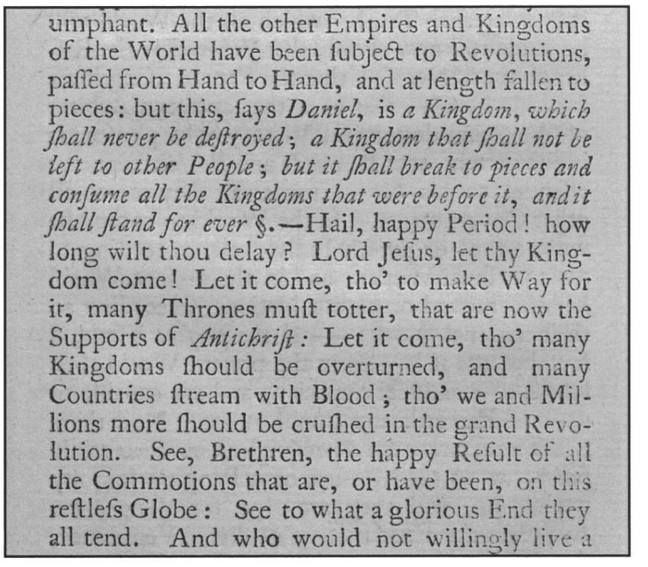
First page of Francis Alison's Aug. 5, 1763 sermon discussing the histories of kingdoms and nations. Francis Alison Papers, Presbyterian Historical Society.

not rule over thousands—he was "the *Servant* of Thousands."[27] Assuredly, few rulers lived up to such a king, and ministers were quick to let their congregants know of such shortcomings.

This brings us to the heart of the matter. As ministers did with the sins of individuals, they set up ideals demonstrating God's expectations for the proper roles, duties and purposes of government, and then, with alacrity and in sometimes terrifying detail, noted how many of those governments had failed. Since mere earthly beings ran governments, they could and did sin, and thus, like individuals, could expect divine wrath. Plenty of biblical examples could be found as evidence of this fact. Rev. James Grier of Deep Run, Pennsylvania, liked to remind his hearers of Nebuchadnezzar, to whom God granted the power to crush a corrupt Judah, but who then succumbed to "opulence and splendor," and "felt himself independent" of God's Law. God soon "humbled" the emperor with "his mighty hand." Grier argued that such punishment proved that "vicious & worthless persons shall be no longer esteemed worthy & honorable because of their high & dignified stations, but wickedness shall be discovered & punished wherever it is."[28] Likewise, Samuel Davies often referenced the fall of the city of Nineveh, a once great city that reveled in luxury and dissipation, thus testing God's "divine patience" with its iniquity, and ultimately falling into "a Heap of Rubbish."[29]

Francis Alison, like Grier and Davies, pointed to many vivid examples of God's vengeance and destruction of sinful and even tyrannical governments. God, he argued, had raised up and destroyed the Jewish Republic, the Babylonian Empire, the Greek Empire, the Assyrian Empire, and the Roman Republic for those very reasons. "When nations corrupt their ways, when they sink into bribery, corruption & irreligion, their ruin is approaching & God will fall against them" and "destroy them."[30] Remember, he counseled, rulers "must die like men & are equally bound with the meanest of their subjects to obey the laws of God."[31]

Yet, God's vengeance, while awful, was also beneficent. God could use natural disasters to pluck up and destroy a government and most of the people with it, but instead God often relied on the people to do his bidding for their own happiness. According to Alison, God fired mankind with a "martial spirit" to protect "Property and Liberty" from the "lawless Hands of Ambition, Avarice, and Tyranny." Rebellions and "all revolutions of States

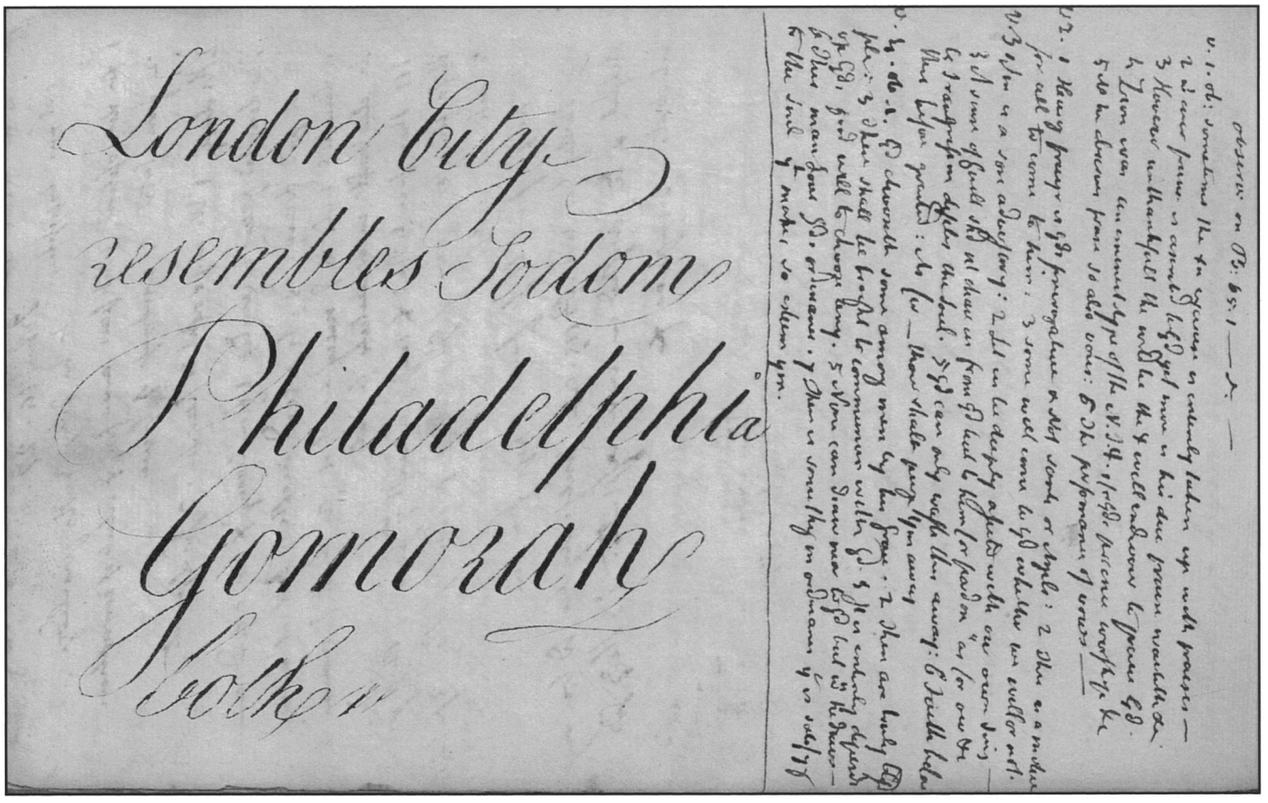

umphant. All the other Empires and Kingdoms of the World have been ſubject to Revolutions, paſſed from Hand to Hand, and at length fallen to pieces: but this, ſays *Daniel*, is *a Kingdom, which ſhall never be deſtroyed; a Kingdom that ſhall not be left to other People; but it ſhall break to pieces and conſume all the Kingdoms that were before it, and it ſhall ſtand for ever* §.—Hail, happy Period! how long wilt thou delay? Lord Jeſus, let thy Kingdom come! Let it come, tho' to make Way for it, many Thrones muſt totter, that are now the Supports of *Antichriſt*: Let it come, tho' many Kingdoms ſhould be overturned, and many Countries ſtream with Blood; tho' we and Millions more ſhould be cruſhed in the grand Revolution. See, Brethren, the happy Reſult of all the Commotions that are, or have been, on this reſtleſs Globe: See to what a glorious End they all tend. And who would not willingly live a

"Lord Jesus, let thy Kingdom come!" passage from Samuel Davies' sermon, *The Crisis: or, The uncertain Doom of Kingdoms at particular Times, Considered With Reference to Great-Britain and her Colonies in their present Circumstances. A Sermon Preached in Hanover, Virginia, October 28, 1756* (London: J. Buckland, et. al., 1757), 27.

& Empires," he lectured, "have been so ordered by him as to Promote the grand design of restoring to mankind and to advance that kingdom of Righteousness, that the Redeemer was to erect on the ruins of the Kingdom of Darkness."[32]

Revolutions, then, represented the resettlement of God's Law, and progress toward the millennium. Samuel Davies, with revival flair, bellowed, "Lord Jesus, let thy Kingdom Come! Let it come, tho' to make Way for it many Thrones must totter that are now the Supports of *Antichrist*: Let it come, tho' many Kingdoms should be overturned, and many Countries stream with Blood; tho' we and Millions more should be crushed in the grand Revolution… Let it come."[33] Ministers taught congregants their purpose and their power to resist and even overthrow oppressive governments. After all, government was created by consent, and therefore could be resisted and overturned just as easily. New Side minister Rev. William McClenachan sounded "the Trumpet of Liberty and Truth," arguing that people only owed "*Caesar* the Things that are *Caesar's*" as long as Caesar upheld the "Agreement made when we threw off the State of Nature." This contractual limit on allegiance, he concluded, was "the Truth of Christ."[34]

Presbyterian ministers, then, offered powerful reasons for resistance and revolution. Their



Page from Rev. William Marshall's sermon book, "London City resembles Sodom Philadelphia Gomorah." William Marshall Papers, Presbyterian Historical Society.

appeals, growing in emphasis in the 1750s and 1760s amidst the ever-present reality of war, came to a climax in the few years before American Independence. Addressing colonists in 1775, Rev. Joseph Montgomery drew from this shared ethos when he stated that it was time to "make use of such means as God and Nature hath put in our hands" to "assert our rights and privileges at the risk of our lives and fortunes."[35] If the people did not use the "means in our power" when the government failed to "observe its original design," Rev. John Carmichael lectured the same year, they "then tempt God, and rebel against his government."[36] As declared by Presbyterian ministers, God sanctioned resistance and the forceful regulation and reform of tyrannical governments.

Biblical examples and religious justifications for resistance and revolution must have inspired colonists as they looked around them and grappled with a faltering imperial political order. Their own colonial governments had become overburdened by the sheer weight of societal transformations. Extensive demographic growth, internal and external migration, expanding government jurisdictions, and the onset of economic change overwhelmed the meager governments on the outpost of Britain's ever extending empire. Colonial politics exacerbated the problem. Legislative inertia irritated the colonists as governors, legislators, and local grandees fought over prerogative and power with little care for the worsening reality of governance and colonial complaints. At the same time, reports reached the colonies of corruption and confusion in the imperial center. Then, shockingly for many, the British government began intruding with new colonial policies, taxes, laws, and coercive military structures. It seemed that the very problems plaguing the governments of old and the ministers' warnings were coming true.

Ordinary colonists did not have to make that connection themselves. As the imperial crisis deepened, ministers ascended their pulpits and let loose a torrent of abuse on those in power, both at home and across the Atlantic. Their passion is exemplified in Rev. William Marshall's sermon book. Marshall wrote meticulous notes in a tiny hand—the letters on the page rarely surpass 1/16

of an inch in both height and width. But as he addressed the changing reality of the imperial world, his handwriting becomes larger, bolder, and more purposeful. Beautifully inscribed on one page of his book, with each letter exceeding an inch in height and nearly a half inch in width, sits the phrase "London City Resembles Sodom Philadelphia Gomorah both."[37] The corruption at the center of empire had reached the colonies.

Such words would not have surprised Samuel Davies. Davies had prophesied the coming crisis since the early 1750s. Likening his message to that of Jonah and Nahum, Davies berated the "leading men" of the colonies for their negligence. They would not even legislate or initiate reforms for the betterment of society. "Nothing great is so much as attempted, much less executed," he groaned. Instead, they basked in "sloth and cowardice."[38] Parallel to the problems at home, corruption had swept through the government of Great Britain. Imperial ministers, coteries, parliamentarians and even the king, basking in their own iniquity, had started to threaten "our natural and legal rights." John Carmichael, addressing his sermon "to all the brave Sons of Liberty in North America," demanded that his listeners "draw the sword *for* Liberty" against the "self-interest" of the few.[39]

If that was not forward enough, Joseph Montgomery made the point far clearer and bolder. On the same day in July 1775 that the Continental Congress called upon the people "to bless our rightful Sovereign, King George the Third," Montgomery brazenly condemned the corruption and oppression of Britain and concluded that the "connection with the parent State must be dissolved." Colonists, he averred, had two choices: they could either "live freemen or die gloriously" trying.[40] Less than a year later, Rev. George Duffield called for the same separation. At Third Presbyterian Church in Philadelphia, Duffield addressed a packed crowd, comparing the Egyptian Pharaoh of Exodus with King George III, and the fate of Israel with America. Concluding his sermon, Duffield emphatically stated that the "Course of Events, indicated strongly the Design of Providence that We should be separated from G. Britain." Congressional delegate John Adams had attended the service. Afterward, Adams wrote that he felt "an Awe upon my mind, which is not easily described."[41] Adams often left heartened after Duffield's sermons. Less than a year earlier, for example, Adams wrote that Duffield's words "fill'd and swell'd the Bosom of every Hearer," a fitting response in a time of war and revolution.[42]

While the power, persuasion, and political ideals of Presbyterian ministers encouraged Adams, they irritated and even frightened others. Since the 1760s, those men who held power in the middle colonies, especially Pennsylvania, had feared the domination of Presbyterians. Presbyterians had grown in strength as a political bloc, nibbling around the edges to upset a solidly oligarchical system of government. By 1775, Presbyterians held nearly a quarter of the seats in the Pennsylvania legislature—and that percentage by no means represented the proportion of Presbyterians in the colony's population.[43] They achieved that level of inclusion by hard work, mobilization, and in some instances, sheer luck. The imperial crisis further emboldened Presbyterians in their political ambitions, and this, coupled with the industriousness of their ministers, made many politically moderate and conservative men of other faiths squeamish. According to John Adams, some conservative members of the Continental Congress feared American independence because they thought it would create "an American Republic" founded on "Presbyterian Principles."[44]

The fear that independence would unleash Presbyterian political dominance may have been hyperbolic, but it was rooted in a kernel of truth. Through the democratic impulse of the revolution, Presbyterians gained a dominant place in the politics and governance of the new states. In Pennsylvania in 1777, for example, Presbyterians held 68 percent of the legislative seats, nearly three times what they had controlled in the colonial period. And in Pennsylvania's constitutional convention, where the radical democratic constitution of 1776 was drafted, Presbyterians comprised the principal religious bloc, with a 40-percent representation. Quakers made up the next largest with 15 percent.[45] A similar political prominence could be found outside of Pennsylvania. General Charles Lee grumpily commented that a "Mac-ocracy" of the "low Scotch-Irish" created the governments of Virginia and Maryland. His insult took aim at both the ethnic and the religious complexion of the Ulster Scots. Lee's intolerant grumbling represented a crucial reality in the new states, where Presbyterians led the movement to uproot old political oligarchies, and helped craft the democratic constitutions and governments of the revolutionary era. Those new governments, it seemed to Lee, represented "some of the worst features of Theocracy."[46]

Some of those features, "worst" or not, drew on the social virtue of Presbyterian political thought. The state constitutions, many of which were drawn up by conventions guided by Presbyterians, enshrined the social and contractual elements of government. The *Declaration of Rights* for both the Virginia and Pennsylvania state constitutions of 1776, for example, argued that in a "state of society" government worked for the community rather than a "man or set of men." According to the Pennsylvania *Declaration of Rights*, individuals were "a part only of that community," and therefore government, properly understood, benefited everyone by upholding and maintaining social duties and expectations. When the government "shall be found inadequate or contrary to these purposes," both the Virginia and Pennsylvania *Declarations* stated, the "community hath an indubitable, unalienable and indefeasible right to reform, alter or abolish it, in such manner as shall be judged most conducive to the public weal."[47] Together, the community had the power to make and remake governments—a central element of the contractual origins of the new states and a principle taught by Presbyterian ministers since mid-century.

Those few lines represented the promise of the revolution that grew from the ideals of revolutionaries, not least of whom were Presbyterian clergy. The revolution, from that cohort of patriots, seemed to fulfill a divine prophecy, one they had preached for over a decade. According to Rev. James Armstrong, "The present revolution is the work of an almighty hand," seeking to resettle God's Law under a government where "free men" ruled. Armstrong and the people gathered under arms to hear his sermon were, he argued, "the instruments used by Providence to bring about so great a revolution."[48]

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