

Study Guide  
to accompany the program

# *Gospel of Liberty*

*Colonial Williamsburg*<sup>®</sup>

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# *Gospel of Liberty*

## STUDY GUIDE

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## INTRODUCTION

From Northern Ireland to India, from Bosnia to the Middle East, religious rivalries beget bloodshed and suffering. Yet despite its profusion of competing faiths, the United States enjoys sectarian peace. We argue—sometimes heatedly—over matters of belief and principle. But in the exercise of the freedom of religion, a legacy from Thomas Jefferson, James Madison, and others, we settle our disputes in our consciences and our courts.

*Gospel of Liberty* helps pupils grasp the concept of the first of the First Amendment freedoms. It portrays the contest between an individual's private conscience and a British colony's official faith.

The setting is Virginia during a spiritual revival—called today the Great Awakening—that swept the mid-eighteenth-century Atlantic community. The student meets the Reverend Samuel Davies, minister of Hanover County's Presbyterian Polegreen Church. Davies fought to minister to congregations that could not in faith conform to Virginia's official religion, to its established church.

A Jefferson character interpreter narrates the program with material adapted from Jefferson's writings, which are based on Jefferson's study of history that recorded religious wars undermining society for centuries in Europe, philosophy in which science had begun to have an influence, and the Bible, which he had carefully analyzed. The Jefferson character speaks from a historical perspective informed by twentieth-century understanding and scholarship.

## HOW TO USE THE PROGRAM

A chronologically relaxed by historically reliable video teaching document, *Gospel of Liberty* can preface study of the Bill of Rights, religious freedom, and toleration. It may be presented as a summation or to illustrate a lesson.

## INTRODUCING THE PROGRAM

### STUDENTS SHOULD KNOW

- Samuel Davies is the central character. His adversaries are the rival Reverend Patrick Henry, uncle of the patriot orator; commissaries—deputies—of the bishop of London; lieutenant governors William Gooch and Robert Dinwiddie; their Councils; and some of Virginia's leading families.
- The Church of England was part of Virginia's power structure. In religious non-conformity, gentry and clergy saw threats to their authority and danger to the souls in their care.
- The authority to license ministers, churches, and meetinghouses and to interpret and enforce the English Act of Toleration of 1689 was central to the regulation of religion in Virginia.

### DISCUSSION TOPICS

- The pervasiveness of religion in the colonial period.
- Why a challenge to an established church was dangerous to secular authority.

### ABOUT THE DOCUMENTS

Extracts of illustrative documents are presented with original spelling, capitalization, and punctuation. The Classroom Activities section suggests ways to use the study guide materials in class exercises.

# I

## FROM THE WRITINGS OF THOMAS JEFFERSON

*Near the Revolution's end, Jefferson wrote in his Notes on the State of Virginia a synopsis of Virginia's early religious history. An extract:*

The first settlers in this country were emigrants from England, of the English church, just at a point of time when it was flushed with complete victory over the religious of all other persuasions. Possessed, as they became, of the powers of making, administering, and executing the laws, they shewed equal intolerance in this country with their Presbyterian brethren. . . The Anglicans retained full possession of the country about a century. Other opinions began then to creep in, and the great care of the government to support their own church, having begotten an equal degree of indolence in its clergy, two-thirds of the people had become dissenters at the commencement of the present revolution. The laws indeed were still oppressive on them, but the spirit of the one party had subsided into moderation, and of the other had risen to a degree of determination which commanded respect.

*Note: Modern scholarship estimates that at the time of the Revolution, about one-fifth of the colonists were dissenters.*

## II VIRGINIA'S ESTABLISHED CHURCH

A Protestant, state-supported, established church headed by bishops and regulated by the Book of Common Prayer had been the aim of most English monarchs since Elizabeth I's reign began in 1558. England spent 130 years in sporadic struggle and bloodletting over the Church of England's supremacy.

Jamestown's settlers brought the Church of England to Virginia in 1607. Sometimes called the Anglican church and known now in America as the Episcopal church, the Church of England was established as Virginia's official church after the first English-American legislature met at Jamestown in 1619. The Church of England in Virginia came under the jurisdiction of the bishop of London. After 1689, the year Britain adopted the Act of Toleration to curtail religious upheaval, church affairs were overseen in the colony by a local deputy, called a *commissary*, of the bishop of London.

Virginia adapted English practice to local circumstances. As in England, church and state in the colony supported one another. The church parish was the basic unit of governmental organization. The General Assembly set parish boundaries. A vestry, chosen from the gentry—often government officers—controlled parish affairs. It hired ministers, maintained churches, verified property lines, and levied church taxes. The General Assembly required all taxpayers, regardless of denomination, to pay Anglican church levies.

Church taxes provided for the poor, paid ministers' salaries as set by the assembly, and supported construction and repair. Through county courts the vestry enforced morality and monthly church attendance.

There was no Anglican bishop in Virginia, however. Nor did Virginia have ecclesiastical courts like those in England. The gentry laymen of the vestry—not an ecclesiastical hierarchy—controlled church affairs in the colony.

The Act of Toleration gave non-Anglican, or *dissenting*, Protestants—but not Roman Catholics, Jews, or Unitarians—some relief. But everyone had to be under the ministry of a trained and licensed preacher. Allegiance to Anglican doctrine was a qualification for public office.

Dissenting Protestant ministers had to subscribe to most of the Church of England's Thirty-nine Articles (the basic tenets of Anglicanism), take oaths of allegiance and supremacy, register their meeting houses, and obtain a license to preach from Virginia's highest court, the General Court in Williamsburg. Toleration was a conditional privilege, often narrowly construed, not a grant of religious liberty.

Government and religious leaders believed public and private morality depended on the authority of a state church. In turn, laws protected established churches and safe-guarded orthodoxy by restricting dissent. Most Virginians were content with the arrangement and with the reasoned harmony of the Anglican faith.

But with little say in church matters, some ordinary parishioners grew indifferent or disaffected. Some said Anglican ministers grew careless of their priestly duties under state protection or led scandalous lives. Some dissenters thought Anglican clergy were self-indulgent, unconverted men failed by moribund religion and consumed by excess. But of 645 Anglican clergy in colonial Virginia, just 17 were dismissed for drunkenness or moral dereliction. Moreover, many devout Christians preferred the Anglican brand of calm, ordered worship and moral instruction.

Virginia officials were suspicious of the self-taught and self-appointed ministers who

followed what they saw as a *New Light*. They objected to itinerants who ranged Virginia preaching without license or fixed residence, converting people as they went, then leaving the new converts without a spiritual leader. Attorney General Peyton Randolph said the Act of Toleration limited even licensed New Light clergy to one congregation.

By the time of the Revolution, the established church seemed to some just one more mechanism of imperial control. Adoption of George Mason's Declaration of Rights in 1776 secured free exercise of religion for all Virginians. It did not disestablish the Anglican or Episcopal Church, but its guarantee of religious freedom inspired large numbers of Baptists and others to petition the assembly to strip that church of its favored status.

## DOCUMENT

John Locke's *Letter Concerning Toleration*

*In 1688, English philosopher John Locke published A Letter Concerning Toleration, which helped prepare the ground for the Act of Toleration. An excerpt:*

I esteem it above all things necessary to distinguish exactly the business of civil government from that of religion and to settle the just bounds that lie between the one and the other. If this be not done, there can be no end put to the controversies that will be always arising between those that have, or at least pretend to have, on the one side, a concernment for the interest of men's souls, and, on the other side, a care of the commonwealth . . . the business of laws is not to provide for the truth of opinions, but for the safety and security of the commonwealth. . . . For the truth certainly would do well enough if she were once left to shift for herself. . . . She is not taught by laws, nor has she any need of force to procure her entrance into the minds of men.

**Discussion question:** *What opinions did Locke mean?*

### III

## THE GREAT AWAKENING

The Great Awakening was a wave of Christian revival that broke across Europe, swept into New England in the 1730s, and spread down the eastern seaboard of British America. Called by one historian “the foremost social episode of pre-revolutionary America,” the Awakening had a democratic character contrary to eighteenth-century society’s traditional hierarchy. Poor whites and middling farmers, slaves and free blacks, tradesmen and gentleman stood before God on common ground. Each was a sinner faced with the leveling power of death. The Great Awakening’s evangelicalism contributed to a sense of American unity and identity.

Religious zeal confronted Enlightenment rationalism, and “new light” glared on what dissenters saw, probably unfairly, as the spiritual emptiness of the cold formalism of established religion. Awakened ministers such as the Reverend George Whitefield promoted spiritual renewal through profoundly personal salvation experiences and conversion. The core of New Light conversion was an overwhelming awareness of personal sinfulness, followed by exultation in redemption through divine grace.

Awakened ministers preached as they felt “the Spirit,” often heedless of earthly authority and uninhibited in speech and action. Their oratory caused people to faint and cry out in the sudden realization of their sinfulness and sense of separation from God. These displays disgusted the orthodox, who judged religious “enthusiasm” of little-lasting spiritual benefit—and dangerous to a peaceful society to boot. Nevertheless, thousands were inspired, and the dignified established church felt itself being drained.

In the northern and middle colonies, the Awakening peaked about 1743. In the 1740s and ‘50s, New Light Presbyterianism made inroads in Virginia under the Reverend Samuel Davies in Hanover and nearby counties. Baptist itinerants came in the 1760s, and Methodist circuit riders in the 1770s.

New Lights set afoot wandering ministries, undertook Indian missions, and established Brown, Rutgers, Princeton, Dartmouth, and other schools to transmit New Light doctrine.

#### DOCUMENTS

The Reverend George Whitefield in Williamsburg

*Whitefield had a genius for extemporaneous preaching, but even in printed form his words found eager readers. An extract from the sermon he delivered December 16, 1739 in Williamsburg’s Bruton Parish Church:*

Some, and I fear a multitude which no man can easily number, there are amongst us, who call themselves christians, and yet seldom or never seriously think of Jesus Christ at all. They can think of their shops and their farms, their plays, their balls, their assemblies, and horse-races. . . but as for Christ, the author and finisher of faith, the Lord who has bought poor sinners with his precious blood, and who is the only thing worth thinking of, alas! he is not in all, or at most in very few or their thoughts. But believe me, O ye earthly, sensual, carnally-minded professors, however little you may think of Christ now, or however industriously you may strive to keep him out of your thoughts, by pursuing the lust of the eye, the lust of the flesh, and

the pride of life, yet there is a time coming, when you will wish you had thought of Christ more and of your profits and pleasures less.

**Discussion Question:** *Did Whitefield appeal to reason, emotion, or both?*

The Reverend Patrick Henry on a New Light Service

*The Reverend Patrick Henry showed Anglican distaste for New Light meetings in a letter he wrote on February, 13, 1745 to Commissary William Dawson:*

. . . the Preacher exalts his voice puts himself into a violent agitation stamping and beating his Desk unmercifully until the weaker sort of his hearers being scar'd cry out fall down & work like people in convulsion fits to the amazement of Spectators. . . and these things are extoll'd by the Preachers as the mighty power of God's grace in their hearts, and they who thus cry out and fall down are caress'd and commended as the only penitent Souls who come to Christ . . .

**Discussion Question:** *How might a sympathetic observer have described this service?*



## THE HANOVER AWAKENING

The Reverend Patrick Henry became rector of Hanover County's St. Paul's Parish in 1736. He brought to its pulpit a reliance on the reasoned forms and customs of the established Church.

His preaching struck bricklayer Samuel Morris as uninspired and pale. Morris quit attending Anglican services. The Act of Toleration excused the absences of dissenting or nonconformist Protestants who attended their own meetings and took certain oaths. It did not protect people who attended no services at all. Summoned to court, Morris met three other men accused of truancy. Afterwards, the four men agreed to read scripture aloud on Sundays at Morris's house.

In 1743, Morris obtained a book of Whitefield's sermons to read. Meetings grew so large the men built a reading house, then additional reading houses. Morris traveled between the different locations. The men were ordered to the General Court in Williamsburg to explain their failure to license the houses.

On the way, a man gave them a copy of the *Confession of Faith of the Presbyterian Church of Scotland*. It agreed so well with their beliefs that they adopted the name Presbyterian.

Itinerant ministers like William Robinson and John Roan accepted invitations to preach at Morris's reading houses. They often had no ordination certificates or seminary diplomas, nor any interest in obtaining preaching licenses.

Man's law and certifications, they said, could neither attest to nor regulate their work for God. Their criticism of the official church, established by man's law, could be incendiary. The government issued a proclamation against such preachers in 1745 and nailed a copy to a Hanover reading house door.

In 1747, the Reverend Samuel Davies, age twenty-three, was sent by the Synod of New York to preach for several weeks. He was considered by some the greatest pulpit orator of his generation. Regarding the Act of Toleration as a dissenter's protection, Davies presented his qualifications to the General Court. He differed from Robinson and Roan because he used the law to his advantage. By securing licenses for himself and four meeting houses, Davies could preach a dissenting gospel legally.

Davies returned to Virginia in 1748. Despite chronic debilitating illness, he preached through a circuit of seven meeting houses in five counties. He disturbed the resident Anglican clergy and some of their slaveholding parishioners. For example, Davies ministered to blacks, helping some to learn to read the Bible and psalm books he distributed among them—attentions sometimes thought to make blacks unruly. A widower, Davies found time despite his workload to marry Jane Holt and help her rear their six children.

The Reverend Henry, Attorney General Peyton Randolph, and the commissaries tried to counter the progress of Davies's ministry. Randolph strictly interpreted the Act of Toleration to limit its liberties. When Davies tried to license an eighth meetinghouse, they said he ought to be limited to one.

In court and out, Davies argued his cause with reason and eloquence. When the French and Indian War began in 1754, he preached patriotism and urged militia enlistments. The distractions of war, and perhaps a grudging gratitude, eased official opposition. In 1755, Davies helped found at Hanover the South's first presbytery. Four years later, he accepted the presidency of the College of New Jersey, now Princeton University, from which James Madison graduated in 1771. Davies died in 1761.

## DOCUMENTS

## Lieutenant Governor Gooch's Grand Jury Charge

*The English Act of Toleration of 1689 protected trained dissenting ministers loyal to the Crown who adhered to central Anglican doctrine and obtained licenses. It did not permit intemperate attack on the established church. On April 25, 1745, Gooch told the General Court's grand jury he knew of licensed and unlicensed New Light preachers "railing against our religious establishment." He said he had information of New Lights who deluded the innocent and ignorant and treated other religions with contempt:*

And therefore, gentlemen, since . . . we know not whereunto this separation may grow, but may easily foretel into what a distracted condition, by long forbearance, this colony will be reduced, we are called upon by the rights of society, and . . . by the principles of Christianity, to put an immediate stop to the devices and intrigues of these associated scismatics . . .

. . . that we, who are in authority . . . and the appointed guardians to our constitution and state, exercising our power in this respect for the protection of the people committed to our care, may show our zeal in the maintenance of the true religion not . . . by violent oppression, but in putting to silence by such method as our law directs, the calumnies and invectives of these bold accusers, and dispelling as we are devoutly disposed, so dreadful and dangerous a combination.

**Discussion question:** *Gooch said he spoke "for the protection of the people committed to our care." What does that say of his government's relationship to ordinary Virginians?*

## Proclamation against Itinerants

*By 1747, roving dissenting ministers so troubled the Governor's Council that it took steps to bring their activities to a halt, decreeing on April 3:*

The board having under their Consideration the Number of Itinerant Preachers lately crept into this Colony and the mischievous Consequences of suffering the Corrupters of our Faith and true Religion to propagate their shocking Doctrines it is Ordered That a Proclamation forthwith issue requiring all Magistrates and Officers to discourage and prohibited as far as Legally they can all Itinerant Preachers . . . from teaching Preaching or holding any meeting in this Colony and that all People be enjoined to be aiding and assisting to that Purpose.

**Discussion question:** *Hanover County's sheriff nailed the proclamation to a meetinghouse door. Davies returned the next year to take up full-time residence. Did the attempt to suppress dissent thus weaken or strengthen Hanover Presbyterianism?*

## The Reverend Henry on Davies

*In Henry's view, Davies was a disturber of the peace. Henry wrote on June 8, 1747, to Commissary William Dawson of Williamsburg:*

Mr. Davies whom the Govnour was pleas'd to indulge in preaching about six weeks in Hanover, is to leave it to day or tomorrow. . . . This Man (who was with me last Friday & Saturday) told us that he did not intend to return hither till next Spring & perhaps not then; and after he took his leave of me, I was inform'd . . . That Mr. Davies is to preach at Goochland Court-house next Thursday, from whence he is to travel as far as Roanoke . . .

I need not inform you of the present distracted condition of my Parish nor of the future disturbances I justly apprehended from these Itinerants, who make it their Study to screw up the People to the greatest heights of religious Phrenzy, and then leave them in that wild state, for perhaps ten or twelve months, till another Enthusiast comes among them, to repeat the same thing over again. . . .

**Discussion Question:** *What might be the consequences of the distraction and disturbance Henry feared? Did events justify his fears?*

Davies to Henry

*Davies abided by the Act of Toleration tests and met its qualifications. But he denied government authority over conscience. On April 21, 1747, he wrote to Henry:*

I readily concede, That Principles subversive of Civil Society, & of the Foundations of N[atu]ral and reveal[ed] Religion, then propagated, may justly be checked by Civil Authority, & the Propagators of them punished with condign Punishment. But I cannot grant, That civil Rulers have Authority to preside in, and determine Controversies about Matters of Faith, & Affairs that Peculiarly concern the Church: The Determination of these, I humbly conceive, belongs ultimately to God speaking in his Word . . . not excluding the inviolable right of private Judgment.

**Discussion question:** *To Davies, “revealed” religion meant the Christian religion. How did toleration differ from religious freedom?*

The Bishop of London to an Associate

*Did the Act of Toleration allow dissenting ministers to make converts among Anglicans? The bishop wrote:*

If the Act of Toleration was desired for no other view but to ease the consciences of those that could not conform; if it was granted with no other view, how must Mr. Davies’s conduct be justified? who under the colour of a toleration to his own conscience, is labouring to disturb the consciences of others. He came three hundred miles from home, not to serve people who had scruples, but to a country—where there were not above four or five dissenters within an hundred miles, not above six years ago.

**Discussion question:** *What did the bishop assume about the intention of the Act?*

Davies to the Bishop of London

*Davies disagreed. He wrote in 1752:*

It is true, my lord, there have been some additions made to the dissenters here since my settlement, and some of them by occasion of my preaching. . . . But here I must again submit it to your lordship, whether the laws of England forbid men to change their opinions and act according to them when changed? And whether the *Act of Toleration* was intended to tolerate such only as were dissenters by birth and education? Whether professed dissenters are prohibited to have meeting houses licensed to them, where there are conformists adjacent whose curiosity may at first prompt them to hear, and whose judgments may afterwards direct them to join with the dissenters?

**Discussion Question:** *How would you have replied if you were the bishop?*

Recruiting Sermon

*Davies opposed tolerance for pagans and non-Protestants, especially Roman Catholics, whom he, like most English, called "Papists." When Protestant England went to war with Roman Catholic France and her Indian allies, Davies helped to recruit militia, preaching in 1758:*

Ye that love your country enlist; for honour will follow you in life or death in such a cause. You that love your religion enlist; for your religion is in danger. Can Protestant Christianity expect quarters from heathen savages and French Papists? Sure in such an alliance the powers of hell make a third party. Ye that love your friends and relations, enlist; lest ye see them enslaved and butchered before your eyes.

## V

## THOMAS JEFFERSON AND RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Examining for himself his contributions to America, Jefferson wrote *A Memoranda of Services to My Country*. After citing the Declaration, he wrote: “I proposed the demolition of the church establishment, and the freedom of religion.”

Jefferson’s attitudes toward religion developed as he matured. He grew to favor a reasoned approach to religious truth. He was a lifelong Anglican, but his studies in history, philosophy, and religion taught him to value freedom of inquiry. He believed the mind was created free and that belief ought to be informed by conviction, not decreed by law. His views harmonized with other colonial thinkers and with dissenters who objected to state intrusion in God’s domain.

In the 1760s, Separatist Baptists insisted on unlicensed religious liberty. As war began in 1775, the Hanover Presbytery renewed calls for religious freedom. It petitioned a convention of Virginia’s leaders “concur in removing every species of religious as well as civil bondage.” One historian says, “It seems beyond doubt to have been the document which cleared the way for the state declaring man’s right to worship God in his own way as it appears in George Mason’s *Declaration of Rights*.”

A delegate to the Convention, Mason began work on a declaration of rights on May 17, 1776. Its last article said, “All men should enjoy the fullest toleration of the exercise of religion according to the dictates of conscience.” Delegate James Madison helped amend the article to read, “all men are equally entitled to the free exercise of religion.”

But the Declaration of Rights, adopted in June 1776, did not disestablish the Anglican church. Virginia dissenters peppered delegates with petitions demanding that they be relieved of paying church taxes and that the public recover Anglican church lands acquired with tax moneys during the colonial period.

Within a few months, the delegates exempted dissenters from contributing to the support and maintenance of the Anglican church. In 1777 Jefferson drafted a “Bill for Establishing Religious Freedom.” It was introduced at the Capitol in Williamsburg in 1779, but the time was not ripe for its passage.

In 1784 a bill to tax everyone in support of the Christian denomination of their choice—general assessment—was proposed. Patriot orator Patrick Henry (nephew of the Reverend Henry), Mason, and others thought a moral republic was necessary to the survival of a republic and that instilling morality required state-supported Christian churches. Madison argued in a “Memorial and Remonstrance” that religion cannot properly be a matter of law. Making a republican and rationalist argument against general assessment, he said that faith cannot be coerced and suffers when coercion is attempted. But it was the opposition of evangelical Presbyterian and Baptist leaders to state intrusion in the province of God that in 1786 prompted passage of Jefferson’s bill. Jefferson himself was in France; James Madison guided the bill through the General Assembly. Virginia became the first state to adopt universal religious freedom.

## DOCUMENTS

## Robert Carter Nicholas’s Opinion

*Treasurer of Virginia and a power broker, Robert Carter Nicholas was a political moderate who championed conservative religious orthodoxy. Observing the expansion of Baptist and other denominations in*

*Virginia, in 1773 he wrote:*

Suppose . . . every Man was allowed . . . *Freedom of Judgement* . . . let all Men, think and speak and preach as they will, or rather as they *can*; instead of that Uniformity of Doctrine which our Church has formerly been blessed with, what a Babel of Religions should we have amongst us?

**Discussion Question:** *Carter believed only the learned could judge in matters of religion. What might the learned Jefferson have replied?*

The First Amendment

*Congress passed the Bill of Rights, the first ten amendments to the Constitution, on September 25, 1789. Ratification was completed December 15, 1791, with Virginia's vote. The First Amendment states:*

Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press, or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.

**Discussion Question:** *How does the First Amendment relate to what you have learned about the struggles of the Hanover Presbyterians?*

## VI CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

### COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

Does the program teach religion or *about* religion? What's the difference?

What happened in this story? When? Who were the main characters?

What was the issue over which the ministers Davies and Henry were at odds?

What does the term *established church* mean? *Dissenter*?

Why would the colonial Virginia government care about people's religion?

Did the events dramatized in the program make any differences in our lives today? If so, what differences?

### EXERCISES FOR YOUNGER STUDENTS

1. Ask students to monitor newspapers for a week for articles about disputes at home or abroad in which differences over religion are involved.
2. Ask students to compose their own definitions of religious freedom.

Ask the class to help you draft a religious freedom statute.

3. Ask the class to design a broadside or handbill like the one shown in the video announcing Whitefield's coming.

### EXERCISES FOR YOUNG ADULT STUDENTS

1. Give each student a photocopy of Jefferson's Statute for Religious Freedom. Read it aloud. Tell the students that it was debated in 1779. Divide them into teams of establishment, disestablishment, and centrist delegates. Each team elects a captain. You are Speaker.

Ask the disestablishment team to prepare arguments for the act's passage, the establishment team against, and the centrist to table it. Direct each team to base its arguments on the statements in the bill.

Arrange the classroom chairs in a square with an open end, each team to a side. The speaker of the Give the captains ten minutes to make their arguments. Captains may yield, or refuse to

yield, portions of their time to any classmate who asks, "Will the gentleman [or gentlewoman] yield?" All arguments must be addressed to the Speaker. The Speaker may challenge or ask for explanations of points.

Give teams two minutes to reply to opposing arguments, in the same order. Ask the students to vote, aloud, whether to table. If they decline to table, ask them to vote yea or nay. Review the outcome.

*The historical vote was to table the bill. Remember, it did not become law until 1786.*

2. Divide the class into four study teams. Give each a photocopy of a guide chapter and the Appendix. Ask each to prepare a team presentation of its section, based on the guide, its research, and its development of the discussion questions that follow the documents.
3. Ask students to investigate the religious affiliations and views of the signers of the Declaration of Independence, the framers of the Constitution, or any figures of the era in whom individual students are interested. Ask students to investigate the religious composition of the thirteen colonies.



## APPENDICES

### CHARACTERS IN *GOSPEL OF LIBERTY*

[in order of appearance]

#### THOMAS JEFFERSON (1743-1826)

Jefferson's public service was marked by a warm opposition to authoritarianism and enforced orthodoxy. He had taken for a motto, "Rebellion to tyrants is obedience to God." Attacked for his rationalist religious views, he wrote, "I have sworn upon the altar of God eternal hostility to every form of tyranny over the mind of man." He asked that his gravestone memorialize him as the father of the University of Virginia and the author of the Declaration of Independence and the Virginia Statute for Religious Freedom.

#### LIEUTENANT GOVERNOR SIR WILLIAM GOOCH (d. 1751)

Virginia's resident chief executive from 1727 to 1749, Gooch did not trouble trained and certified dissenting clergy who abided by the Act of Toleration. In his farewell speech, he defended the established church but recommended "a legal indulgence of such dissenters, who under the required proof of their fidelity to our civil establishment, lead quiet and inoffensive lives." He had no patience for itinerant, self-proclaimed preachers.

#### COMMISSARY JAMES BLAIR (1656-1743)

Blair reached Virginia in 1685 as a parish priest. He was appointed commissary of the bishop of London in 1689. For the rest of his life he oversaw the Anglican affairs in Virginia. Blair secured the College of William and Mary's charter and was its first president. He was a member of the Governor's Council. As president of the Council, Blair acted for Governor Gooch when Gooch was absent from Virginia for several months.

#### THE REVEREND GEORGE WHITEFIELD (1714-1770)

Whitefield's passionate, evangelical zeal and his simple, direct sermons urging repentance and Christian renewal made him the "Great Awakener," famous on each side of the Atlantic. An Anglican priest, Whitefield preached in Williamsburg and at the Reverend Patrick Henry's Hanover County parish church. An early disciple of John and Charles Wesley's Methodist movement within the Anglican church, Whitefield considered himself an Anglican reformer.

#### MRS. SARAH HENRY (1710-1784)

A Hanover County widow, Sarah married John Henry in 1734. Among her nine children was the patriot orator Patrick Henry, born in 1736. Though John Henry was a St. Paul's Parish vestryman and his brother its rector, Sarah converted to New Light Presbyterianism in the 1740s. According to tradition, Patrick drove his mother and sisters to the Reverend Samuel Davies's services, and she had him recount the sermons going home. Those recitals are supposed to have molded his speechmaking style.

#### THE REVEREND PATRICK HENRY

An Anglican priest, Henry was the uncle of the patriot orator who was his namesake. He became rector of a Spotsylvania County Parish in 1733. Henry succeeded to the St. Paul's Parish

post of Hanover County in 1736. He tutored his nephew in Greek, Latin, and maxims of moral living.

#### SAMUEL MORRIS

A bricklayer, Morris doubted that the Reverend Patrick Henry preached the true gospel. Late in the 1730s, Morris began to absent himself from Anglican services, in defiance of the law. He and like-minded dissenters read the Bible and religious materials in gatherings in their homes. Eventually, they built meeting houses and secured Davies's services.

#### THE REVEREND WILLIAM ROBINSON

An itinerant evangelical, Robinson preached among the Scotch-Irish settlements of southwest Virginia. He was at Rockfish Gap in 1743 when a messenger reached him with an invitation to visit the Hanover County dissenters. He preached to them under an oak on July 6 and instructed the leaders in Presbyterianism.

#### THE REVEREND SAMUEL DAVIES (1723-1761)

Davies filled his thirty-seven years with devotion to Christianity and to toleration for dissenters. A Pennsylvanian, he settled in Hanover County in 1748, and for eleven years contested for fair administration of the Act of Toleration. Davies was instrumental in the founding of Virginia's first presbytery in 1755. In 1759, he became the fourth president of the college of New Jersey, now named Princeton. His sermons were compiled and printed and remained popular for fifty years.

#### COMMISSARY WILLIAM DAWSON (d. 1752)

Educated at Oxford, William Dawson was ordained an Anglican priest in the late 1720s and accepted a College of William and Mary professorship in moral philosophy. He was chaplain of the House of Burgesses and rector of James City Parish. In 1743, he succeeded Blair as commissary and college president.

#### COMMISSARY THOMAS DAWSON (b. 1715)

Thomas Dawson joined his brother William in Virginia in the 1720s. Trained in an English grammar school, in the early 1730s he lived in Williamsburg, where he studied divinity at the College of William and Mary. Thomas journeyed to England in 1740 to be ordained; on his return he became Blair's Bruton Parish assistant. He became rector when Blair died.

#### LIEUTENANT GOVERNOR ROBERT DINWIDDIE (1693-1770)

Dinwiddie superintended Virginia's government from 1751 to 1758. War with the French and Indians began in 1754. The prosecution of hostilities, and dependence on the frontier's Scotch-Irish Presbyterians may have deflected Dinwiddie's administration from harassment of dissenters.

## EVENTS

### WHITEFIELD'S TOURS (1738-1770)

Whitefield began the first of seven American preaching tours in 1738. Employing advance men and newspaper ads, he ranged the Atlantic seaboard. Thirty thousand Philadelphians attended a 1740 Whitefield sermon. He stopped in Hanover County in 1745 and returned to Virginia in 1755 and 1763. He toured Scotland fifteen times and Ireland three. Whitefield preached perhaps eighteen thousand sermons, averaging four a day. Eighty percent of the American population may have heard him speak. He eventually was banned from most Anglican pulpits.

### FRENCH AND INDIAN WAR (1754-1763)

The readiness of New Light Presbyterians to fight in the French and Indian War, in contrast to the reluctance of some Anglicans to volunteer, helped the dissenters' cause. The war sparked, and was a part of, the Seven Year's War (1756-1763) between Roman Catholic France and Protestant Great Britain and their allies. Fighting in America ceased after Britain conquered French Canada.

## INSTITUTIONS

### CHURCH OF ENGLAND

King Henry VIII broke with Rome in 1534 and created the Church of England with himself, not the Pope, at its head. Henry's church retained a rich medieval Catholic framework and a bishops', or episcopal, administration. More than a century of bloody turmoil reformed and fixed the English, or Anglican, denomination on Protestant episcopal doctrines. The Virginia Company of London's Jamestown settlers brought the Church of England to America in 1607, but the establishment in Virginia never duplicated the establishment in England. To be sure, every person in eighteenth-century Virginia except formally declared dissenters were members of the Anglican church, constrained by law to attend their parish churches at least once a month. Whether Anglican or dissenter, none could legally avoid paying the taxes levied by vestries to pay Anglican clergy, build and repair parish churches, and support parish indigents. Nevertheless, there was no Anglican bishop in Virginia, nor did Virginia have ecclesiastical courts. Vestries of gentry laymen—not an ecclesiastical hierarchy—had control of church affairs in the colony. Challenged by ever-increasing numbers of evangelical dissenters, the Anglican church in Virginia was disestablished in 1786 and divested of much of its land in 1802.

### PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

A Reformed church shaped by the theology of John Calvin of Geneva (1509-1564). His influence spread to the Netherlands and England and was brought to Scotland by his friend and disciple John Knox (c. 1513-1572). Two central doctrines were stressed: the reliance on the Bible as the source of religious truth and the belief that personal salvation cannot be achieved by human goodness or works. Instead, justification depended only on faith in God's grace to free humankind from guilt and penalty for sin. Presbyterians adopted a church government by elders, which consisted of both clergy and laypersons. This church government combined in one system both democratic and hierarchical elements with a balance of power between the clergy and the laity and between local congregations and larger governing bodies of the church. Religious wars and persecutions, particularly in Scotland and Ireland, caused many traditional Presbyterians to come to America in the seventeenth century. Large numbers settled in Pennsylvania, and in the early eighteenth century the migration started south. Reformed theology had an immense influence on religious practice and secular thought that shaped the lives of American Congregationalists (Puritans), Presbyterians, and Baptists during the colonial period. Samuel Davies and others brought evangelical ("New Side") Presbyterianism into Virginia.

### GENERAL COURT

The Governor and Council sat as Virginia's highest court, the General Court. It had original jurisdiction in cases in which free persons were accused of felonies and in some civil actions. It was to the General Court that Samuel Davies and other dissenting ministers were to apply in person for licenses to preach in Virginia.

## GLOSSARY

ANGLICAN – Pertaining to the Church of England, and the wider Anglican or Episcopal communion of churches holding essentially the same faith, order, and worship.

BAPTIST – Protestant denomination that accepts the basic tenets of the Reformation but added baptism by immersion and the autonomy of individual congregations. Evangelical Particular, or Separate, Baptists, made Virginia inroads beginning in the 1760s.

CONVERT – A person who changes creed, often based on a profound religious experience.

DISSENER – One who separates from or does not unite with an established church.

ESTABLISHED CHURCH – A supported by civil authority.

ESTABLISHMENT CLAUSE – The portion of the First Amendment–“Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion”– that prohibits government from setting up a church; passing laws that aid one, or all, religions; giving preference to one religion, or forcing belief, or disbelief, in any religion.

FREEDOM OF RELIGION – Freedom from dictation, constraint, or control in matters affecting the thoughts, conscience, religious beliefs, and practice of religion; to entertain or express any or no system of religion; to participate in or refrain from religious worship.

METHODISM – A reform movement within the Church of England. In the 1720s, Anglicans John and Charles Wesley proposed a more “methodical” Christian life. Hoping to reform the national church, they organized societies within the Church of England to promote earnest spiritual commitment through regular Bible reading, devotions, prayers, and meetings for telling others of the Christian experience. These societies became a threat to the established church, and Methodist itinerants in Virginia in the 1770s put Anglicans on their guard.

NEW LIGHT/NEW SIDE – Evangelical, “awakened” Christians. In the wake of religious revivals animated by the preaching of George Whitefield, Anglican clergy and other critics dubbed evangelical Christians as *dissenters*, *enthusiasts*, *fanatics*, and *new lights*. Originally a mocking term, *New Light* came from the evangelical claim to direct communication from God in the conversion experience and the spiritual enlightenment and renewal that resulted. Evangelical Presbyterians were labeled *New Side*. Many of their ministers, noted for fervent piety, impassioned preaching, and evangelical faith, were trained in a school set up by William Tennent in a log building north of Philadelphia (Log College).

OLD LIGHT/OLD SIDE – Antirevivalist, tradition-minded sentiment among the clergy and laity of the various denominations in colonial America. *Old Lights* insisted on a university-educated clergy as opposed to the Log College education of evangelical Presbyterian preachers and the simple “call from God” to preach that *New Light* Baptists believed took precedence over learning or ordination. Traditional Presbyterians were Old Side Presbyterians. In 1741, the Presbyterian denomination split over the issue of revivalism and did not reunite until 1758.

**PRESBYTERIAN** – Protestant church organization characterized by church government by elders that balances power between the clergy and the laity and between local congregations and larger governing bodies of the denomination. Presbyterianism is the main branch of the Reformed churches embodying Calvinism. Presbyterian dissenters entered Virginia in the 1730s. These traditional Presbyterians filtered into the valley of Virginia with the approval of the General Assembly. Their settlements served as buffers along the colony's frontiers with the Indian territory. After the arrival of Samuel Davies in the late 1740s, evangelical (New Side) Presbyterians spearheaded the series of religious revivals that occurred in the colony during the Great Awakening.

**TOLERATION** – Legal permission to worship outside an established church. For instance, the English Act of Toleration of 1689 permitted dissenters from the Church of England to assemble legally for worship, but dissenters continued to pay taxes to the Anglican church, and they could not hold public office.

**VESTRY** – In the Anglican and Episcopal churches, a group of laymen presided over by the parish clergy who managed the church's temporal affairs.

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER READING

### TEACHERS

- Haynes, Charles C. *Religious Freedom in America: A Teacher's Guide*. Silver Spring, MD: Americans United Research Foundation, 1986.
- Stafford, Jan. "How to Teach about Religions in the Elementary Social Studies Classroom." *Social Studies*, LXXXIV (Nov. 1, 1993).

### ADULT READERS

- Bonomi, Patricia U. *Under the Cope of Heaven: Religion, Society, and Politics in Colonial America*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1986.
- Buckley, Thomas E. *Church and State in Revolutionary Virginia, 1776-1787*. Charlottesville, VA: The University of Virginia Press, 1977.
- Bushman, Richard L., comp. *The Great Awakening: Documents on the Revival of Religion, 1740-1745*. New York: Atheneum for the Institute of Early American History and Culture, 1969.
- Butler, Jon. *Awash in a Sea of Faith: Christianizing the American People*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press 1990.
- Gaustad, Edwin S. *Neither King nor Prelate: Religion and the New Nation, 1776-1826*. Rev. and corr. ed. Grand Rapids, MI: W. B. Eerdmans, 1993. Originally published as *Faith of our Father: Religion and the New Nation*. San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1987.
- . *Sworn on the Altar of God: A Religious Biography of Thomas Jefferson*. Grand Rapids, MI: W. B. Eerdmans, 1996.
- Isaac, Rhys. *The Transformation of Virginia, 1740-1790*. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press for the Institute of Early American History and Culture, 1982.
- Pilcher, George William. *Samuel Davies: Apostle of Dissent in Colonial Virginia*. Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Press, 1971.
- Raboteau, Albert J. *Slave Religion: "The Invisible Institution" in the Antebellum South*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1978.
- Stout, Harry S. *The Divine Dramatist: George Whitefield and the Rise of Modern Evangelicalism*. Grand Rapids, MI: W. B. Eerdmans, 1991.
- Sweet, Leonard I., ed. *Communication and Change in American Religious History*. Grand Rapids, MI: W. B. Eerdmans, 1993.

### HIGH SCHOOL READERS

- Gaustad, Edwin S. *Revival, Revolution, and Religion in Early Virginia*. Williamsburg, VA: The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, 1994.
- Miller, William Lee and Cynthia M. Miller. *Williamsburg: Cradle of the First Liberty*. Williamsburg, VA: The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, 1988.

### YOUNGER READERS

- Anderson, Joan. *A Williamsburg Household*. New York: Clarion Books, 1988. For fifth grade.
- Cohen, Barbara. *I Am Joseph*. New York: Lothrop, Lee & Shepard Books, 1980. For sixth grade.

## FOR PHOTOCOPYING

*Thomas Jefferson's "Bill for Religious Freedom" appeared as a Williamsburg broadside in 1777 and was adopted nine years later in slightly different form.*

*A BILL for establishing RELIGIOUS FREEDOM, printed for the consideration of the PEOPLE.*

Well aware that the opinions and belief of men depend not on their own will, but follow involuntarily the evidence proposed to their minds; that Almighty God hath created the mind free, and manifested his supreme will that free it shall remain by making it altogether insusceptible of restraint; that all attempts to influence it by temporal punishments, or burthens, or by civil incapacitations, tend only to beget habits of hypocrisy and meanness, and are a departure from the plan of the holy author of our religion, who being lord both of body and mind, yet chose not to propagate it by coercions on either, as was in his Almighty power to do, but to extend it by its influence on reason alone; that the impious presumption of legislators and rulers, civil as well as ecclesiastical, who, being themselves but fallible and uninspired men, have assumed dominion over the faith of others, setting up their own opinions and modes of thinking as the only true and infallible, and as such endeavoring to impose them on others, hath established and maintained false religions over the greatest part of the world and through all time: That to compel a man to furnish contributions of money for the propagation of opinions which he disbelieves and abhors, is sinful and tyrannical; that even the forcing him to support this or that teacher of his own religious persuasion, is depriving him of the comfortable liberty of giving his contributions to the particular pastor whose morals he would make his pattern, and whose powers he feels most persuasive to righteousness; and is withdrawing from the ministry those temporary rewards, which proceeding from an approbation of their personal conduct, are an additional incitement to earnest and unremitting labours for the instruction of mankind; that our civil rights have no dependence on our religious opinions, any more than our opinions in physics or geometry; that therefore the proscribing any citizen as unworthy the public confidence by laying upon him an incapacity of being called to offices of trust and emolument, unless he profess or renounce this or that religious opinion, is depriving him injuriously of those privileges and advantages to which, in common with his fellow citizens, he has a natural right; that it tends also to corrupt the principles of that very religion it is meant to encourage, by bribing, with a monopoly of worldly honours and emoluments, those who will externally profess and conform to it; that though indeed these are criminal who do not withstand such temptation, yet neither are those innocent who lay the bait in their way; that the opinions of men are not the object of civil government, nor under its jurisdiction; that to suffer the civil magistrate to intrude his powers into the field of opinion and to restrain the profession or propagation of principles on supposition of their ill tendency is a dangerous fallacy, which at once destroys all religious liberty, because he being of course judge of that tendency will make his opinions the rule of judgment, and approve or condemn the sentiments of others only as they shall square with or differ from his own; that it is time enough for the rightful purposes of civil government for its officers to interfere when principles break out into overt acts against peace and good order; and finally, that truth is great and will prevail if left to herself; that she is the proper



and sufficient antagonist to error, and has nothing to fear from the conflict unless by human interposition disarmed of her natural weapons, free argument and debate; errors ceasing to be dangerous when it is permitted freely to contradict them.

WE the General Assembly of Virginia do enact that no man shall be compelled to frequent or support any religious worship, place, or ministry whatsoever, nor shall be enforced, restrained, molested, or burthened in his body or goods, nor shall otherwise suffer, on account of his religious opinions or belief; but that all men shall be free to profess, and by argument to maintain, their opinions in matters of religion, and that the same shall in no wise diminish, enlarge, or affect their civil capacities.

AND though we well know that this Assembly, elected by the people for the ordinary purposes of legislation only, have no power to restrain the acts of succeeding Assemblies, constituted with powers equal to our own, and that therefore to declare this act irrevocable would be of no effect in law; yet we are free to declare, and do declare, that the rights hereby asserted are of the natural rights of mankind, and that if any act shall be hereafter passed to repeal the present or to narrow its operation, such act will be an infringement of natural right.

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