

Joseph McKeen and the Soul of Bowdoin College:
*An Analysis of the Chapel Sermons of Rev. Joseph McKeen, First President of
Bowdoin College, as they relate to his call to serve the Common Good.*

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A thesis submitted to Edinburgh Theological Seminary
and the University of Glasgow for the degree of Master of Theology

June 2016

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INTRODUCTION

Rev. Joseph McKeen was the first president of Bowdoin College, Brunswick, ME. He is not the best known figure from Bowdoin's illustrious history. More famous by far are Joshua Chamberlain (the famous General of Gettysburg and Little Round Top), Harriet Beecher Stowe (authored *Uncle Tom's Cabin* while her husband, Calvin Ellis Stowe, taught religion at Bowdoin), the poet Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, the author Nathaniel Hawthorne, and Alfred Kinsey (research on human sexuality). Nevertheless, McKeen left his mark, most notably in his inaugural address, in which he calls students to serve the common good. "It ought always to be remembered," he said, "that literary institutions are founded and endowed for the common good, and not for the private advantage of those who resort to them for education."¹

The concept of common good addresses the idea of human flourishing. The phrase can be used in a broad sense or a narrow sense. Broadly it can refer to the good that is common to all human flourishing: the good that is pursued for itself. Narrowly, it can be used to refer to human flourishing in community: the good that is pursued for the benefit of all. At one end of the spectrum it is

¹ *The Inaugural Address Delivered in Brunswick, September 2, 1802, By The Rev. Joseph M'Keen, A.M. & A.A.S., At His Entrance On The Duties Of President Of Bowdoin College, With An Eulogy Pronounced At His Funeral, By The Reverend William Jenks* (Portland: Thomas A. Wait & Co, 1807), 7.

concerned with the good of an individual, at the other end, the good of a community. Where common good refers simply to individual human flourishing it addresses higher questions of being and existence. Where common good refers to human flourishing in community it often addresses property rights and the pursuit of wealth. The Old English, *common weal*, (or *common wele*), means public well-being. Defining the goods people have in common is a key part of social and political theory. Life in a *commonwealth* addresses flourishing in community. The concept is discussed in Greek ethical or political writings. For example, Augustine addresses the subject in *The City of God*, and Aristotle in *Nichomachaen Ethics* and *Politics*. It is also present in more modern writings on politics such as John Locke, *Two Treatises of Civil Government*.

The relationship between the individual and the community may lead to tension. The Christian tradition has addressed the tension between the one and the many, or the relations of transcendence to immanence, as Oliver O'Donovan notes,

The Christian tradition has achieved this by speaking of an *original act of communication*, one which overcomes the dichotomy of the "good in itself" and the "good for us." It has dared to speak of God himself as the supremely self-communicating. Is that meant to suggest that God is exhaustively accounted for by our communications? No; it is simply that our communications find their origin in God's self-communication,

and are therefore open to a radically greater communication than they achieve.²

As a Congregational minister in the early republic, McKeen was surrounded by discussion of politics; of republicanism and the flourishing community. He brings to the discussion the principles of theology: a Biblical understanding of God and humanity. The moral authority of the common good, as understood in the Christian tradition, is rooted in theology. McKeen's call to serve the common good is rooted in God's self-communication. By encouraging students to serve the common good, he was not exalting the good life in itself. Nor was he exalting the republic. He was applying his theology to the public realm.³

The commitment to the concept of 'common good' now dominates Bowdoin's educational ethos. The words of the first president have become synonymous with Bowdoin's existence. It was not always so, but they have been somewhat revived in recent years, in the sense of a call to public service. The religious

² Oliver O'Donovan, "What is 'the Common Good'? Community, Communication, and Personal Communion." Opinion, Australian Broadcasting Corporation, Religion and Ethics, Posted 20 February, 2015, updated 23 February, 2015. <http://www.abc.net.au/religion/articles/2015/02/20/4183986.html>. (accessed 28 July, 2015).

³ For more on the concept of the common good cf. Mary M. Keys, *Aquinas, Aristotle, and the Promise of the Common Good*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006). David Hollenbach, *The Common Good and Christian Ethics*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002). Miroslav Volf, *A Public Faith, How Followers of Christ Should Serve the Common Good*. (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2011). Steven Garber, *Visions of Vocation: Common Grace for the Common Good*. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2014).

and theological import of McKean's phrase is not emphasized. The concluding words of his inaugural address make clear, however, that he had a theological agenda. He asks prayer for the new college, "that it may eminently contribute to the advancement of useful knowledge, the religion of Jesus Christ, the best interests of man, and the glory of God."⁴

I began to encounter McKean when I had regular opportunity to speak in Bowdoin College Chapel. That building has recently been beautifully restored and is now called the McKean Center for Common Good. It lies at the heart of the campus, and the heart of Bowdoin's commitment to service, which is viewed as a 'defining tradition.' The college website states:

The Joseph McKean Center for the Common Good highlights this defining tradition by actively engaging the College in the community and helping students connect their learning and aspirations to pressing issues through public engagement. Bowdoin students collectively provide some 40,000 hours of public service each year through co-curricular volunteer activities, community-based academic courses, and fellowship opportunities. Student leaders coordinate nearly all programs.⁵

I therefore began to research the life and work of this man to try to understand his original vision. I found that McKean has not been the subject of extensive study. The library contains numerous original documents relating to McKean's

⁴ *The Inaugural Address*, 13.

⁵ <http://www.bowdoin.edu/about/campus/tour/chapel-mckean-center/index.shtml>. (accessed March 20, 2014).

appointment as President and his brief administration (1802-1807). They yield very little information about McKeen himself. Early minutes of Trustee meetings and Faculty meetings give some insight in the early history of the college, but reveal little about McKeen or his views. Apart from some biographical references in older books (for example, various histories of Bowdoin College, or of Londonderry, NH), there is no recent research on his life, his views, or his administration. This may be due to the brevity of his tenure. The College opened in 1802 and he died in 1807; five years is not a long period of time in an early republic College. It may also be due to his reserve and brevity of expression. There is no lengthy correspondence, like that of later Bowdoin presidents, or of great American figures like George Washington, John Adams or Thomas Jefferson.

The archives contain a number of manuscript sermons. McKeen preached these sermons in the college chapel during his years as president. They had all been preached before, usually in Beverly, MA, where McKeen served as pastor for seventeen years, before his appointment as president of the college. Many of the sermons were also preached in other places.

As I began to study these sermons, Robert Gregory, Esq., a lawyer in Damariscotta, ME, and volunteer working with Intervarsity Fellowship, was in

the process of transcribing and publishing this collection of sermons.⁶ This greatly assisted my research. I have accessed the original documents in the archives and also utilized the digital photographs of the original manuscripts, as well as using the printed edition of the sermons.

The sermons are written in a clear hand, although some of his abbreviations took a little time to decipher. The sermons do not appear to have been altered in form between their first preaching and any subsequent use. There are occasional words or lines scored out, but nothing scribbled in addition or as an afterthought. He fills the page entirely, rarely leaving spaces. We do not know if McKeen preached them exactly as written, or if, in delivery, there was oral expansion. His sermon style is in keeping with the style of his generation. The inherited sermonic form usually involved three elements: an explanation of the text or doctrine, a confirmation of this from Scripture or reason and application, either doctrinal or practical.⁷ Interestingly his spelling is American English. For example, he writes ‘Savior,’ sometimes abbreviating the word to ‘Sav.’ I have consequently maintained his spelling.

⁶ *Sober Consent of the Heart: The Bowdoin College Chapel Messages of its First President, Joseph McKeen, DD, Delivered 1802-1806*. Ed. Robert Gregory (Damariscotta, ME: Rocky Hill Publishing, 2011). As I was completing my research a second volume was published, *All Governing Providence: The Beverly, Massachusetts Sermons of Joseph McKeen from 1783-1801*. Ed. Robert Gregory (Damariscotta, ME: Rocky Hill Publishing, 2013).

⁷ This method is stated by John Wilkins in *Ecclesiastes: Or A Discourse Concerning the Gift of Preaching as it Falls Under the Rules of Art*, Seventh Edition (London: Black Swan, Paternoster Row, 1693).

What these sermons provide is an outline of McKeen's theology and his views on various matters. Given that he preached for seventeen years in Beverly, there was obviously a larger body of sermons from which he could choose to preach to the students in chapel. We do know, from notes on his manuscripts, that he re-preached sermons in Beverly, sometimes with only two years separating the first and second presentations. That being so, these are the sermons he chose to present to the students under his care. In the absence of any other data, these sermons are therefore important in the study of his life and work.

In this study, given the significance of the concept of common good in the current ethos of the college, we shall examine the subject of common good in the light of McKeen's preaching in the college chapel.

First of all, this should help to elaborate his idea of common good in terms of theology and the theological disputes of his generation. It is well understood that 'common good' is rooted in classical political theory and was used in the early republic. McKeen's preaching casts theological light on the subject. Apart from Caitlin Lampman's MA thesis for Simmons College in 2013,⁸ I have not been able to find any other research into McKeen's theology.

⁸ Caitlin Lampman, "Congregationalism Divided: A Case Study of Beverly, Massachusetts' First Parish Congregational Church Split, 1802-1834." MA thesis, Simmons College, 2013.

Second, on reading the history of theology in order to place McKeen, it becomes clear that he stands apart from more famous contemporary college presidents, for example, Stanhope Smith (1751-1819) in the College of New Jersey, Princeton, and Timothy Dwight (1752-1817) in Yale. These men come from the same revivalist, New Side (New Light) background and so one would expect McKeen to be like-minded. He differs, however, from both men.

Unlike Smith, McKeen does not appear to have subscribed to the Scottish Common Sense reasoning that dominated America after Witherspoon's arrival to New Jersey. And unlike Dwight, he does not subscribe to the New England Theology, in which the most prominent point of discussion was the nature of true virtue.

Speaking in very broad terms New England Theology is the name given to the development of theology in New England from Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758) onwards. The successors of Edwards, such as Samuel Hopkins (1721-1803) and Joseph Bellamy (1719-1790), expanded, or adjusted his views to form what became known as the New Divinity. Their views were in turn adjusted and expanded to form the New Haven Theology, since the principal proponents, such as Nathaniel W. Taylor (1786-1858) and Timothy Dwight, were associated with Yale in New Haven. A very helpful introduction and select readings from the various developments is found in *The New England Theology: From Jonathan Edwards to Edwards Amasa Park*, edited by Douglas A. Sweeney and Allan C. Guelzo (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006). In the

discussion that follows I have endeavoured to highlight particular views that represent the various developments relevant to an understanding of McKeen's position.

There are two other areas of importance. The Unitarian controversy which swept through the Congregational churches in the years after 1805 also centred on the subject of common good. Preaching on the fatherhood of God led to an emphasis on the brotherhood of man and ultimately, an emphasis on benevolence. Since it was not considered wise to preach on 'speculative' theology, moral philosophy became increasingly significant. We will examine McKeen's preaching for the influence of Unitarianism. The final area of study will concentrate on the rising study of science and scientific method under the title of natural philosophy. This was also fruitful ground for pondering the nature of the common good, and McKeen's contribution in the realm of science is significant. He was a mathematician and had papers published by the prestigious American Academy of Arts and Sciences. While interested in all manner of mathematical science, the published articles are early forms of statistics. Statistics became important within decades of McKeen's death in redefining common good from an absolute to a majority-controlled issue.

My thesis is that McKeen's view of common good is not simply a political view. He is not merely a republican, expressing his views on the future of the republic in a classical political way. He is also, indeed primarily, a pastor and

theologian. His view of common good is a deeply theological view. It is coloured by the theological era in which he lived and worked. In this study I shall first of all provide some background to the man, the college and the Congregational churches in New England. Then I shall endeavor to substantiate this thesis by examining McKeen's college sermons in the light of the previously mentioned subjects: Scottish Common Sense Realism, The Nature of True Virtue, The Controversy with Unitarianism, and Science and Mathematics. In each of these subjects I shall seek to provide a framework to understand contemporary discussion and then use McKeen's own sermons to express his particular views.

I hope that more study will be pursued of this remarkable man. He was marked by humility and brevity. Perhaps one might even say he was taciturn, reserved in speech. When it came to preaching, he was not so reserved. He left us very little of himself, but his preaching is still powerful.

I. INTRODUCING MCKEEN, BOWDOIN, AND NEW ENGLAND CONGREGATIONALISM

In this section, we will give a brief biography of McKeen, highlighting the influence of various teachers. We will relate the early history of Bowdoin College within the framework of the establishment of early colleges in America, and we will give an overview of the rise of Congregationalism in New England, noting those aspects that influenced McKeen.

A. Biographical Sketch of Joseph McKeen (1757-1807)

In 1718, James McKeen, paternal grandfather of Rev. Joseph McKeen, along with 217 others still in Northern Ireland, signed a petition to Governor Shute of Massachusetts for permission to “assure His Excellency of our sincere and hearty Inclination to Transport our selves to that very excellent and renowned Plantation upon our obtaining from His Excellency suitable incouragement. And further to act and Doe in our Names as his Prudence shall direct. Given under our hands this 26th day of March, Annoq. Dom. 1718.”⁹

The Governor gave his encouragement. The settlers embarked on five ships, departed for Boston, and arrived there on August 4, 1718. Some of the settlers

⁹ Edward Lutwyche Parker, *The History of Londonderry: Comprising the Towns of Derry and Londonderry, NH* (Boston: Perkins and Whipple, 1851), 317.

stayed in Boston, while others moved to other areas of Massachusetts. James McKeen went with a party of sixteen families to Casco Bay in what is now Maine.¹⁰ Arriving late in the season, they were unprepared for the Maine winter. Their vessel was frozen in the harbour, and they had insufficient supplies. The inhabitants of Falmouth (later named Portland) petitioned the General Court at Boston for the relief of this “great company of poor strangers.”¹¹

1. Londonderry, NH

In the spring, concluding there was no suitable settlement, the impoverished settlers returned to Boston. They eventually settled in a region known as Nutfield, fifteen miles northwest of Haverhill. The settlement commenced on April 11, 1719.

James McKeen took a prominent role, and on April 29, 1720 he was duly appointed by King George to be “one of our Justices of the Peace, within our

¹⁰ Originally part of Massachusetts, Maine gained statehood on March 15, 1820, as part of the Missouri Compromise. Missouri was accepted as a slave state, Maine as a free state. For a detailed account of the move to separate from Massachusetts and become a state see Ronald F. Banks, *Maine Becomes a State: The Movement to Separate Maine from Massachusetts, 1785-1820* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1970).

¹¹ Parker, *History of Londonderry*, 37.

Province of New Hampshire, in America.”¹² From this point onwards James McKeen would be known as *Justice* McKeen.

The settlers quickly presented a call to Rev. James MacGregor, who had accompanied them from Ireland. With no presbytery to install him, the congregation met on a certain day and he assumed pastoral responsibilities, preaching from Ezekiel 37:26, “Moreover, I will make a covenant of peace with them; and I will place them and multiply them, and will set my sanctuary in the midst of them for evermore.” The town was incorporated by charter from King George, by the name of Londonderry, in June, 1722.

Justice McKeen’s son, John, was born in Ballymoney, Co. Antrim, Ireland, on April 13, 1715. He was about four years of age when his father immigrated to America. Eventually, he married his cousin, Mary McKeen, and also had a large family. Joseph was the sixth of their nine children.¹³

John served as a deacon in the ‘West’ Presbyterian Church and was also actively involved in local government. In 1778, he represented Londonderry to the General Court in Massachusetts. These were the heady days when the Constitution of Massachusetts was debated, a document that would have an impact on the Constitution of the United States.

¹² Ibid., 327.

¹³ George Thomas Little, ed., *Genealogical and Family History of the State of Maine* (New York: Lewis Historical Publishing Company, 1909), 177.

2. Education and Early Life

Joseph McKeen was born in Londonderry, New Hampshire, October 15, 1757.

His early education was under the tuition of Rev. Mr Simon Williams of Windham, NH. He entered Dartmouth College, Hanover, NH, at the age of thirteen. Dartmouth was established in 1769,

...for the education and instruction of Youth of the Indian Tribes in this Land in reading, writing and all parts of Learning which shall appear necessary and expedient for civilizing and christianizing Children of Pagans as well as in all liberal Arts and Sciences; and also of English Youth and any others.¹⁴

Little is known of his time at Dartmouth except that “he showed a decided predilection for mathematical studies.”¹⁵

Of the eight students who graduated in 1774, four were from Londonderry, NH. Seven of the eight students subsequently studied divinity, and six of these were ordained to the ministry. It is recorded of Elisha Porter that, “being of a timid make, considered himself not competent for so great duties, and settled down in a gloomy and inactive state until his death, at Westerfield, Conn, about 1835.”¹⁶ Two of the students, James Miltimore and Samuel Taggart,

¹⁴ The Charter of Dartmouth College, available online at [www.dartmouth.edu, http://www.dartmouth.edu/~library/rauner/dartmouth/dc-charter.html](http://www.dartmouth.edu/~library/rauner/dartmouth/dc-charter.html). (accessed February 6, 2012).

¹⁵ Parker, *History of Londonderry*, 224.

¹⁶ George T. Chapman, *Sketches of the Alumni of Dartmouth College: from the first graduation of 1771 to the present time, with a brief history of the institution* (Cambridge: Riverside Press, 1867), 17.

both from Londonderry, studied divinity with Rev. David M'Gregor(e), in Londonderry. Rev. David M'Gregor's son, David, was also a member of the class of 1774. McKeen's father, John, was a deacon in this congregation, and Joseph became a communicant member after his graduation. This congregation was New Side Presbyterian. It was sometimes known as West Parish, and the division from the East Parish church (where the Rev. William Davidson served as pastor) was not simply geographical, but also theological. Blaikie records that M'Gregor "preached and entered earnestly into the awakening," whereas Davidson and his church (East Parish) "stood aloof from all participation in the work."¹⁷

McKeen was the only member of the class of 1774 on whom Dartmouth later conferred the honorary degree of Doctor of Divinity. After graduating he returned to Londonderry and was employed as a school teacher. His service as a teacher was interrupted by the Revolutionary War (War of Independence, 1775-1783). McKeen joined the army and served in Captain James Gilmore's company under General John Sullivan. Sullivan was from New Hampshire and went on to serve as Governor of New Hampshire.

¹⁷ Alexander Blaikie, *A History of Presbyterianism in New England: Its Introduction, Growth, Decay, Revival and Present Mission* (Boston: Alexander Moore, 1881), 80.

McKeen served as an instructor during 1782-3 at Phillips Academy, Andover, MA.¹⁸ He was licensed to preach by the Presbytery of Londonderry. He preached for some time in the congregation of “Presbyterian strangers” in Boston. Presbyterianism was not welcome in colonial Boston. Originally only one Presbyterian congregation was tolerated. Early Presbyterians therefore settled in areas outside the city. Several presbyteries were formed during this period: a presbytery of the west (Londonderry), of the center (Boston), and of the east (areas in Maine).¹⁹

3. Private Student at Harvard

After his brief service in the army, McKeen concluded teaching and went to Harvard, Cambridge, where he studied natural philosophy, mathematics and astronomy, apparently as a private student, under Prof. Samuel Williams. Williams was Hollis Professor of Mathematics and Natural Philosophy at Harvard from 1780 until 1788. Harvard University archives contain copies of his lecture notes that are “varied and include astronomy (sun spots, stars, the moon, lunar eclipses, comets, the galaxy) heat and cold, gravity, repulsion,

¹⁸ Charles C. Carpenter, *Biographical Catalogue of the Trustees, Teachers and Students of Phillips Academy, Andover* (Andover: Andover Press, 1903), 10.

¹⁹ Blaikie, *Presbyterianism in New England*, *passim*.

pneumatics, gunpowder, magnetism, the heat of the Earth, the discovery of the planet Uranus, and global climate change and its causes.”²⁰

The archives also contain numerous scientific observations made by Williams including “the temperature of spring water and of water in wells; high and low annual temperatures in Massachusetts; daily meteorological observations of a wide variety; highly detailed lunar observations made over almost a decade; and computations from Williams' attempt to calculate the course and date of the return of a comet, expected in 1789.”²¹

The Rev. Samuel Williams was born on April 23, 1743, in Waltham, Massachusetts.²² His father, Warham Williams, was pastor of the Congregational church. Jonathan Edwards was Warham's cousin, and Solomon Stoddard was his step-grandfather. When Warham was four years old his family was captured by Native Americans in the infamous Deerfield raid of 1704. His mother and two siblings were killed. His father, Rev. John Williams, was released to the French, and Warham was not returned to his family for a further three years. His sister, Eunice, remained with the Native

²⁰ Samuel Williams, 1743-1817. Papers of Samuel Williams, 1752-1794. HUM 8, Harvard University Archives. Notes on Scope and Content, available online, <http://oasis.lib.harvard.edu/oasis/deliver/~hua05010>. (accessed February 6, 2012).

²¹ Ibid.

²² For the details that follow see Robert Friend Rothschild, *Two Brides For Apollo: The Life of Samuel Williams, 1743-1817* (Bloomington, IN: iUniverse, 2009).

Americans and in time became something of a celebrity in Colonial New England.

Samuel Williams studied at Harvard and was licensed to preach the gospel on October 11, 1763. He received a call from the congregation of Bradford, and was ordained on November 20, 1765. He took an active part in the revolutionary years that followed, but all the while he was pursuing and advancing his mathematical and scientific skills, carrying out astronomical observations and calculations. His work was of such a high calibre that in 1779 he was chosen to be the Hollis Professor of Mathematics and Natural Science. It is to be remembered that within five years Harvard would be in turmoil over the issue of choosing a successor for the Hollis Professor of Divinity.

By choosing to study under Samuel Williams in Mathematics and Natural Philosophy, McKeen was choosing to study under one of the most brilliant men in the field. It was a commitment that bore fruit in the life of Bowdoin College.

4. Preparation for Ministry with Rev. Simon Williams

In preparation for the ministry McKeen studied theology under the guidance of his childhood tutor Rev. Simon Williams, Windham, NH. Samuel Davies Alexander records that Simon Williams graduated from Princeton College

with a BA in the class of 1763, and adds the following brief note: “Simon Williams came to America from Ireland. Three years after his graduation, he was ordained pastor of the Congregational Church in Windham, NH. He died September 10, 1793.”²³ More can be said about Rev. Simon Williams.

Rev. Simon Williams was born in Trim, County Meath, Ireland, on Feb. 19, 1729. His family was wealthy and he was well educated. It is recorded that,

He became greatly attached to a young lady of higher social position than himself, and before he was sixteen years of age, they became engaged. Her parents forbade her to receive his addresses, and they fled to England and sought protection. The king became interested in them, sent them to school, where he was finely educated, and by and by married them in the city of London, April 30, 1749. He sent them to St. Thomas, one of the West India Islands, where he was a teacher for several years.²⁴

From St Thomas, prior to 1760, he and his family moved to Philadelphia, where he continued to work as a teacher, serving as a tutor in a college of which Rev. Samuel Finley was president. He was converted under the preaching of Rev. Gilbert Tennent. He graduated from the College of New Jersey, Princeton, NJ, in 1763, at the age of thirty-four. Morrison comments,

²³ Samuel Davies Alexander, *Princeton College during the Eighteenth Century* (New York: Randolph and Co., 1872), 89.

²⁴ Leonard A. Morrison, *The History of Windham in New Hampshire (Rockingham County) 1719-1883: A Scotch Settlement (Commonly Called Scotch Irish)* (Boston: Cupples, Upham & Co., 1883) 813.

“He was highly educated before coming to America, but probably wished the finish of an American college as a better passport to the churches.”²⁵

In August, 1766, Williams was called to Windham, and ordained by the Presbytery of Boston in December of that year. The Presbytery of Boston had formed following a dispute with the Presbytery of Londonderry over the installation of Rev. David MacGregor. Morrison quotes a personal letter from Alexander Blaikie, author of *A History of Presbyterianism in New England*,

The Rev. David McGregor, when he received the call from the West Parish of Londonderry, was ordained in 1737, in the absence of a majority of the members of said court; but at the next meeting, those who ordained him, Rev. Mr. Moorehead, of Federal-street (sic) Church, Boston, and Rev. Mr. Harvey, of Palmer, Mass., were inquired of by Rev. Mr. Dunlap and others why they did ordain him in the absence of the majority, and the Presbytery refused him a seat. His ordination was admitted to be lawful, but irregular. As he was refused a seat, the ordainers stood on their dignity, and Moorehead being moderator, left the house, accompanied by Harvey and McGregor. Moorehead and Harvey refusing to return without McGregor, and the others refusing to receive him, the strife became so bitter that the majority suspended Moorehead and Harvey.²⁶

Eventually, Moorehead, Harvey, and McGregor, were joined by a Scotsman, Rev. Ralph Abercrombie, and established their own presbytery on ‘the third Wednesday of March, 1745.’ It was thought best not to name it the Presbytery of Londonderry, and so they called it the Presbytery of Boston. There was no

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid., 125.

neat geographical boundary between these two presbyteries. Though Londonderry is the town bordering Windham, Williams was ordained by the Presbytery of Boston, which had members in Londonderry!

It is not surprising that in 1768, two years after ordination, Williams opened a private academy. It should be noted it commenced before Dartmouth College was founded, and also before the well known academies of Exeter, Atkinson, and New Ipswich. Morrison notes, “His academy flourished, and was an important tributary of Dartmouth College.”²⁷ Pupils from Boston or Salem boarded with the Williams family, others walked to the school from Windham, or neighbouring towns such as Londonderry, among whom was Joseph McKeen. Many of the pupils went on to study in Dartmouth College. Morrison boasts, “A good number of distinguished men who were natives of the town would never have honored their birthplace or themselves but for him. This able and talented man gave this town position and standing with the larger towns about us.”²⁸ One half of the fourth class to graduate from Dartmouth attended Williams’s academy.

During his life Williams was instrumental in the publication of two books, *Genuine Revealed Religion* by Thomas Blackwell, with an introduction to the

²⁷ Ibid., 148.

²⁸ Ibid., 149.

American edition by Rev. Simon Williams; and ‘a small book by the Presbytery.’ Both were published prior to 1793.²⁹

Williams’s relationship with Presbyterianism was not always happy. On September 11, 1782, he protested that in various ways the Synod was not proceeding in an orderly Presbyterian manner and he sought to “meekly, quietly and peaceably withdraw.” The Synod’s response was swift. Prior to his meek, quiet and peaceable withdrawal, Williams had invited Rev. John Murray to “assist at the Lord’s Supper, and had, without consulting any of his brethren, read the papers, and did what was done for inducting said Murray at Newburyport.” The Synod had twice prohibited ministers from holding communion with this Mr Murray.³⁰ The Synod therefore judged that Williams had conducted himself “in a very disorderly way; as he has indulged in very indecent reflections and even mockeries of his brethren in time of Synod, and has shown ungoverned, sudden passions, contrary to the express command of Christ; that he has induced some elders to unite with him, and for several other reasons recorded, the Synod, with grief and reluctance, declare the said

²⁹ Ibid., 194.

³⁰ For an account of this controversial figure see Blaikie, *passim*, and Robert E. Cray, “The Reverend John Murray and the Eighteenth Century Presbyterian Church.” *Journal Of Presbyterian History*. Fall/Winter 2010, 59-67.

Williams guilty of contumacy, schism, and hypocrisy, contrary to the laws of Christ, and the peace of the Church.”³¹ He was suspended from office.

The influence of Rev. Simon Williams may be viewed in the following terms. First, being well educated and erudite, he encouraged higher education.

Second, since his associations are all New Side Presbyterian, his concern was for genuine conversions. This is evidenced by the following facts: his conversion under Rev. Gilbert Tennant, his attendance at the College of New Jersey, his association with David McGregor and the Presbytery of Boston, and his association with John Murray, a popular and controversial revivalist preacher. This is further supported by the fact that he wrote the introduction to the American edition of a book on genuine religion.

Third, perhaps a negative influence of Williams may be seen in the ongoing tensions and ultimate failure of Presbyterianism in New England. Cray argues that John Murray illustrates “how geographic mobility and sermonic skill enabled maverick clerics to overcome professional penalties in the evolving polity of the Presbyterian Church in the fledgling United States.”³² It is not surprising that McKeen, with his irenic frame of mind, displays no ardour or

³¹ Blaikie, *History of Presbyterianism*, 196-7.

³² Cray, 59.

passion for any particular form of church government. The move to Congregationalism was not difficult for him. Williams's influence was obviously not strong in convincing McKeen of Presbyterianism.

5. First Congregational Church, Beverly, MA

In 1785 McKeen accepted a call to become pastor of First (Congregational) Church, Beverly, MA. His immediate predecessor, Rev. Joseph Willard, left the congregation to become president of Harvard. The congregation lost two pastors in succession to the work of higher education. McKeen was ordained on May 11, 1785. The following year he married Alice Anderson, the daughter of James and Nancy (Woodbury) Anderson of Londonderry.

Of his pastoral work Little says, "Here he labored for seventeen years with great acceptance. Though not a brilliant preacher, he was a most instructive and helpful one, and by exemplary life and fidelity to his pastoral duties, won the respect and confidence of the entire community."³³ The congregation divided after McKeen's departure. He was aware the division was coming and, speaking pointedly in his farewell address, hoped it would be conducted without contention or a "spirit of party." The subsequent history appears to indicate the division was doctrinal, not simply a church grown too large.

³³ Little, *Genealogical and Family History*, 177.

McKeen was Trinitarian, but Unitarianism was beginning to rise in New England.

6. Bowdoin College (founded 1794)

Though the population of the province and district of Maine was “not only small, but sparse and comparatively poor,”³⁴ pressure to establish an “Eastern College” emerged as early as 1788. The Massachusetts legislature finally approved the plan and a charter was established, dated June 24, 1794. The Legislature named the college after James Bowdoin II, a wealthy Boston merchant, patriot and politician. He had served as the second governor of Massachusetts, after John Hancock. His state funeral, in 1790, was reportedly one of the largest and grandest ever seen in Boston. His son, James Bowdoin III, made significant donations of a thousand acres of land as well as \$1,000 to the fledgling “Eastern College.”³⁵

Nehemiah Cleaveland remarks, “It is not strange that the trustees of Bowdoin College, when looking round for a man competent to start and carry on their new enterprise, soon fixed their eyes on Dr. McKeen.”³⁶ Though a graduate of Dartmouth, he had clear connections with Harvard, and all eyes seem to have

³⁴ Nehemiah Cleaveland, *History of Bowdoin College: with biographical sketches of its graduates, from 1806 to 1879, inclusive*. Edited and compiled by Alpheus Spring Packard (Boston: J. R. Osgood, 1882), 4.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 5.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 112.

been focused in that direction when establishing the new college. Little records that, “With a wise boldness,” McKeen “adopted the same qualifications for admission that were then required at Harvard...The young college stood in this respect in advance of others older and wealthier.”³⁷

McKeen was inaugurated as the first president of the college in 1802. His ministry in Bowdoin was decidedly evangelical. He set the tone in his Inaugural Address in the following way:

That the inhabitants of this district may have of their own sons to fill the liberal professions among them, and particularly to instruct them in the principles and practice of our holy religion, is doubtless the object of this institution; and an object it is, worthy the liberal patronage of the enlightened and patriotic legislature, which laid its foundation, and of the aid its funds have received from several gentlemen, especially that friend of science whose name it bears.³⁸

McKeen’s time at Bowdoin was short, but significant. The first commencement was the only one at which he presided. Speaking to the only class he lived to see graduate from the college he said, “God forbid that you

³⁷ Bowdoin College, *General Catalogue of Bowdoin College and the Medical School of Maine 1794-1894: Including a historical sketch of the institution during its first century, prepared by George Thomas Little* (Brunswick: Bowdoin College, 1894), xxxii.

³⁸ Joseph McKeen, *The Inaugural Address Delivered in Brunswick, September 2, 1802, By The Rev. Joseph M’Keen, A.M. & A.A.S., At His Entrance On The Duties Of President Of Bowdoin College, With An Eulogy Pronounced At His Funeral, By The Reverend William Jenks* (Portland: Thomas A. Wait & Co, 1807), 7.

should ever be ashamed to be governed by the principles of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.”³⁹

McKeen took ill in 1805, with a lingering disease described as dropsy, probably edema due to congestive heart failure. Packard records, “Having waited calmly and patiently his appointed time, the president died suddenly, as he was sitting in his chair, July 15, 1807.”⁴⁰ He was weeks short of his fiftieth birthday.

B. Religion and Bowdoin College

George M. Marsden does not include Bowdoin College in his book *The Soul of the American University: From Protestant Establishment to Established Nonbelief*.⁴¹ His research is helpful in understanding the history of Bowdoin. He highlights several common religious denominators in the establishment of colleges and universities in America, and helpfully examines unintended consequences of decisions made by these schools. Marsden observes,

³⁹ Egbert C. Smyth, *Three Discourses upon the Religious History of Bowdoin College: During the Administrations of Presidents M’Keen, Appleton, & Allen* (Brunswick: J. Griffin, 1858), 9.

⁴⁰ Alpheus Spring Packard, “Historical Sketch of Bowdoin College,” *American Quarterly Register*, 8 (1835-1836), 109.

⁴¹ (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994).

The American university system was built on a foundation of evangelical Protestant colleges. Most of the major universities evolved directly from such nineteenth-century colleges. As late as 1870 the vast majority of these were remarkably evangelical. Most of them had clergymen-presidents who taught courses defending biblicist Christianity and who encouraged periodic campus revivals. Yet within half a century the universities that emerged from these evangelical colleges, while arguably carrying forward the spirit of their evangelical forbears, had become conspicuously inhospitable to the letter of such evangelicalism.⁴²

Marsden argues that “by broadening the definitions of Protestantism,” the American Protestant establishment “managed to maintain their cultural hegemony under the rubric of consensual American ideals.”⁴³ The pressures of the rise of science, technology and Enlightenment thought all contributed to the tension between religion and public education. Yet the significant issue Marsden identifies is that of the unintended consequences of the decisions of the early founders of colleges and universities. Beginning with Harvard (the first American college, founded in 1636), he examines several decisions. These decisions are relevant to our study of McKeen.

1. Classical Greek and Latin

First, there was the decision that the curriculum include the study of classical Greek and Latin learning. This, of course, was the standard practice of

⁴² Marsden, 4.

⁴³ Ibid., 6.

medieval learning. Marsden comments, “Education was not conceivable without the pagans. Latin and Greek were the very languages of education. All the practical elements (the trivium of grammar, rhetoric, and logic and the quadrivium of arithmetic, music, geometry, and astronomy) had been established by the ancients.”⁴⁴ The important word is not ‘ancients,’ but ‘pagan.’ An unintended consequence of the importance of Athens was the undervaluing of Jerusalem. “Yet the danger,” argues Marsden, “was that to honor the pagans for their unparalleled intellectual achievement would seem to dishonor the preeminence of the wisdom revealed in Christ.”⁴⁵

Bowdoin College was established after the pattern of Harvard, indeed, to be an eastern counterpart to it. After visiting several colleges (Cambridge, Providence, New Haven, and Williamstown), McKeen established the entrance requirements. Little remarks,

With a wise boldness he adopted the same qualifications for admission that were then required at Harvard. These were a knowledge of the principles of the Latin and Greek languages, the ability to translate English into Latin, to read the Select orations of Cicero, the *Æneid* of Virgil, and an acquaintance with arithmetic as far as the rule of three. The young college stood in this respect in advance of others older and wealthier.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ Ibid., 34.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ *General Catalogue of Bowdoin College and the Medical School of Maine, 1794-1894*, xxxii.

The curriculum for the early years is not available. We may gain some insight into the curriculum through the discipline meted out to erring students and noted in the records of the Executive Government,⁴⁷ of which the following are examples.

At the meeting of March 16, 1807, President McKeen and Messrs Abbot, Cleaveland and Parker examined one Samuel Abbot, and found him guilty of “conduct disgraceful and highly dishonorable to the character of a young gentleman.” He was, while in company, “armed with two pistols, one of which at least was loaded with powder and ball, and using them in a manner unjustifiable and to the danger of his companions.” He also fastened two of the outside doors of the college “in such a manner that they could not be opened from without, with an intention to prevent the entrance of [some of] his fellow students.” Further on the evening of 14th of this month, he “discharged two pistols loaded with powder and ball within the walls of the College...” At that time he refused to give the pistols to one of the Executive Government, who was then present.

Samuel Abbot was suspended for 9 months and told to pursue his studies under Rev. Mr Weston of Gray. He was to keep up with his class and was to

⁴⁷ Records of the Executive Government, 1805-1875, Faculty: Records, Minutes and Reports. George J. Mitchell Department of Special Collections & Archives, Bowdoin College Library.

study Webber's *Mathematics* Vols. I and II, Horace, Sallust, Livy, Xenophon's *Anabasis*, Dalzel's *Collectanea Graeca Majora*, Vol. II, English Grammar, and Geography.

On October 29, 1807 a student named Thorndike was found guilty of "driving away, taking, and killing a goose, the property of an inhabitant of the town of Brunswick." He was suspended for 8 months and charged to continue his studies under Rev. Mr Tilton of Scarborough. He was to study Webber's *Mathematics* Vol. I, Horace, Sallust, Xenophon's *Anabasis* and English Grammar.

On the same day student Joseph S. Jewett was found guilty of "aiding and assisting" in the theft of the said goose, and was "guilty of receiving into his room a goose, which at the same time he knew to be stolen." He was also "often and unnecessarily absent from his chamber at the hours of study, and after nine o'clock in the evening; by illegally visiting taverns, and by various other irregular conduct rendered himself a burden and dishonorable to the College." Mr Jewett was suspended for 6 months. He was to continue his study under Rev. Mr Marrett of Standish, and was required to study "Webber's *Mathematics*, I and II, Geography, Logic, Livy, Horace, *Collectanea Gr. Maj.* and Blair."

McKeen's policy on curriculum fits the pattern outlined by Marsden. Like others he was obviously aware of the inherent danger since he took the same steps to overcome the problem.

2. Clerics as Educators

The second decision was to involve clerics in teaching. This was the generally held way to counteract the pagan influence. As Marsden puts it, "the role of clerics in education inevitably provided Christian perspectives even on pagan authorities."⁴⁸ The difficulty was that the Reformation not only provided for a much better educated clergy, but also "the cultivation of an educated laity."⁴⁹ In time this brought the tensions of the relationship between church and state much more to the fore. While Harvard's primary purpose was training men for the ministry, its public function increasingly provided graduates to serve in civil government. Marsden comments, "Like other Reformation schools, Harvard served the interests of confessionalism and of the corresponding political principle that an orderly realm should tolerate one religion, the true one."⁵⁰ As the idea of Christendom began to fade in the increasingly diverse culture of America, the place and position of the Protestant clergy began to diminish.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 35.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 36.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 40.

The decision to appoint a clergyman as president of Bowdoin College set the tone. McKeen was a churchman. He was licensed by the Presbyterians and ordained by the Congregationalists. Furthermore, several Congregational clergy were involved with the founding of Bowdoin. The Cumberland County Association of Ministers petitioned the General Court of Massachusetts on November 5, 1788, requesting a charter for a college in Cumberland County. When the charter came six ministers were appointed to serve as Trustees⁵¹ (with a total of 13 members), and fourteen ministers were appointed to serve as Overseers⁵² (with a total of 42 members).

Clergymen were the educators of the new republic. Marsden remarks, "...the role of clerics in education inevitably provided Christian perspectives even on pagan authorities."⁵³ One of the peculiar results of this was that college education tended to be free of the direct study of theology. Following McKeen's death, his successor, Rev. Jesse Appleton, swiftly moved to introduce the study of theology.

⁵¹ Thomas Brown, Samuel Deane, Daniel Little, Thomas Lancaster, Tristram Gilman, and Alden Bradford.

⁵² Moses Hemmenway, DD, Silas Moody, John Thomspon, Nathaniel Webster, Paul Coffin, Benjamin Chadwick, Samuel Eaton, Samuel Foxcroft, Caleb Jewett, Alfred Johnson, Elijah Kellogg, Ebenezer Williams, Charles Turner and, Ezekiel Emerson.

⁵³ Marsden, 35.

Bowdoin College not only follows the pattern with successive clergy-presidents, but the trend is also clear in the oversight of suspended students. In the examples from the Executive Government above, suspended students were placed under the care of the local established clergyman. He was obviously not only required to oversee their studies, which were listed, but to aid the erring student to greater virtue. The relationship of a well-educated clergy to a well-educated citizen was clear. What was not clear was how long this relationship would last.

3. Daily Christian Liturgy

The third decision was to surround studies with an atmosphere of Christian liturgy. Harvard started and ended the university day with worship. This was to indicate that all of life was for the glory of God, even the study of dead pagan treatises. McKeen seems to have been particularly aware of this, since he not only established compulsory daily prayer and devotional exercises, but he also made the effort to preach at weekly chapel. The Executive Government once more gives a glimpse into this Christian liturgy.

The first recorded meeting of the Executive Government was on April 2, 1805. Present were, “the President, Messrs. Abbot and Willard.” Samuel Willard served as a tutor for one year. His New England lineage is impressive. His ordination, in 1808, sparked one of the early ruptures between Trinitarian and Unitarian Congregationalists in New England.

The records begin by informing us that “by examination, John O’Brian and Moses Quimby” were found guilty of “repeated acts of violence committed on each other under the influence of ungoverned passion,” and were therefore “to be publicly admonished.” The Executive Government noted that this action was aggravated by the fact that it appears to have happened at prayer time, in fact as the bell was being rung for attendance at prayer, and that “immediately after prayers you walked deliberately together into the woods, where, as your faces show, your treatment of each other resembled that of savage beasts much more than of Christians or young gentlemen who are receiving a liberal education.” The offending students were not suspended, but their parents informed and they were exhorted to repentance. The public admonition ended with a reference to Ephesians 4 and 5, “and we pray God to work in you sincere contrition of heart for this and all your sins, to clothe you with humility, and to put upon you the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, that, putting away all bitterness and anger and clamor, and evil speaking, ye may be followers of God, as dear children, and walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself for us.”⁵⁴

⁵⁴ Records of the Executive Government, 1805-1875, Faculty: Records, Minutes and Reports. George J. Mitchell Department of Special Collections & Archives, Bowdoin College Library.

Fighting was clearly not to be tolerated. The circumstances alert us to the fact that there was a bell to indicate attendance at prayer. Prayer was part of the liturgy of the College.

At a meeting on March 16, 1807, William C. Wilde was found guilty of fastening the college doors closed so that others could not enter. He was publicly admonished in chapel to “abstain from frequenting the taverns and shops, you must abstain from the influence of intoxicating liquors; and avoid associating with dissolute and licentious companions. You must not have powder in your pistols, or other fire arms in your room; nor suffer your room to be the seat of noise and riot, nor be employed in any conduct, which may prove the disgrace, or disturb the peace of College.”

The same day Jacob Herrick was also implicated in the door fastening prank. He too was publicly admonished in chapel, and a certain Mr Ellis was fined one dollar for falsehood, and record made of his punishment. This is not all we hear of Mr Ellis. On May 15, 1807, it is recorded that Sam. D. Ellis was “greatly absent from Collegiate exercises, both devotional and literary... and frequently called upon and admonished, publicly admonished in Chapel.”

The same day, we read of Thomas Davies, who was also “greatly absent from Collegiate exercises,” and also often absent from his chambers. Furthermore, “on the evening of the 11th inst. at an unreasonable hour, unlawfully present in a tavern, and then and there lewdly associating with a woman of suspicious

morals; thereby evidencing dissoluteness of morals; and grossly violating the moral law of God..." The Executive "voted that the said Davies be, and he accordingly is, hereby rusticated for the space of twelve months; and upon application for readmission the said Davies shall produce satisfactory testimonials of good behavior during his absence."

On May 18, 1807, Wood and Jewett were fined two dollars each for disorderly conduct and their punishment entered on record.

On the term bill issued on 19 May 1807, Davies and Ellis were fined 20c each for absence from public worship on the Lord's day.

On Aug 26, 1807, numerous fines of 20c, 40c, 60c, were imposed for absence from public worship. Mr Ellis was fined 2 dollars for "detaining two volumes from the library ten weeks beyond the time allowed by law."

On October 30 1807, Mr Ellis was fined 20c for neglect of an exercise.

Another person was fined for riding out of town on the Sabbath, another for absence from public worship.

The list of offences is extensive: fighting, lying, drinking, lewd association, theft, idleness, even pranks and disturbing the peace of the College. But also clear are offences such as Sabbath breaking or failure to attend daily prayers.

Several standards appear to be applied: the virtue of young gentlemen, Christianity, the privilege of men receiving a liberal education, dishonour to parents, and violation of the law of God. In typical Puritan fashion, there are stated aggravations for their sins. There was a clear attempt to surround study with a Christian atmosphere. The twin themes of conduct becoming a Christian and conduct becoming a gentleman or citizen are clearly present.

4. Scripture and Nature

Fourth was the decision to address the relationship between Scripture and nature. The dominant New England opinion was that nothing in nature would contradict Scripture. “Relating faith and science was a matter of relating two approaches to universal truths within [the New England] dogmatic context.”⁵⁵

The rise of natural philosophy was not viewed as a threat to faith. “Truths learned through the methods of philosophy and those learned from biblical authority would supplement each other and harmonize in one curriculum.”⁵⁶

One of the most significant aspects during McKeen’s presidency was the appointment of Parker Cleaveland as Professor of Mathematics and Natural Philosophy in 1805. Cleaveland was the son of a clergyman, a Harvard graduate, with subsequent studies in law and theology. He went on to teach foundational courses in chemistry and mineralogy. He is regarded as the father

⁵⁵ Marsden, 50.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

of American geology, having published the first American textbook on the subject, *Elementary Treatise on Mineralogy and Geology*.⁵⁷ Though his contact with McKeen was minimal, this appointment was significant in carrying forward the study of natural philosophy.

5. Moral Philosophy

Fifth was the decision to teach moral philosophy. Marsden notes that “with the emergence of the American republic it seemed almost self-evident that the goal of education should be to produce ‘virtuous citizens.’ Correspondingly, by the end of the century American colleges were instituting courses in moral philosophy, taught by the clergyman president, as the capstone and integrating feature of their curricula.”⁵⁸ This moral philosophy, like natural philosophy, was not viewed as a threat. It was, however, a significant shift. While it provided a “common ground for building a republic of virtue,”⁵⁹ it also had the potential for “making Christian revelation superfluous.”⁶⁰ Moral philosophy was viewed as being non-sectarian. In the particular circumstances of the new

⁵⁷ Parker Cleaveland, *An Elementary Treatise on Mineralogy and Geology: being an introduction to the study of these sciences, and designed for the use of pupils, for persons attending lectures on these subjects, and as a companion for travellers in the United States of America*. (Boston: Cummings and Hilliard, 1816).

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 51.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 51.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 50.

republic, education, and educational institutions were crucial to founding common values and beliefs.

McKeen taught this very course. Theology was for the chapel. Moral philosophy was for the lecture hall. We do not have copies of McKeen's lecture notes, but his sermons often speak to this point. So it appears, in his case, the lecture hall and the pulpit were not so separate. Since the publication of Sidney E. Ahlstrom's article, "The Scottish Philosophy and American Theology",⁶¹ it has been generally accepted that American theology was heavily influenced by the Scottish Common Sense Philosophy of Thomas Reid and others. Various scholars now question this assumption.⁶² We will particularly examine McKeen's preaching for evidence of this influence.

⁶¹ Sydney E. Ahlstrom, "The Scottish Philosophy and American Theology," *Church History* 24 (1955) 257-72.

⁶² For example, Paul K. Helseth, *Right Reason and the Princeton Mind: An Unorthodox Proposal* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2010). David Smith, *B. B. Warfield's Scientifically Constructive Theological Scholarship* (Eugene OR: Pickwick Publications, 2011).

C. Congregationalism in New England

The history of Congregationalism in New England can be summarized in three stages.⁶³ The first extends from the beginning of Congregationalism in England, (*circa* 1580) to the Great Awakening (1730s and 40s). The second runs from the Great Awakening to the Plan of Union (1801), when the Congregationalists of Connecticut and the Presbyterian Church came to an agreement for joint missionary work in the expanding West. (The Congregational churches of Massachusetts did not enter this Union.) The third period runs from the Plan of Union (1801) through the Albany Convention of 1852, to the present. McKeen's ministry is shaped by the debates of the second period, from the Great Awakening to the Plan of Union.

1. Beginnings to the Great Awakening

a. Robert Browne

Under the ministry of Robert Browne a Congregational church was gathered in Norwich, England. In 1582 Browne published a book stating Congregational principles. As a Puritan he desired to see a fuller reformation

⁶³ For a helpful summary see Williston Walker, *Three Phases of New England Congregational Development*, (Hartford, Connecticut: Hartford Seminary Publications, 1892). This is Walker's inaugural address as Waldo Professor of Germanic and Western Church History at Hartford Seminary. For more detailed analysis see Walker's *Creeds and Platforms of Congregationalism* (Philadelphia: Pilgrim Press, 1960) and *A History of the Congregational Churches in the United States* (American Church History Series, volume 3. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1916).

of the church and also to foster true spiritual development. He came to believe, however, that the only way to promote that reformation was to separate from the Church of England. This radical stance of seeking the ideal of a pure church was supported by the argument that “the kingdom off God Was not to be begun by whole parishes, but rather off the worthiest, Were they ever so fewe.”⁶⁴

b. Charlestown-Boston Church Covenant 1630

Many of the pilgrims on the Mayflower held distinctly Congregational views, having already left England because their views were not tolerated. Several churches in New England drew up covenants that were Congregational in nature. For example, the church in Salem drew up a covenant in 1629, in which the members bound themselves, “to walk together in all God’s ways.” This was renewed and expanded in 1636, strengthening the bonds of the particular congregation. The Charlestown-Boston Church drew up a similar covenant in 1630. Williston Walker notes the significance of these events:

The Charlestown-Boston covenant...was of the highest importance for the development of Congregationalism on our shores; for it was the work of men who were essentially conservative, who had no desire to break with the Church of England and did not regard themselves as separating from her. And it was the work, too, of those who were, and were to be, above all others, the leaders and founders of civil institutions in Massachusetts. In thus heartily embracing Congregationalism at the outset, the Charlestown-Boston Christian

⁶⁴ Quoted by Walker, *Creeds and Platforms*, 9-10.

community made it certain that Congregationalism was to be the polity of Puritan New England.⁶⁵

New England Puritans managed to adopt a form of separatism in their church policy without abandoning the establishment principle. Walker comments, “During the century and a half of this epoch, the thoughts of Congregationalists were centered primarily upon polity, and doctrinal differences were little felt and little debated.”⁶⁶ Since issues of polity are issues of doctrine, involving the doctrine of the church, Walker’s remarks are a little misleading. It is not true that doctrinal differences were not at issue. E. Brooks Holifield comments, “[I]t is equally accurate to depict the history of theology in seventeenth-century New England as a troubled progression marked by continual dispute, often grounded in disagreements about the covenant.”⁶⁷ Holifield goes on to detail the controversy over preparation (the extent to which the convicting law is to be preached in preparation for the gospel) involving Thomas Hooker (1586-1647) and John Cotton (1585-1652); the controversy over antinomianism (the extent to which sanctification provided evidence of justification) involving Anne Hutchinson (1592-1643); as well as controversies concerning the millennium and baptism.⁶⁸ McKeen

⁶⁵ Ibid., 130-31.

⁶⁶ Walker, *Three Phases of New England Congregational Development*, 5.

⁶⁷ E. Brooks Holifield, *Theology in America: Christian Thought from the Age of the Puritans to the Civil War* (New Haven, Conn: Yale University Press, 2003) 42.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 42-55.

does not directly refer to any of these issues. The whole issue of church polity is absent from his preaching.

c. Cambridge Synod and Platform 1646-48

The question of how particular churches in New England related to all others began to stir debate and so the General Court called a synod to discuss the issue. This resulted in the publication of the Cambridge Platform of 1648. Ahlstrom notes, “This document became the seventeenth-century platform of the New England churches, marking them off as clearly Congregational at a time when British Puritanism was dividing between a strict Presbyterian party and a kind of “Independency” which would tolerate all sects and allow each particular group to revel in whatever “heresy” it might prefer.”⁶⁹ This creed plainly states “the autonomy of the local church, the dependence of the churches upon one another for counsel, the representative character of the ministry” and “the right of the civil magistrate to interfere in matters of doctrine and practice.”⁷⁰

⁶⁹ Sydney E. Ahlstrom, *A Religious History of the American People* (New Haven, Conn: Yale University Press, 1972), 155.

⁷⁰ Walker, *Creeds and Platforms*, 185-6. Walker gives a detailed account of the Platform in chapter X, pages 157-237.

d. Halfway Covenant

Early Congregationalism favoured a regenerate membership and sought some personal religious experience as necessary for admission to full membership. This would become a more acute problem during the Great Awakening. A precursor to the problem, however, was resolved with the so-called Halfway Covenant. The pressing question in the succeeding generations of colonists was what to do with the children of those who had themselves been baptized as infants but had not professed that experience the churches expected for admission to full membership. Since they were so-called non-communicant members of the church, they were in some way connected to the church, though they had not professed such a spiritual experience as to become full communicant members. Rather than let these people, and their children, fall out of the church, a halfway position was adopted: they were considered as halfway members, and their children were eligible for baptism. This Halfway Covenant quickly became the policy of all New England Congregational churches. Since Massachusetts permitted only church members to vote, this was also politically expedient. Every community had those who were communicant members (the church), those who were halfway members (the congregation), and the unconverted population (the parish). Solomon Stoddard took the Halfway Covenant a step further and began offering communion to the halfway members, thus further undermining the original attempt of striving for a regenerated membership. In *The Doctrine of Instituted Churches Explained and Proved from the Word of God*, Stoddard asserts that, “All Adult

Persons that are fit to be admitted into the Church, ordinarily have all those qualifications requisite to the participation of the Lords Supper.”⁷¹ Halfway members had been admitted to the church, and in Stoddard’s view, should be admitted to the Lords Supper. Later in the book he asks “whether such Persons as have a good Conversation and a Competent Knowledge, may come to the Lords Supper, with a good Conscience, in case they know themselves to be in a Natural Condition?” He answers as follows: “They may and ought to come, tho they know themselves to be in a Natural Condition; this Ordinance is instituted for all the Adult Members of the Church who are not scandalous, and therefore must be attended by them; as no Man may neglect Prayer, or hearing the Word, because he cannot do it in Faith, so he may not neglect the Lords Supper.”⁷² This would have an enormous impact on the life and ministry of his grandson and successor, Jonathan Edwards.

In the end, the Halfway Covenant brought about increasingly formal religion. C. C. Goen comments, “In actual operation, the Halfway Covenant served not to lead men into full relationship with the church, but to encourage them to

⁷¹ Solomon Stoddard, *The Doctrine of Instituted Churches Explained and Proved from the Word of God* (London: Ralph Smith, 1700), 19.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 21.

remain content with their halfway status. The measure designed to protect experiential piety in the churches actually furthered its decline.”⁷³

2. The Great Awakening.

The ten years between 1734 and 1744 saw significant spiritual controversy. Following a period of low religious experience, the preaching of men such as George Whitefield, Jonathan Edwards, Gilbert Tennant, and many more, awakened an interest in religion. Some of the innovations of this awakening, however, caused controversy. Goen helpfully summarizes these innovation as follows: the rise of itinerant preaching, undermining the churchly order of settled communities; the emphasis on dramatic conversions, which went beyond the older emphasis on spiritual experience; an emphasis on emotional extravagance, more resembling a ‘tempest of ungoverned passions’; and finally the rise of ministerial factions, to an extent never seen before in the Colonies.⁷⁴

This brought about a division among the Congregationalists. Those who were in favour of the revival and its attendant methods were known as the New Lights, and those who opposed these innovations were dubbed the Old Lights.

⁷³ Goen, *Revivalism and Separatism in New England, 1740-1800* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1962), 5. For a detailed account of the Halfway Covenant and its literature, see Williston Walker, *Creeds and Platforms*, chapter XI, 238-339.

⁷⁴ Goen, 8-35.

A similar division occurred among the Presbyterians in the Middle Colonies, with the names New Side and Old Side. As we have seen, McKeen was nurtured in a New Side Presbyterian Church in Londonderry, NH.

This was a period of fragmentation. Matters of church polity led to dispute over doctrinal issues such as the doctrine of original sin, the freedom of the will, justification by faith, and the relation of faith and reason. Eventually three groups became apparent: Arminians, Edwardeans, and moderate Calvinists (also known as Old Calvinists).⁷⁵ New England Arminians not only attacked Calvinistic orthodoxy, but had greater confidence in the reasonableness of theology and the ability of human nature. This group began to drift towards liberalism and Unitarianism. The Edwardeans believed that revelation stood above reason and viewed themselves as consistent Calvinists, linking the doctrine of the sovereignty of God with the sinner's responsibility to repent immediately. This group further developed after Edwards to form the New Divinity of Hopkins and Bellamy. The moderate Calvinists "never formed a unified movement, but because they presented themselves as the defenders of tradition, they became known as the Old Calvinists".⁷⁶

⁷⁵ For a helpful summary see E. Brooks Holifield, *Theology in America*, chapter 6, 127-156.

⁷⁶ Holifield, 149.

The ministry of Rev. Joseph McKeen took place largely within this period and reflected the topics of debate. He often spoke of the reasonableness of Christianity, yet always acknowledged the need for special revelation and the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit. His understanding of virtue needs to be viewed within the disputes of this era.

C. Plan of Union 1801

Congregationalism in Massachusetts maintained a looser form of church association, while that in Connecticut was stricter. Consequently the Congregationalists of Connecticut were much closer to the Presbyterians of the Middle States. As western emigration intensified these two bodies came to agreement to cooperate in church planting in the new settlements. The Plan of Union was ratified in 1801. Meanwhile, in Massachusetts Congregationalism finally moved to an irrevocable split over the issue of Unitarianism. Beginning in 1805, with the appointment of Henry Ware, a Unitarian, to the Hollis Chair of Divinity at Harvard, the controversy rumbled on for two decades until the Unitarians formed the American Unitarian Association in 1825.⁷⁷

Massachusetts Congregationalists eventually moved closer to other Congregational Associations and the first national Assembly met in Albany, NY, in 1852.

⁷⁷ For an excellent introduction see Conrad Wright, *The Beginnings of Unitarianism in America* (Boston: Starr King Press, 1955).

II. SCOTTISH COMMON SENSE REALISM AND COMMON GOOD

In this section we shall examine the subject of Scottish Common Sense Realism in order to assess what influence, if any, it exerted on Joseph McKean's call for the common good. We will outline the origins and theological influences of this philosophy in America, particularly noting the influential voice of Edwards. We will note recent scholarly questioning of the influence of Scottish Common Sense, and then turn to McKean himself. We will seek to identify if he believed serving the common good was self-evident, or whether it was based on other philosophical foundations.

The influence of Scottish Common Sense Realism on American political life is obvious. When the Continental Congress of 1776 declared, "We hold these truths to be self-evident," thereby declaring independence from Great Britain, it was using the language of Common Sense Realism. This approach to ethics is based on universal human instincts that did not need to be defined or defended in a formal epistemology. The theory was put forward in Scotland by several philosophers, including Thomas Reid (1710-1796), and Dugald Stewart (1753-1828). Mark Noll observes, "the fullest popular spread of this

commonsense reasoning, albeit in terms considerably altered from their Scottish origin, occurred in the early United States.”⁷⁸

A. Scottish Common Sense in America

In his introduction to the theme, Noll uses various phrases to describe the theory: “the new moral philosophy,” “theistic common sense,” “theistic mental science,” or “the evangelical Enlightenment.” His study leads him to conclude that

these patterns of commonsense moral reasoning shaped theology just as distinctly as did assumptions of republican politics. In the decades between the Revolution and the Civil War, almost all Americans, especially Christian ministers who ventured into print, relied strategically on the weight of “self-evident truths” or “intuitive truths,” even as they expressed repeatedly the conviction that “the best reason which anyone can have for believing any proposition is that it is so self-evident to his intellectual faculty that he cannot disbelieve it.” So self-evident were these mental procedures that few paused to realize how different they were from earlier habits of mind, especially in the earlier history of Protestantism.⁷⁹

1. Scottish Common Sense Comes to America

The earlier history of Protestantism, to which Noll refers, shows a certain distrust of the ability of the human mind both to be able to discern good or to

⁷⁸ Mark A. Noll, *America's God: From Jonathan Edwards to Abraham Lincoln* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 94.

⁷⁹ Noll, 95, n8. The quotation regarding the best reason for believing being self-evident is from a lecture on epistemology by Archibald Alexander.

reason concerning God. For example, William Ames (1576-1633) states that, where “Aristotle holds...that the judgment of prudent men is the rule for virtue, there are nowhere such wise men under whose judgment we might always stand.”⁸⁰ The irony of the common sense reasoning is that it undermines the doctrine of the *noetic* effects of sin: the futility of thinking in the unconverted state (Romans 1:21). It grants innate powers to the human mind, but minimizes the effects of sin on human reasoning. As we shall see in our discussions on the subjects of virtue and the Trinity, this epistemology became part of a larger shift in theology in New England.

Noll proposes that the new moral philosophy thrived in the United States because it “suited so perfectly the needs of the emerging nation.”⁸¹ As the Colonies convulsed in revolution, the danger of chaos and anarchy was only too obvious. Scottish commonsense reasoning secured public order and public virtue without having to retain traditional religious authority. Virtue did not need theology. To break with Britain was one thing, to raise a new society was another, but to define the role of the Church in that new society so that it was not seen as a tyrannical authority was another thing altogether. Reid and

⁸⁰ William Ames, *The Marrow of Theology* (3d Latin ed., 1629), trans. and ed. John Dykstra Eusden (Boston, 1968), 225-26. Quoted by Noll, 96.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 103.

Hutcheson paved the way. Human beings could not only know what was good, but could do what was good.

It needs to be observed that this theory did not necessarily deny the place of divine revelation. It affirmed the reasonableness of Christianity and “sought to establish the authority and limits of reason.”⁸² One of the effects of this was to restrain metaphysical speculation. This restraint is clearly evidenced in the restrained discussion of the doctrine of the Trinity prior to 1805. While most theologians accepted that the truths of revelation stood above reason, it would not be long until any revelation that was not reasonable would be denied. Scottish Common Sense reasoning showed the rationality of the Christian faith, while retaining the need for revelation. The difficulty, of course, was that in theological debate, “advocates of conflicting views always found consciousness on their side.”⁸³ In Ahlstrom’s memorable phrase, in America, the Scottish philosophy was “the handmaiden of both Unitarianism and Orthodoxy.”⁸⁴ Debates over the nature of sin, conversion, sanctification, the person of Christ, and the inner relations of the Trinity would all be influenced by the Scottish philosophy.

⁸² E. Brooks Holifield, *Theology in America*, 175.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 179.

⁸⁴ Sydney E. Ahlstrom, “The Scottish Philosophy and American Theology” *Church History* 24 (1955), 267.

2. Contribution to American Theology

Ahlstrom outlines three contributions of the Scottish philosophy to American theology. Firstly, the humanistic tendency of this view tended to run against the theocentricity of Calvin. “Self-consciousness became the oracle of religious truth. Man’s need rather than God’s Word became the guide in doctrinal formulation.”⁸⁵ Secondly, the optimistic anthropology “veiled the very insights into human nature which were a chief strength of Calvin’s theology.”⁸⁶ Thirdly, it accelerated the “long trend toward rational theology.”

Ahlstrom’s conclusion is stark. “A kind of rationalistic *rigor mortis* set in.”⁸⁷

3. Edwards and Scottish Common Sense

In his recent biography of Jonathan Edwards, George Marsden notes that Edwards did not live long enough to read the work of Thomas Reid, but he was certainly familiar with the work of Francis Hutcheson (1694-1746) and the trends in British moral philosophy. The new moral philosophy troubled Edwards because while he believed that humans had an inbuilt moral faculty, “yet he saw it not as a reliable subjective sensibility so much as a rational ability to approve of proportion and harmony, as one might appreciate the

⁸⁵ Ibid., 269.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

proportions of a triangle or the harmonies of a melody.”⁸⁸ Consequently, while it was of great value for regulating society, it was not to be considered as true virtue.

Marsden comments, “Although Hutcheson and Edwards worked in the same universe of discourse, their views were poles apart because the Scottish philosopher, like most of his contemporaries, was assuming that nature and human nature provided normative guides to human life.”⁸⁹ Edwards clearly did not agree. The concluding paragraph of chapter two of his *Treatise on True Virtue* states,

Hence it appears that these *schemes* of religion or moral philosophy, which, however well in some respects they may treat of benevolence to *mankind*, and other virtues depending on it, yet have not a supreme regard to God, and love to him, laid in the *foundation* and all other virtues handled in a *connection* with this, and in a *subordination* to this, are no true schemes of philosophy, but are fundamentally and essentially defective. And whatever other benevolence or generosity towards mankind, and other virtues, or moral qualifications which go by that name, any are possessed of that are not attended with a *love to God*, which is altogether above them, and to which they are subordinate, and on which they are dependent, there is nothing of the nature of true virtue or religion in them. And it may be asserted in general that nothing is of the nature of true virtue, in which God is not the *first* and the *last*; or which, with regard to their exercises in general, have not their first foundation and source in apprehensions of God's

⁸⁸ Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards, A Life* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2003), 469.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 465-6.

supreme dignity and glory, and in answerable esteem and love of him, and have not respect to God as the supreme end.⁹⁰

This statement makes clear that Edwards' thinking distinguished between a merely speculative understanding of what God has revealed, and a spiritual understanding. Edwards affirms that the new birth is necessary for a religious epistemology, since "nothing is of the nature of true virtue, in which God is not the *first* and the *last*." The only way to know God is through the new birth, a work of the Holy Spirit. The movement of the Spirit within the heart brought a "true sense of the excellency of the things revealed...it elicited a consent that the natural reason could never have given since reason alone could never discover 'the beauty and loveliness of spiritual things.'"⁹¹

Edwards's view, however, did not dominate subsequent theology. As Holifield observes,

The honors of priority in the introduction of Scottish Realism to America have gone to the Presbyterian immigrant John Witherspoon (1723-94), who used Reid's ideas to overcome Edwardean idealism when he became the president the (sic) College of New Jersey (Princeton) in 1768. By the 1790s the Scottish philosophy had a secure place in the lectures of David Tappan at Harvard and Timothy Dwight at Yale. Leonard Woods made it part of the seminary training at

⁹⁰ Jonathan Edwards, "Treatise on True Virtue." *The Works of Jonathan Edwards, Vol. 8 Ethical Writings*, Ed. Paul Ramsey (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1989), 560.

⁹¹ J. Edwards, quoted by E. Brooks Holifield, 110.

Andover, and it became the reigning philosophy in every Protestant seminary of note.⁹²

Witherspoon, however, may not have made use of Reid, as Holifield claims. Witherspoon apparently denied that he had been influenced by Reid, claiming that his own work had anticipated that of Reid.⁹³ On the other hand, Witherspoon appears to have made direct use of Hutcheson, so much so that Noll says, “Witherspoon in fact incorporated so much material from Hutcheson’s writings that, in the opinion of the most careful modern student of the subject, Witherspoon’s work ‘borders on plagiarism.’”⁹⁴ While a friend to Edwards’ theological view, Witherspoon clearly did not share Edwards’ philosophical views.⁹⁵

4. Helseth’s Unorthodox Proposal

In an important work, Paul Kjoss Helseth interacts with the scholarly consensus to argue against over-emphasizing the influence of Scottish

⁹² Ibid., 175.

⁹³ Cf. the discussion by Noll, *America’s God*, 105-6. Noll leans on the work of Varnum Lansing Collins, *President Witherspoon*, 2 vols (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1925) 1:41.

⁹⁴ Ibid., 106, n53. Noll is quoting Jack Scott, ed., *An Annotated Edition of Lectures on Moral Philosophy by John Witherspoon*. (Newark, Del.: University of Delaware Press, 1982) 27.

⁹⁵ For a detailed discussion of the legacy of Witherspoon and the swift introduction of Scottish Common Sense Realism to the College of New Jersey, see Mark A. Noll, *Princeton and the Republic, 1768-1822, The Search for a Christian Enlightenment in the Era of Samuel Stanhope Smith* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989) 16-58.

philosophy.⁹⁶ In the opening pages he quotes George Marsden suggesting why the Scottish realism attracted so many believers. The quotation is significant because it brings together the issues of ‘right’ reasoning and moral behaviour.

Many believers in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were attracted to Scottish Realism because it affirmed the existence “of both reality and morality,” and thus supplied the philosophical justification for “both a popular intellectual defense of the faith and a clear rationale for moral reform.”⁹⁷

Helseth outlines three reasons Scottish realism was compelling for the American church. First, “it challenged a perceived defect in Locke’s concept of ‘idea.’”⁹⁸ John Locke (1632-1704) argued that at birth, the mind is a blank slate, a *tabula rasa*, and that our knowledge is not derived from some pre-existing universal truth, but from our own experience by reason of our sense organs. Bernard Ramm comments, “If such a system is thoroughly carried out it is known as *sensationalism* for the origin of knowledge and the adjudication of knowledge is in the senses.”⁹⁹ Helseth comments that Scottish Common Sense Realists “looked with scorn on Locke’s ‘theory of ideas’ because they were convinced it left the mind without access to objective reality and thereby

⁹⁶ Paul Kjos Helseth, “*Right Reason*” and the Princeton Mind: an Unorthodox Proposal (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing, 2010). Cf. Tim McConnell, “The Old Princeton Apologetics: Common Sense or Reformed?” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 46/4 (December 2003) 647-72.

⁹⁷ Helseth, 8-9.

⁹⁸ Helseth, 9.

⁹⁹ Bernard Ramm, *Varieties of Christian Apologetics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, rev. ed. 1961), 111.

denied the possibility of objective knowledge.”¹⁰⁰ The Scottish Common Sense Realists believed Locke’s theory left the mind imprisoned in sense and introspective experience. Knowledge was not confined to *sensationalism*, but to *realism*. This appeal to realism had strong appeal in the pragmatic early republic. It cut the knot of speculation and moved directly to action.

Second, “it affirmed that true knowledge of objective reality is possible because of how our minds are constructed.”¹⁰¹ The Scottish philosophers argued that it was absurd to deny self-evident truths, because these truths are “forced upon us by the constitution of our nature.”¹⁰² For example, Thomas Reid lists seven benevolent affections “which appear to me to be parts of the human constitution.”¹⁰³ These affections are the following: that of parents and children, and other near relations; gratitude to benefactors; pity and compassion toward the distressed; esteem of the wise and the good; friendship; the passion of love between the sexes; and public spirit, an affection to any community to which we belong.¹⁰⁴ This reasoning sidesteps

¹⁰⁰ Helseth, 9.

¹⁰¹ Helseth, 9.

¹⁰² Helseth, 10, quoting Grave.

¹⁰³ Thomas Reid, “Essay III. Of the Principles of Action.” *Essays on the Active Powers of Man* (Edinburgh: John Bell and G.G. J. & J. Robinson, 1788), 161.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, “Chapter IV, Of the Particular Benevolent Affections”, 148-162.

speculation about affections “acquired by education, or by habits and affections grounded in self-love.”¹⁰⁵ It releases the energy of nation builders.

Third, Scottish Realism “commended the ‘Baconian Philosophy.’”¹⁰⁶ E.

Brooks Holifield notes three significant lessons from Baconian principles.

“[T]he first was that progress came through the observation of particular facts as a prelude to generalization... The second was that theology should avoid the metaphysical, or speculative, or theoretical... The third was that the theologian, like the naturalist, should become an expert in taxonomy, the discipline of classifying the facts and ordering the classifications.”¹⁰⁷ Holifield asserts that the Scottish Common Sense Realists were inspired by Bacon to “establish the authority and the limits of reason.”¹⁰⁸

5. Scottish Common Sense and Bowdoin College

In his *History of Bowdoin College*, Louis Hatch notes the early curriculum required students in their junior year to study Locke (1632-1704), *An Essay concerning Human Understanding*. In their senior year they studied the following philosophical and theological works: Paley (1743-1805), *View of the*

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 162.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 10.

¹⁰⁷ Holifield, 174-75.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 175.

Evidences of Christianity; Butler (1692-1752), *Analogy of Religion, Natural and Revealed*; Stewart (1753-1828), *Elements of the Philosophy of the Human Mind*; Burlamqui (1694-1748), *The Principles of Natural Law*; Enfield (1741-1797), *Institutes of Natural Philosophy*; and Priestley (1733-1804), *Lectures on History and General Policy*.¹⁰⁹

Students were clearly introduced to the major themes in British moral philosophy. The work by Duguld Stewart is most significant in showing that the Scottish Common Sense philosophy was part of the curriculum. Ahlstrom refers to the place of Stewart in regards to the Scottish philosophy as being “its salesman to the world.”¹¹⁰ Clearly McKeen bought the product. The question is, what use did he make of this philosophy?

The curriculum is also important in revealing the contemporary interest in theological rationality; hence the standard works of evidential Christianity are also present. Holifield observes that “this evidentialist position consisted of the claim that rational evidence confirmed the uniqueness and truth of the biblical revelation.”¹¹¹ The result was that both natural theology and evidences

¹⁰⁹ Louis C. Hatch, *The History of Bowdoin College* (Portland: Loring, Short and Harmon, 1927), 23.

¹¹⁰ Ahlstrom, “The Scottish Philosophy and American Theology,” 260.

¹¹¹ Holifield, 5.

for revelation were important. This evidential Christianity encouraged scientific investigation since there was no expectation that anything discovered in the natural world would contradict what was revealed in Scripture. There was confidence in scientific investigation (natural philosophy) because, “it seemed to substantiate everything [religious conservatives] believed in.”¹¹² The danger, of course, is that this can lead to a purely rationalistic approach to the faith, an intellectualist treatment of the faith.¹¹³ Since Common Sense was so influential, we will look for evidence in McKeen’s preaching for his understanding of the issue. This will involve his view of reason and the senses, natural and revealed theology, the effect of sin on the mind, and the place of the new birth.

¹¹² Helseth, 11.

¹¹³ This is the charge brought against the Princeton Theology and discussed by Helseth.

B. Joseph McKeen and Scottish Common Sense

1. Reason and Reasonableness

McKeen believed in the ‘reasonableness’ of Christianity. Based on his view of both general and special revelation, which we shall mention later, he believed it was reasonable that all people should fear God and live to please him.

Preaching on January 2, 1803, he said, “If we attend to these things, does it not appear fit and reasonable that we should fear him above all? Whom should we fear in comparison with this great Being who is King of nations, and Lord of all the heavenly hosts?”¹¹⁴ Or later in the sermon, “Whenever we consider what a holy Being God is, that he is a lover of righteousness, and a hater of wickedness, we cannot avoid perceiving that it is perfectly reasonable we should fear him above all other beings in this world or in any other.”¹¹⁵ He encouraged students to use their minds. “Superstitious and groundless fears vanish when we examine them thoroughly: but the more we examine the fear of God, the more proper and reasonable it will appear.”¹¹⁶ Preaching on February 23, 1806, he asserted, “As rational creatures and moral agents, we are bound to love the Lord our God supremely because he is the supreme

¹¹⁴ Sermon on 1 Kings 18:3, *Now Obadiah feared the Lord* (also titled Ecclesiastes 5:7 *But fear thou God*). First preached in Beverly on September 18, 1791, and repeated in Bowdoin Chapel on November 3, 1805.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

good, the greatest and the best of beings, possessing all possible perfections and excellencies.”¹¹⁷

Preaching on February 13, 1803, he encouraged the students that reason and the ability to reason are gifts of God, and meant to be used.

The subjects of which the gospel treats are certainly of a very interesting nature. If what it teaches us be true, it is of infinite importance to us to attend to it, and we must be inexcusable if we take no pains to inform ourselves of its evidences nor of the doctrines and precepts which it contains. We are endued with reason, and not to use our reason in examining the things which are in the highest degree interesting to us is to despise the gift of God; it is to sin against him who made us. If the gospel be not true, still as rational creatures we ought to examine and satisfy ourselves about it. And if it be true, it will answer little purpose for us to plead hereafter before our Judge that we did not think it of sufficient importance to deserve our attention. Such an excuse as this cannot be admitted as good.¹¹⁸

McKeen consequently viewed righteousness and goodness as reasonable. In the sermon on 1 Kings 18:3, he asserted, “There is a reasonableness and fitness in righteousness and goodness, by which they approve themselves to our minds. And the fitness of a thing is a sufficient reason always for the Deity to do it.” He went on to say, “But this is not the case with us. The intrinsic excellence of righteousness, truth and goodness is not a sufficient motive for

¹¹⁷ Sermon on Colossians 1:10, *That ye might walk worthy of the Lord, unto all pleasing*. First preached in Beverly on May 6, 1798.

¹¹⁸ Sermon on John 1:11, *He came unto his own, and his own received him not*. First preached in Beverly on February 28, 1796, and preached on numerous occasions.

imperfect creatures to practice them.”¹¹⁹ Reason is obviously not sufficient for righteousness and goodness. McKeen often returns to the inadequacy of reason as a basis for benevolence and true religion. For example, in the same sermon he says, “The mere reasonableness of doing right will have little influence on a man’s conduct if he has no belief of God’s existence or his being the universal Governor and Judge of the world.”¹²⁰ McKeen moves from rationality to the inadequacy of rationality by alluding to faith and the need to believe in the existence of God. He makes this clear preaching on December 23, 1804,

In discoursing on the text I propose first, to show that reason or the light of nature has been found by experience to be insufficient to teach men the knowledge of God, for the most learned and polished nations were gross idolaters till they were instructed and reformed by the Jews or their writings...¹²¹

However highly any may think of the powers of the human mind, and of the sufficiency of reason to lead men to the knowledge of the most important truths of religion, yet it is a fact which cannot be denied that a fair experiment was made. Philosophy, eloquence, human sciences in general, the arts of peace and of war were cultivated with great diligence and success. The works of many men eminently learned have been handed down to us, and we may justly admire the great progress

¹¹⁹ Sermon on 1 Kings 18:3, *Cf. n114 above*.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*

¹²¹ Sermon on John 4:22, *Ye worship ye know not what; we know what we worship; for salvation is of the Jews*. First preached in Beverly on June 10, 1797.

that they have made in human science. But the proficiency they had made in divine knowledge was comparatively very small.¹²²

Due to the nature of sin, McKeen counselled not to think too highly of our rational powers.

If we have so high an opinion of our own understanding that we imagine it is sufficient to direct us to the knowledge of all important truth, we shall not see our need of instruction from Jesus Christ and his apostles. The doctrines of the gospel appeared contemptible to the conceited philosophers of Greece. If we have a high opinion of our own righteousness, we shall not set a high value on that provision which is made by Christ and revealed in the gospel for the pardon of our sins and the acceptance of our persons with God. If we be not sensible of the corruption and treachery of our hearts and the deceitfulness of sin, we shall not feel our need of the power of the grace of Christ to deliver us from sin, to subdue our lust, and to purify our hearts.¹²³

For this reason McKeen stresses the importance of revelation, both general and special. On numerous occasions he reminded the students that we do not reason our way to goodness and righteousness rather God's grace is necessary. Preaching on February 17, 1805, he said, "If men by the power of their own reason were unable to deliver themselves from their natural ignorance and from the superstition that prevailed almost universally, it was an act of great goodness in God to condescend to be their instructor and guide, and to convey

¹²² Ibid.

¹²³ Sermon on Acts 4:11, *This is the stone which was set at naught of you builders, which is become the head of the corner*. First preached in Beverly on June 4, 1797.

instruction to them in such a way as was likely to be most useful to them.”¹²⁴

He is not here arguing for the new birth. This is first of all an argument for revelation, the need for God to reveal himself and his will. McKeen believed that God had done that in both general revelation and special revelation.

2. General Revelation

“Reason, or the light of nature, teaches every reflecting mind that imperfection and vice can have no place in the eternal Being who is the Creator, Preserver, and Benefactor of the universe.”¹²⁵

General revelation reveals the first principles of religion. Preaching on

November 13, 1803, McKeen argued,

These first principles of religion are asserted and illustrated by divine revelation, but they do not depend on supernatural revelation for their evidence. The works of God furnish us with the evidence of his existence which must be acknowledged before any revelation can be received as from him. Hence inspired writers appeal to the things that are made to prove the existence of the Maker. The invisible things of him, saith the apostle Paul, from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and godhead.¹²⁶

¹²⁴ Sermon on John 5:39, *Search the Scriptures*. First preached in Beverly, August 12, 1792.

¹²⁵ Sermon on Revelation 15:4, *Who shall not fear thee, O Lord, and glorify thy name? For thou only art holy*. First preached in Beverly on September 28, 1800.

¹²⁶ Sermon on Psalm 58, *Verily he is a God that judgeth in the earth*. (Also titled 2 Tim 4:8, *The Lord, the righteous Judge*, and Psalm 22:28, *For the kingdom is the Lord's and he is the governor among the nations*.) First preached in Beverly on March, 9, 1794.

The works of God are not restricted to the physical creation, but also the nature of our own minds. In the same sermon McKeen pointed out, “The very frame of our own minds therefore teaches us to acknowledge that God is the moral Governor of the world, that he loves righteousness and hates wickedness, and that we are the subjects of a moral government and that verily there is a God who judgeth in the earth.”¹²⁷

In a sermon on September 1, 1805, he gives a fuller list of the parts of general revelation, including the heavens, the earth, the seasons, providence and the nature of man, body and mind.

The heathens had the works of God before their eyes, from whence without his written word they might have learned his being, power, wisdom and goodness. The heavens declare the glory of God, and the earth abounds with tokens of his goodness. The wonderful formation of man, his powers of mind and body, the succession of seasons and the order of providence, speak to the ear of reason a very plain and intelligible language. They proclaim that there is a being above, the Maker, Preserver, and Governor of the world. The faculty of distinguishing between right and wrong, or between moral good and evil, and the tendency of virtue to make men happy and of vice to make them miserable afford us strong evidence that our Maker loves righteousness and hates wickedness, and that we are the subjects of his moral government.¹²⁸

¹²⁷ Ibid.

¹²⁸ Sermon on Romans 1:21, *When they knew God, they glorified him not as God.* (Also titled Daniel 5:23, *And the God in whose hand thy breath is, and whose are all thy ways has thou not glorified.*) First preached in Beverly on March 1, 1801.

McKeen believed that general revelation was sufficient to provide a common ethic. Preaching on July 6, 1806, he says, “Reason, or the light of nature, teaches every reflecting mind that imperfection and vice can have no place in the eternal Being who is the Creator, Preserver, and Benefactor of the universe.”¹²⁹ Or again, preaching on October 28, 1804, he says, “Every rational creature should govern his conduct according to the law or rule which prescribes the duty which he owes to his Maker, to himself, and to his fellow creatures.”¹³⁰ Or again, preaching on July 10, 1803, he says, “Had we never fallen into such a state, the light of nature, or the law of God written in our hearts, might have been sufficient to direct our practice and to guide us in the way of life and peace.”¹³¹

The last quotation introduces an important qualification. The state we have fallen into is a state of sin and McKeen understands this state affects our ability to understand general revelation. He makes this clear on several occasions, as the following quotations show:

Though the being of God and his eternal power and godhead are manifested in his works, the knowledge of his being and perfections

¹²⁹ Sermon on Revelation 15:4. *Cf. n125 above.*

¹³⁰ Sermon on Mark 1:15, *Repent ye, and believe the gospel.* First preached in Beverly on September 6, 1795.

¹³¹ Sermon on Luke 4:18 *The Spirit of the Lord is upon me because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor.* (Also titled Isaiah 61:1, *The Spirit of the Lord is upon me...*) First preached in Beverly on April 4, 1802.

was actually obtained by very few. The knowledge of the true character of God is of the utmost importance. This first principle of religion was so much corrupted by the vain imaginations of men that they changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man and even to birds, and beasts, and creeping things.¹³²

Again, all human inquiries without the aid of divine revelation are necessarily attended with much darkness.¹³³

For though the being and perfections of God may be known from the visible works of creation, yet the fact is, that the most learned and polite heathen nations did continue in the most stupid idolatry till the gospel of Christ was introduced among them.¹³⁴

Men, from the light of nature, usually form very imperfect notions of that universal rectitude [of] God, and the heathen systems of morality were very defective. And the corrupt glosses which the Jewish doctors had given of the law had rendered it extremely defective as a standard of moral rectitude or a rule of life. Therefore Christ charged them with making void the law by their traditions.¹³⁵

¹³² Sermon on Isaiah 9:2, *The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light; they that dwell in the land of the shadow of death, upon them hath the light shined.* First preached in Beverly on November 20, 1796.

¹³³ Ibid.

¹³⁴ Sermon on Colossians 1:13, *Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear son.* (Also titled Ephesians 5:8, *For ye were sometimes darkness, but now ye are light in the Lord*, and 1 Peter 2:9, *Who hath called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.*) First preached in Beverly on July 26, 1789.

¹³⁵ Sermon on John 8:12, *Thus spake Jesus again unto them saying, 'I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life.'* (Also titled John 12:46, *I am come a light into the world, that whosoever believeth on me shall not abide in darkness*, and Matthew 4:16, *The people which sat in darkness saw a great light; and to them which sat in the region and shadow of death light is sprung up.*) First preached in Beverly on October 9, 1791.

3. Special Revelation

Noting the insufficiency of reasoning, even from God's general revelation in creation, McKeen goes on to argue the necessity of special revelation. It is his view that, "This is a subject which I think deserves to be carefully considered by those who reject the scriptures upon the pretense that a revelation is unnecessary, that reason and the light of nature sufficiently teach men the knowledge of God and their duty."¹³⁶

In several sermons he emphasizes the importance of God's gracious revelation of himself in Scripture. The following two quotations are typical:

But whatever difficulties we might meet in contemplating the ways of God to men if we had only the light of nature to direct us, they are in a great measure removed by the revelation which he had given us of his will in his word. He has therein assured us not only that he exercises a moral government over us in this world, but that we are to be judged and rewarded or punished hereafter according to the things done in the body.¹³⁷

As a fair experiment has been made of what reason without the aid of revelation could do, and it has appeared that all the learning and philosophy of ancient Greece and Rome could not prevail to introduce a rational system of religion in opposition to errors and follies of superstition, let us be thankful for the light of revelation and walk in it, that our feet may be guided in the way of peace.¹³⁸

¹³⁶ Sermon on John 4:22. Cf. n121 above.

¹³⁷ Sermon on Psalm 58. Cf. n126 above.

¹³⁸ Sermon on John 4:22. Cf. n121 above.

An important emphasis in his preaching regarding special revelation is that what God especially reveals is his mercy, the way of salvation. Preaching on March 6, 1803, he says, “And indeed, if the true character of God were actually known, yet without a revelation of his will, it could not be certainly known on what terms offending creatures might obtain reconciliation and peace with him.”¹³⁹ He later adds, “But without a revelation of the divine will, how gloomy must be our prospects while we behold death with an unrelenting hand destroying our race, and our consciences in the mean time foreboding more dreadful miseries to follow!”¹⁴⁰

It is here that special revelation is an advance on general revelation. McKeen says,

The knowledge of God and of divine things which may be easily acquired from the sacred Scriptures is greater than the wisest of the heathens could ever acquire from the mere light of nature of the closest application. That God is reconcilable to his offending creatures could not be easily known with certainty from the light of nature, though it is true that this is intimated by the general course of his providence; for his goodness herein is so manifested as to invite us to repentance, but without an express revelation of God’s mind and will, the subject would be necessarily involved in much darkness; the darkness, however, is quite dispelled by the light of the glorious gospel.¹⁴¹

¹³⁹ Sermon on Isaiah 9:2. *Cf. n132 above.*

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁴¹ Sermon on Colossians 1:13. *Cf. 134 above.*

In the same vein, preaching on October 18, 1803, he says,

Without an express revelation of the will of God and a plain declaration of his readiness to forgive the truly humble and penitent sinner, the contrite in heart might be filled with painful doubts and anxious inquiries, whether it would be consistent with the honor of the divine government fully to forgive his sins. It is true that the goodness and forbearance of God manifested in his providential dealings with mankind might give him encouragement to hope in the mercy of his Creator, but would not the justice of God make him afraid?¹⁴²

All of this should have a profound effect on the way we behave. “A view of the purity of the divine perfections as they are revealed through Jesus Christ makes one of a humble and contrite spirit, lament that he is so unlike God, and so far short of that perfection at which he aims.”¹⁴³ Speaking on the comparison of our responsibility regarding general and special revelation, he says, “If heathens were thus criminal, how inexcusable must we be if, with much greater advantages for knowing God and knowing the relation in which we stand to him, we do not glorify him.”¹⁴⁴

¹⁴² Sermon on Isaiah 57:15, *For thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy, I dwell in the high and holy place, with his also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite man.* First preached in Beverly on September 18, 1791.

¹⁴³ Ibid.

¹⁴⁴ Sermon on Romans 1:21. Cf. n128 above.

4. Noetic Effects of Sin

McKeen clearly recognizes that merely possessing God's special revelation is insufficient. He does not assume that people would be good and virtuous merely because they knew God required it from them. Preaching on April 4, 1805, he says,

If it be said that were men taught the reasonableness or propriety of the personal and social virtues they would practice them. This must be said without evidence. It must be merely a matter of opinion which is not supported by facts. It has never been proved by experience. It is an opinion built upon the supposition that mankind is naturally so good and virtuous as to be governed by reason more than by their passions.¹⁴⁵

As we have seen, he believed that our mind has been affected by sin. Sin also affects the passions.

It is not easy to account for such conduct without supposing that his mind is blinded or infatuated by the influence of his corrupt passions. In most other cases when a person is deceived we suppose him to be true to himself and faithful to his own interest. But in this case he is both the deceiver and the deceived. He suffers some corrupt passion to gain such an ascendancy over him that every other consideration must give way. The calm dictates of the understanding and the remonstrances of conscience are disregarded. Some pretext is devised or some excuse framed for setting them aside and for following in the present instance the impulse of passion.¹⁴⁶

¹⁴⁵ Sermon on Deuteronomy 5:29, *O that there were such an heart in them, that they would fear me, and keep all my commandments always, that it might be well with them, and with their children forever.* First preached in Beverly on April 2, 1795.

¹⁴⁶ Sermon on Job 15:31, *Mankind, both he deceiver and the deceived.* First preached in Beverly on January 28, 1798.

McKeen understands the corrupting effect of sin upon the human mind and heart. Preaching on March 9, 1806, he makes this very clear.

By the apostasy of the human race from God, the knowledge of his character and will was in great measure lost. The law of God which was originally written upon man's heart was obscured by the prevalence of corruption. Though the heavens declare the glory of God, though all of his works are impressed with marks of his power, wisdom, righteousness, and goodness, yet these were strangely overlooked by the world. The great part of mankind formed the most absurd notions of God and of the worship which was due to him. They changed, as St. Paul says, the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to beasts, and creeping things; and to these they bowed down as their gods.¹⁴⁷

Mankind is naturally slow to learn and averse to admission of religious truths which forbid the indulgence of their evil inclinations and condemn the practices to which they are strongly inclined. Hence the ignorance of heathens was in a degree willful, and much more so is that of persons who continue ignorant of God when they have his word in their hand which they may consult at leisure.¹⁴⁸

5. The Holy Spirit

The heart of McKeen's theology is that we need the work of the Holy Spirit.

Our mind and passions are corrupted by sin. The essential thing we must recognize is that human reason could not determine that God would be merciful. And even if we know that God is merciful, we are not persuaded

¹⁴⁷ Sermon on John 8:12. *Cf. n135 above.*

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

because it sounds reasonable, but because of the work of the Holy Spirit. He says,

It would be wrong to suppose this darkness of men's minds to proceed from the imperfections or the weakness of their understanding merely. If this were the case, they would be the objects of pity, not of blame; but it evidently proceeds from the perverseness of their minds. They love darkness rather than light, because their deeds are evil. Their pride, their worldly-mindedness, their lusts and passions both of flesh and spirit, blind the eyes of their minds to such a degree that they do not perceive the light of the gospel, though it shines with a bright luster all around them. They may be no stranger to the great doctrines of the gospel, wherein life and immortality are brought to light; but they continue insensible of the amazing importance of these things.¹⁴⁹

He here asserts that we will continue insensible of these things because we need God's grace to change us. "But until his Spirit impresses these truths upon their hearts and shows them their importance, they are not so effectually taught of them as to live under their governing influence." We need to have the "eyes of our understanding enlightened."¹⁵⁰ McKeen explains this in classic language when he says, "The operations of the divine Spirit on the mind are secret and imperceptible, and can only be known by the effects. The manner of his operations cannot be comprehended by us; the wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell where it

¹⁴⁹ Sermon on Colossians 1:13, *Cf. n134 above.*

¹⁵⁰ Sermon on Luke 4:18 *The Spirit of the Lord is upon me because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor.* (Also titled Isaiah 61:1, *The Spirit of the Lord is upon me...*) *Cf. n113 above.*

cometh, nor whither it goeth, so is everyone that is born of the Spirit.”¹⁵¹ In the same sermon he explains this in more detail.

It is the work of the Spirit to set home the truths of the word upon the mind, to excite attention to them, and to discover to the mind the great importance of these truths. There is reason to suppose that where the light of revelation is enjoyed, the word is the principal means in the hand of God by which a sinner is effectually called from darkness into light. Hence we read of being begotten by the word of truth. And it seems to be the office of the divine Spirit so to fix the attention on the truths of the word that while one beholds the glory of the Lord, he may be changed into the same image from glory to glory.¹⁵²

In another sermon he states the point clearly:

And until by his providence, his word, and his Spirit he convinces them of the deceitfulness of all sinful pleasures, and the folly, madness and danger of all sinful courses, they regard his offers and invitations with indifference, if not with aversion and contempt. Their hearts wander far from God. They are seeking their portion in the pleasures or the gains of the world and saying, “Who will show us any good, without any hearty desires of conformity to God or of enjoying his favor?” They are deceived and they deceived themselves.¹⁵³

From these quotations it can be seen that McKeen’s epistemology is not the inconsistent theology of the Scottish Common Sense Realists. He consistently holds to orthodox doctrine, recognizing the *noetic* effects of sin, and the necessity of the work of the Holy Spirit. When he calls for pursuit of the

¹⁵¹ Sermon on Colossians 1:13. Cf. n134 above.

¹⁵² Ibid.

¹⁵³ Sermon on Luke 4:18. Cf. n131 above.

common good in his inaugural address, it is to be noted that in that same address he recognizes the need for the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit when he says, “I would not be understood to assert, nor even intimate, that human learning is alone sufficient to make a man a good teacher of religion. I believe that he must have so felt the power of divine truth upon his heart as to be brought under its governing influence.”¹⁵⁴ For McKeen, common good is not rooted in Common Sense Realism. It is deeply rooted in the Biblical view of God and man.

¹⁵⁴ *The Inaugural Address*, 6.

III. COMMON GOOD AND TRUE VIRTUE.

It ought always to be remembered, that literary institutions are founded and endowed for the common good, and not for the private advantage of those who resort to them for education. It is not that they may be enabled to pass through life in an easy or reputable manner, but that their mental powers may be cultivated and improved for the benefit of society. If it be true, that no man should live to himself, we may safely assert, that every man who has been aided by a public institution to acquire an education, and to qualify himself for usefulness, is under peculiar obligations to exert his talents for the public good.¹⁵⁵

McKeen's famous inaugural remarks do not stand in isolation from his generation. In his study of the history of higher education in America, Frederick Rudolph notes that "President McKeen spoke not only in the tradition of the Puritan colleges of New England, but of the entire Western world of the time, a tradition that recognized institutions of education as social institutions and learned men as both masters and servants of society."¹⁵⁶ In this section we will examine the relationship between common good and true virtue.

From a political perspective, it is clear that McKeen was not simply a Congregational clergyman attempting to regain social control in the early

¹⁵⁵ *The Inaugural Address*, 7-8.

¹⁵⁶ Frederick Rudolph, *The American College and University: A History* (Athens, Georgia: The University of Georgia Press, reprint 1990. Originally published New York: A. Knopf, 1962), 59.

republic. He is calling for improvement, not simply order. From a religious viewpoint, it is also clear that he is not falling into a radical individualism as shaped by the Great Awakening. He is calling for service.¹⁵⁷

A. Common Good and the New Republic

Bowdoin College was founded during the era of the early republic; the period from the establishment of the Constitution, 1787-88, to the establishing of two political parties in the 1820s. The call to serve the common good is clearly part of this era of nation building. Herbert Ross Brown, in an essay titled *Bowdoin and the Common Good*, observed that Bowdoin's first Trustees were "influenced by a wise patriotism which recognized that political independence must be safeguarded by intellectual independence, and that the maintenance of republican institutions depends upon an enlightened and virtuous people."¹⁵⁸ The use of the word 'virtuous' is important. Brown adds that the prayer of the Trustees was that "Bowdoin might not only train men to be ministers, but that it might train ministers and others to be men,"¹⁵⁹ to which we could add, not merely men, but virtuous men of the republic.

¹⁵⁷ For a helpful summary and examination of these themes see Jonathan D. Sassi, *A Republic of Righteousness: The Public Christianity of the post-Revolutionary New England Clergy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001).

¹⁵⁸ Herbert Ross Brown, *Bowdoin and the Common Good*, published by the Bowdoin College Library, 1979, 9-10.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 10

In this section, I propose to examine McKeen's phrase in the light of the theology of true virtue. It is beneficial to remember the political environment just summarized, but it is also beneficial to see McKeen's inaugural address in the light of his religious convictions. If we listen more closely to his inaugural address and commencement, as quoted in our introduction, the specifically religious aspect becomes obvious. He expressed his desire in the following way: "that the inhabitants of this district may have of their own sons to fill the liberal professions among them, and particularly to instruct them in the principles and practice of our holy religion."¹⁶⁰

In the closing words of that address he stated his desire for the College as follows: "that it may eminently contribute to the advancement of useful knowledge, the religion of Jesus Christ, the best interests of man, and the glory of God."¹⁶¹ He reiterates this in his address at the first commencement. "God forbid that you should ever be ashamed to be governed by the principles of the Gospel of Jesus Christ."¹⁶² President McKeen was a preacher – an evangelical preacher. He loved the republic, but he also loved the kingdom of God. His

¹⁶⁰ *The Inaugural Address*, 7.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 13.

¹⁶² Quoted by Egbert C. Smyth, *Three Discourses upon the Religious History of Bowdoin College, During the Administrations of Presidents M'Keen, Appleton, & Allen* (Brunswick, J. Griffin, 1858), 9.

call to serve the common good is more than patriotism; it is also an expression of his theology of virtue.

B. Common Good and the New England Theology

Joseph McKeen lived and ministered in an era that E. Brooks Holifield alludes to as a period of theological fragmentation in New England. In the wake of the Great Awakening and the monumental work of Jonathan Edwards, the issues of reason, revelation and virtue were hotly debated. Calvinism fragmented into three groups in Massachusetts: the followers of Edwards, the Arminians, and the ‘moderate’ Calvinists. Regarding reason and revelation, Holifield observes, “The disputants had no fundamental difference about reason and revelation, though they believed that they did.”¹⁶³ When it comes to virtue, however, there were fundamental differences. It is helpful to view McKeen’s emphasis on the common good in the context of the long and complicated discussion of virtue in New England.

Part of the dispute was over who could be virtuous. Strict Calvinists believed that without the transforming grace of Christ, the unconverted person was not capable of anything good. Arminians, on the other hand, questioned this theology and held a differing view of human potential. One cautious Arminian was Ebenezer Gay (1696-1787), pastor for seventy years in First Parish,

¹⁶³ *Theology in America*, 128.

Hingham, Massachusetts. In 1759 he delivered the Duddleian Lecture at Harvard, titled *Natural Religion, as Distinguish'd from Revealed*. Says Holifield, “Without denying that evangelical obedience could result only from the grace of sanctification, or that natural religion remained insufficient for salvation, he instructed his hearers not to disdain obligations discovered by the light of reason alone.”¹⁶⁴

As New England theologians wrestled with the capacity of people to be virtuous, the doctrine of original sin was abandoned, and the doctrine of the cross was modified from judicial substitutionary atonement to a governmental theory, supposedly preserving the dignity of God’s government and humanity.¹⁶⁵ It became less important that sanctification in the old Calvinist sense was required for virtue. Humanity was created to be benevolent, in a natural reflection of God. Another well known Arminian, Jonathan Mayhew (1720-1766), argued that preachers should avoid such “metaphysical niceties” and preach holiness and good works.¹⁶⁶ The implicit accusation was that Calvinists did not preach holiness. They did not call people to be holy. They were concerned with faith, but not with life. Divisions also began to appear within the Calvinist tradition between moderate Calvinists and the New

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., 129-130.

¹⁶⁵ Cf. Holifield, 128-135.

¹⁶⁶ Holifield, 131.

Divinity men (also called Edwardeans, or Hopkinsian, or sometimes simply the New England Theology).

1. New Divinity (New England Theology)

B. B. Warfield remarks that, “It was Edwards’ misfortune that he gave his name to a party; and to a party which, never in perfect agreement with him in its doctrinal ideas, finished by becoming the earnest advocate of (as it has been sharply expressed) ‘a set of opinions which he gained his chief celebrity in demolishing.’”¹⁶⁷

The New Divinity, or Edwardeans, continued to emphasize revelation and reason, but always placed revelation above reason, offering “truths that reason alone could not attain.”¹⁶⁸ They trained their sights on the subject of virtue for several reasons. They wanted to refute the Arminians, of course, but they also wanted to express indignation about viewing virtue as self-interest. This, in their view, too easily accommodated itself to the greed of the small town marketplace. Joseph Bellamy (1719-1790) published *True Religion Delineated* in 1750, arguing that “the heart of true religion and true virtue consisted in the

¹⁶⁷ Warfield, quoting Lyman H. Atwater, in “Edwards and the New England Theology,” *Studies in Theology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1932), 532.

¹⁶⁸ Holifield, 136.

love of God for God's own intrinsic excellence."¹⁶⁹ In this he was clearly following Edwards; indeed, Edwards wrote a preface to the book commending it to be read. In 1773 Samuel Hopkins published *Inquiry into the Nature of True Holiness*, arguing that he was interpreting Edwards by stating more particularly the opposition of holiness and self-love, and by defining all sin as selfishness.¹⁷⁰

Herein are the seeds of the New Divinity and the so called New England Theology. It reaches its pinnacle in the appointment of Timothy Dwight (1752-1817) as president of Yale in 1795, when the movement has developed into the New Haven Theology. George Nye Boardman's *A History of New England Theology* indicates the New England Theology covers the period 1730 to 1830. He chooses 1730 since it was the date of Edwards's settlement as pastor in Northampton, and 1830 as marking the end of discussion on the New Haven Theology.¹⁷¹

¹⁶⁹ Holifield, 137.

¹⁷⁰ Holifield, 140.

¹⁷¹ George Nye Boardman, *A History of New England Theology* (New York, A. D. F. Randolph Company, 1899). Boardman does not elaborate on why he chose 1830 as the end of the discussion. Williston Walker notes that, "in December 1829, Rev. Dr. Bennet Tyler effectively answered Nathaniel W. Taylor, the chief New Haven proponent." *History of the Congregational Churches in the United States*, 358.

The Great Awakening of 1740 served to highlight the differences beginning to stir New England Calvinists. As churches began to wrestle with spiritual awakening, they also re-examined the criteria for membership. It is to be remembered that this had been loosened in New England by the introduction of the ‘half-way covenant.’¹⁷² The question that began to agitate the churches concerned the standard of church membership, particularly the need to testify to an experience of grace. This in turn raised questions about the use of means. Goen’s statement is succinct, “Before the Great Awakening, one went to heaven from New England by a diligent employment of the ordinary means of grace offered through the regular ministrations of the churches.”¹⁷³ As the revival gripped communities, this old view was treated with suspicion, and came to be attacked as a subtle form of Arminianism.

Jonathan Edwards sought to think clearly and biblically on these issues. His most immediate response was *Some Thoughts Concerning the Present Revival of Religion in New England* (1742). This was an attempt to defend the revival while guarding against the excesses of emotionalism. In time, he turned his attention to the issues at the centre of the debate, writing *Freedom of the Will*

¹⁷² Williston Walker provides an excellent overview of the history of discussion in *The Creeds and Platforms of Congregationalism* (Philadelphia: Pilgrim Press, 1960, 2nd printing 1969), 238-339.

¹⁷³ Goen, *Revivalism and Separatism in New England*, 40.

(1754), *The Nature of True Virtue* and *The End for Which God Created the World* (1755, published posthumously in 1765), and *Original Sin* (1758).

Distinguishing the regenerate from the unregenerate led to questions concerning true virtue. Boardman states the key question, “how a will under the control of evil, can be required to prefer the good.”¹⁷⁴ The discussion of this question pulled in many subjects, including the freedom of the human will, original sin, the Divine permission to sin, the nature of sin and the nature of responsibility. The ‘Old Calvinists’, or ‘Moderate Calvinists’, were content to let concerned souls wait under the means of grace for God to probably convert them in due time. The ‘Consistent Calvinists’ called for concerned souls to repent immediately. It was not enough to put oneself under the means of grace and seek to live a moral life. They witnessed too many people believing that this was their whole duty and so desired to state their doctrines in a way that was more consistent. The division of Congregationalists into ‘old lights’ and ‘new lights’ became apparent with the first Great Awakening, but the issue was always more than a reaction to spiritual awakening. As the New England Theology progressed it became more interested in what came to be called ‘unregenerate doings.’ The question of virtue took on greater political and theological significance. Edwards defined virtue as follows, “True virtue most essentially consists in benevolence to Being in general. Or perhaps to

¹⁷⁴ Boardman, 10.

...speak more accurately, it is that consent, propensity and union of heart to Being in general, that is immediately exercised in a general good will.”¹⁷⁵

Boardman asserts that Edwards implies in many places that the virtuous state is a gift of God. The important point to note is, “the doctrine that virtue is benevolence has a large place in New England Theology.”¹⁷⁶

2. Edwards on True Virtue

The influence of Edwards on the New England discussion of benevolence cannot be overstated. His dissertation, *The Nature of True Virtue*, was published posthumously in 1765. It was prepared for publication, along with the dissertation, *Concerning The End For Which God Created The World*, by Hopkins and Bellamy, to whom Edwards’ papers had been entrusted. It is to be remembered that, “Edwards intended these dissertations to be published together. The one is the mirror of the other; the ‘end’ for which God created the world must be the ‘end’ of a truly virtuous and holy life.”¹⁷⁷

In a very useful appendix to the Yale edition of Edwards’ Ethical Works, editor Paul Ramsey makes a helpful point.

¹⁷⁵ Jonathan Edwards, *Works of Jonathan Edwards, Vol. 8 Ethical Writings*, Ed. Paul Ramsey (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 540.

¹⁷⁶ Boardman, 60.

¹⁷⁷ Paul Ramsey, 5.

In the theological battles of their own day, the New Divinity men (Bellamy, Hopkins, Emmons) identified themselves as heirs of the master theologian of the eighteenth century. Their claims served mainly to impair the continuing influence of Edwards in the intellectual history of America in the national period and in the nineteenth century. Three foci of Bellamy's system of divinity were surely not Edwardsean: his legalism, his concept of disinterested love, and his computation of virtue in terms of happiness in the whole consequences. The law of God was not Edwards' *emphasis* in theology. And, while the expression "disinterested love" can be found in Edwards' writings, there could not be a more *interested* love than his (whether by this is meant the will/love of one's own happiness on the part of any intelligent willing being, or such a being's *specific* determination to love to God and to fellow creatures). It is quite reasonable to suppose that sooner or later the charity sermons— and especially these sermons among Edwards' writings— would disturb Bellamy; and threaten his fond belief, and that of other New Divinity men, that they were only thinking Edwards' most intimate thoughts after him.¹⁷⁸

In a footnote to the above paragraph, Ramsey also emphasizes that Edwards would not have agreed with the later theologians.

No intelligent willing being can will or love disinterestedly. Such love was not among Edwards' themes, either in its New Divinity or its contemporary sense. The notion of "disinterested love" enabled Hopkins to write, as Edwards did not, a "Dialogue between a Calvinist and a Semi-Calvinist," showing that a true Christian should be willing, if God so wills it, to be damned for the glory of God. See *The Works of Samuel Hopkins, D. D.* (3 vols., Boston, 1854), 3, 143–57. In his mature years Hopkins went in quite different directions, in both substance and terminology, from those of his mentor. He used the Edwardsean language of "benevolence or good will to being in general." But this "term of art" for love to God in *True Virtue* he

¹⁷⁸ *Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 8, Appendix One, *Joseph Bellamy's Copy of the Charity Sermons*, 648-9.

promptly turned into a characteristic of the Deity, an axiom from which to reason as follows: "This is love of pure, disinterested benevolence, to creatures infinitely odious and guilty... Hence it follows with certainty, that disinterested benevolence is primary and essential in the divine moral character... And it follows from this also, that the love to God which is required, is the love of disinterested benevolence" (*The System of Doctrines, Contained in Divine Revelation, Explained and Defended... in Two Volumes* (Boston, 1811), 1, 291. Cf. pp. 52–61; and 465 ff., "On Disinterested Affection," distinguishing "self-love and a desire or *love of happiness*" [!] from "disinterested benevolence"). Hopkins presumed to know enough about the divine wisdom to write (as JE would not) a treatise entitled *Sin, Thro' Divine interposition, an Advantage to the Universe* (Boston, 1759), in *Three Sermons from Rom. iii. Romans 3:5–8* (Boston, 1773). His older associate Bellamy computed (in 1758) the happiness of the generations, whether destined for heaven or hell, so as to *prove* the advantage! The need for such theological investigations logically follows from the premise that "disinterested benevolence" is a quasi-philosophical "characteristic of the Deity."¹⁷⁹

Edwards believed that benevolence was possible as a common morality, an ethics of creation. He viewed this as a splendid thing, though, as we shall see below, he distinguished this benevolence of common morality from the benevolence of true virtue.

a. Edwards' Principia of Morality

His discussion of common morality revolves around four principles. "These elements, sources, or *principia* are (1) our sense of the secondary beauty in moral dispositions and relations, (2) self-love extended by association of ideas,

¹⁷⁹ Ibid., 648 n6.

(3) natural conscience, and (4) instinctual kind affections: pity and familial affection.”¹⁸⁰

Edwards' well-known thesis, of course, is that there is nothing of the nature of true virtue in the morality arising from these four principles; such natural dispositions are "entirely diverse" from truly virtuous goodwill. Still he is equally concerned to show that, working together or separately, these four principles adequately account for a common morality which, both in its nature and its effects, greatly "resembles" and is "agreeable" to true virtue and readily mistaken for it.¹⁸¹

By secondary beauty in moral dispositions and relations, Edwards means that there is “some image of the true, spiritual original beauty” in our common moral world. This is a law of nature. In defence of self-love, Edwards argues this is a principle or spring of disposition of action to an extensive love of others. This too, springs from the nature of creation.

Conscience is natural to mankind and consistent with ‘nature’s laws.’ Edwards speaks of conscience as

...a disposition in man to be uneasy in a consciousness of being inconsistent with himself and, as it were, against himself in his own actions. This appears particularly in the inclination of the mind to be uneasy in the consciousness of doing that to others which he should be angry with them for doing to him, if they were in his case, and he in theirs; or, of forbearing to do that to them which he would be displeased with them for neglecting to do to him.¹⁸²

¹⁸⁰ Ibid., 33.

¹⁸¹ Ibid., 33.

¹⁸² Ibid., 589.

Instinctual kind affections are the kinds of affections and actions towards others, family, or those we naturally pity.

Edwards argues there are two sources of morality, the natural and the gracious. He does not empty natural morality of meaning, and makes clear that the one is often confused with the other. One of the reasons for this is that

... although they have not the specific and distinguishing nature and essence of virtue, yet they have something that *belongs to the general nature* of virtue. The general nature of true virtue is love. It is expressed both in love of benevolence and complacence; but primarily in benevolence to persons and beings, and consequently and secondarily in complacence in virtue, as has been shown. There is something of the general nature of virtue in those natural affections and principles that have been mentioned, in both those respects.¹⁸³

Edwards' approach to the subject of virtue reflects a mature biblical balance. He uses the ethics of creation to assert benevolence in mankind, while distinguishing it from true virtue. He does not become embroiled in questions of what the unregenerate can or cannot do, and so avoids the extremes of other theologians.

b. Disinterested Benevolence

Samuel Hopkins set out to improve Edwards. "All I can pretend to, as an improvement on him, is to have explained some things more fully than he did,

¹⁸³ Ibid., 609.

and more particularly stated the opposition of holiness to self-love, and shown that this representation of holiness is agreeable to the scripture...”¹⁸⁴

This statement moves virtue completely out of the capacity of the unregenerate since it is an aspect of holiness. It asserts self-love is the pinnacle of sin, and he goes on to assert that true benevolence must be ‘disinterested.’ This phrase, ‘disinterested benevolence,’ came to dominate theological discussion for many years. Hopkins drove a wedge between self-love and benevolence to Being in general. In time this wedge resurrected the old Puritan test of whether one was willing to be damned by God if it was clear this was for the greater good. In time, this led to a discussion of benevolence as seeking the happiness of others. Dr Nathaniel Taylor defined virtue in the following way: “Virtue is making the highest happiness of the universe the ultimate object of pursuit.”¹⁸⁵ This is far removed from Edwards’ magisterial thinking.

3. Moses Hemmenway, D.D

The New England Theology did reach Maine and Bowdoin College. One of the original overseers of Bowdoin College, Rev. Moses Hemmenway, D.D. (1735-1811), publicly opposed Hopkins’ views and published several sermons

¹⁸⁴ Boardman, 133.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid., 142.

on the obligation of the unregenerate to use the means of grace.¹⁸⁶ In Hemmenway's view, there can be no harm in encouraging the unconverted to use means appointed for their conversion since they were God-appointed.¹⁸⁷ Along with others, he argued that "the unregenerate have power to obey in some degree the religious requirements of God. They have not the next, or habitual power to perform absolutely holy acts."¹⁸⁸

In reply to Hemmenway, Hopkins said,

The sinner, in all his exertions under awakenings and convictions of conscience, while under the dominion of Satan, is more like a wild bull in a net than a submissive, obedient child; and would get out of the hands of God if he could, and all his strivings are really strivings against God, as they are utterly opposed to submission to him; like the exertions of a wild beast, untamed, unsubdued, in the hands of him who is taking methods to bring him to submission.¹⁸⁹

Calvinists were not only at odds with Arminians, they were increasingly divided among themselves. Any discussion of benevolence, virtue, or serving the common good, needs to be viewed in the light of this intense discussion.

¹⁸⁶ Moses Hemmenway, *A Vindication of the Power, Obligations and Encouragement of the Unregenerate to Attend the Means of Grace* (Boston: J Kneeland, 1772).

¹⁸⁷ Boardman, 189.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid., 187.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid., 197-8.

C. McKeen on Common Good and True Virtue

It is inconceivable that McKeen would be unaware of these discussions. His inaugural address to seek the common good is not New Divinity. He does not call men to immediate repentance in order to do good. He seems, rather, to hold very much to the view of Edwards. Common good is related to common morality. In examining his sermons to the college, we become aware of his position.

In the light of Edwards' definition of true virtue as "benevolence to Being in general" it is important to note that McKeen often refers to God as 'Being'. Perhaps it was a common way of referring to God in that generation, but this title probably indicates McKeen's familiarity with, and approval of, Edwards' view on virtue. He often modifies the title as the following list shows.

"...this great Being who is King of nations, and Lord of all the heavenly hosts."¹⁹⁰

"...what a holy Being God is."¹⁹¹

"...that Being who is clothed with majesty and glory and who is perfect in righteousness and goodness."¹⁹²

"...the Supreme Being."¹⁹³

¹⁹⁰ Sermon on 1 Kings 18:3, *Now Obadiah feared the Lord*. (Also listed as a text, Ecclesiastes 5:7, *But fear thou God*). This sermon was preached in the Chapel on January 2, 1803, and again on Nov 3, 1805. First preached in Beverly on September 18, 1791, in the morning service.

¹⁹¹ Ibid.

¹⁹² Ibid.

“The name of this eternal and independent Being is called Holy to denote the perfect rectitude of his nature.”¹⁹⁴

“...this incomprehensibly great and transcendently glorious Being.”¹⁹⁵

“...the greatness and majesty of the divine Being.”¹⁹⁶

“...the world was made by a Being who is both wise and good.”¹⁹⁷

“...a righteous Being.”¹⁹⁸

“...that such a Being is the Supreme Governor of the world.”¹⁹⁹

“...the existence of ONE Supreme Being. The Creator, Preserver, and Governor of the world.”²⁰⁰

“...the existence of an invisible and just Being who governs the world.”²⁰¹

¹⁹³ Sermon on Isaiah 57:15, *For thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy; I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones.* Preached in Chapel on October 18, 1803, 2nd service. First preached in Beverly on September 18, 1791, evening service.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁹⁷ Sermon on Psalm 58, *Verily he is a God that judgeth in the earth.* (Also titled 2 Timothy 4:8, *The Lord, the righteous Judge* and Psalm 22:28, *For the kingdom is the Lord's and he is the governor among the nations.* Preached in Chapel on November 13, 1803. First preached in Beverly on March 9, 1794.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰⁰ Sermon on John 4:22, *Ye worship ye know not what; we know what we worship; for salvation is of the Jews.* Preached in Chapel on December 23, 1804. First preached In Beverly on June 10, 1797, morning service.

²⁰¹ Sermon on Deuteronomy 5:29, *O that there were such an heart in them, that they would fear me, and keep all my commandments always, that it might be well with them, and their children forever.* Preached in Chapel on April 4, 1805. First preached in Beverly on April 2, 1795, a Fast day.

“God is a merciful Being.”²⁰²

“...an almighty Being.”²⁰³

“...an infinitely wise Being.”²⁰⁴

“...the greatest, best and most excellent Being.”²⁰⁵

“...a Being who is everywhere present and who has all things constantly in his view.”²⁰⁶

McKeen believed that people had a duty to be benevolent. This was an obligation made clear not only by the gospel, but also by the nature of creation. Though he does not use the term ‘ethics of creation’ he certainly expressed the idea, referring to it as ‘this constitution of things.’ Preaching in the Chapel on July 6, 1806, he says,

Reason, or the light of nature, teaches every reflecting mind that imperfection and vice can have no place in the eternal Being who is the Creator, Preserver, and Benefactor of the universe. We are surrounded with tokens of his goodness. And experience shows us that virtue tends

²⁰² Sermon on Job 15:31, *Mankind both the deceiver and the deceived. Let him that is deceived trust in vanity: for vanity shall be his recompense.* Preached in Chapel on August 25, 1805. First preached in Beverly on January 28, 1798.

²⁰³ Sermon on Romans 1:21, *When they knew God, they glorified him not as God.* (Also titled Daniel 5:23. *And the Lord in whose hand thy breath is, and whose are all thy ways, has thou not glorified*). Preached in Chapel on September 1, 1805, and repeated in chapel on August 10, 1806. First preached in Beverly on March 1, 1801.

²⁰⁴ Ibid.

²⁰⁵ Ibid.

²⁰⁶ Sermon on Genesis 16:13, *And she called the name of the Lord that spake unto her, Thou seest me.* Preached in Chapel on November 3, 1805. First preached in Beverly on September 8, 1793, morning service. This sermon was repeated at Salem, Danvers, Upper Parish and Salem again during 1793-4.

to make men happy and vice to make them miserable. This constitution of things affords a plain intimation even to heathens, that the Father of the universe loves righteousness and hates wickedness. The same thing may be learned from attending to the constitution of our own minds, which are so framed that when they attain to the full exercise of their rational powers; they are necessarily sensible of moral obligations.

Our maker has implanted in our breasts a conscience to approve us when we do right, and to reproach us when we do wrong. It appears to be a just and natural inference from this that it is the will of God we should practice virtue and abstain from vice, and consequently that he approves of one and disapproves the other; he loves righteousness and hates wickedness, and he will invariably act accordingly because as his wisdom and power are infinite, he cannot be deceived nor tempted with evil.²⁰⁷

To be sensible of moral obligations is not the same thing as fulfilling moral obligations. McKeen is not arguing that rational power alone will make people virtuous. On the other hand, he also is not arguing that the unregenerate are like ‘a wild bull in a net’ as Hopkins suggests. His approach is far more like that of Edwards, though not as articulate and nuanced.

When it comes to the duty of the regenerate to be benevolent, McKeen preaches clearly to the students.

²⁰⁷ Sermon on Revelation 15:4, *Who shall not fear thee, O Lord, and glorify thy name? For thou only art holy*. First preached in Beverly, MA, September 28, 1800; and repeated in Salem, Dr. Barnard’s, February 1, 1801 and Bath, Mr Jenks’, June 29, 1806.

The religion which is pure and uncorrupted with superstition or fanaticism infuses a spirit of love, meekness and benevolence.²⁰⁸

Love to God and benevolence to men constitute the very essence of that religion which is pure and true. The gospel as well as the law requires these; and from these obedience to the whole will of God naturally springs, so far as his will is naturally made known to us either by the law or the gospel.²⁰⁹

Thus did Jesus teach the boundless extent of that great commandment, “Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.” Were men allowed by the gospel to confine their benevolence to persons of their own nation, language or religion, the bounds of all the little sects and parties in the world would be the bounds of their benevolence; and uncharitableness, dissension, discord, and every evil work would have the authority of the gospel to support them. And what would be the benevolence in the world when everyone would think himself justified in showing mercy only to his own sect and party? This would be no more than self love reflected, as publicans and sinners love those who love them.²¹⁰

In a brief digression during the sermon, McKeen laments that some were trying to split morality and spirituality, as though ceremonies and formal duties were superior to benevolence. This goes against the grain of his view. He is critical of those who

²⁰⁸ Sermon on Luke 10:30-37, *The Good Samaritan*. Preached in Brunswick, September 4, 1803, AM. This sermon was probably preached in First Parish Church, where students were required to attend. Cf. Thompson Eldridge Ashby, *A History of the First Parish Church in Brunswick, Maine*. Edited by Louise R. Helmreich. (Brunswick: J. H. French and Son, 1969).

²⁰⁹ Ibid.

²¹⁰ Ibid.

...did not profess any love to those who were not of their nation or religion. They valued themselves as the peculiar people of God and looked with contempt, aversion and abhorrence upon all others.

The truth, doubtless is this, their corrupt and superstitious notions of religion had hardened their hearts, had led them to suppose that they could please God and secure his favor without doing his will. They were usually employed in offering sacrifices, prayer, and performing the services of the temple. These they considered as the most sublime parts of religion, and they looked upon humanity and mercy as duties of an inferior class that might be dispensed with. This has been in all ages a too common tenor.

And notwithstanding the prophets, Jesus Christ himself and his apostles bore testimony against it and declared that true religion does not consist in sacrifices, nor modes nor forms, but in love to God, in justice, temperance and charity; and it is hard even to this day to convince many of it, who split and maim religion by separating morality from it, as if there were nothing of a spiritual nature in moral virtues.²¹¹

This is a clear reaction against the kind of Calvinism that rests in outward forms, but has no life or action.

When McKeen speaks of “disinterested benevolence” it is not in the same manner as Hopkins and Bellamy. He does not fall into a discussion of the premise that "disinterested benevolence" is a quasi-philosophical "characteristic of the Deity.”

²¹¹ Ibid.

Preaching to the chapel on July 15, 1804, McKeen speaks of the disinterested love of Christ as an example to follow:

Gratitude to our compassionate Redeemer should engage us to imitate his temper and conduct. And surely if we love him, we will keep his commandments and be animated with a generous ambition to aspire after a likeness to him who has laid us under so many obligations by his disinterested love. We can never do nor suffer so much for him, nor for our brethren, as he did for us. And can we think it hard that he requires us to be humble, benevolent, patient and resigned, when he has set us such an example without any prospect of benefit or reward from us? It is for our good and not his own that he requires us to imitate him. And can it be imagined that we have any grateful sense of what he has done and suffered for us if we have no desire to be like him, or to have such a temper or mind in us as he had? His kindness and love to us is without a parallel.²¹²

Since Edwards's discussion of common morality revolves around four principles: (1) our sense of the secondary beauty in moral dispositions and relations, (2) self-love extended by association of ideas, (3) natural conscience, and (4) instinctual kind affections: pity and familial affection, it will be helpful to examine McKeen's preaching for evidence of these *principia*.

1. Secondary Beauty

The first principle in Edwards' discussion of common morality was the concept of secondary beauty: there is "some image of the true, spiritual

²¹² Sermon on Philippians 2:5, *Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus*. First preached in Beverly on May 22, 1791 and perhaps repeated in 1797, (McKeen's note reads, "Domi, 1797 [Abroad last week]").

original beauty” in our common moral world. This theme appears in McKeen’s preaching. On September 1, 1805, he opened his chapel sermon with these words,

Every effect depends on some cause. The things that are made have a maker. And the greater the order, beauty, or utility of the things that are made, the clearer and stronger is the evidence of wisdom and goodness of him who made them.²¹³

This appeal to order, beauty, and utility of things is an appeal to secondary beauty. McKeen points to observable aspects of the created world: heavens and earth, the nature of mankind, mind and body, general providence, seasons and orderliness, conscience, distinguishing good and evil, right and wrong, and the tendency of virtue to make us happy and vice to make us miserable. All of these he uses as examples of order, beauty, and the utility of things, in order to provoke us to glorify the great Being who has made us subjects of his moral government. This is an argument from secondary beauty.

2. Self-love

In speaking of mankind’s capacity to deceive himself, McKeen appeals to the ‘principle of self-love.’ He says, “It should seem that the principle of self-love alone, or a general regard to his own happiness, might prompt him to act more

²¹³ Sermon on Romans 1:21. Cf. *n203 above*.

wisely.”²¹⁴ There is a certain simplicity in the phrase. He does not strain over the meaning of the words as does Hopkins.

In his *Inquiry into the Nature of True Holiness*, Hopkins attempts to distinguish between self-love that is merely selfish and self-love as a “love a person has for himself as part of the whole, which is implied in universal benevolence.”²¹⁵ He goes on to argue that “all sin consists in self-love.”²¹⁶ He concludes,

Self-love is, in its whole nature and in every degree of it, enmity against God. It is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be, and is the only affection that can oppose it. It cannot be reconciled to any of God’s conduct, rightly understood, but is, in its very nature, rebellion against it; which is all an expression of that love which is most contrary to self-love. This is, therefore, the fruitful source of every exercise and act of impiety and rebellion against God, and contempt of him, that ever was, or can be.²¹⁷

In the light of this intense discussion, it is noteworthy that McKeen does not attempt to strain at words in the way Hopkins does. McKeen seems far more comfortable with Edwards’ approach that there is such a thing as self-love, tending towards happiness, and that this is part of the nature of man’s constitution. Here is McKeen preaching in the Chapel in these very terms, on August 25, 1805.

²¹⁴ Sermon on Job 15:31. Cf. n202 above.

²¹⁵ *Works of Samuel Hopkins*, Vol. 3 (Boston: Doctrinal Tract and Book Society, 1854), 23.

²¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 28.

²¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 29.

We often observe in the frame of nature, and in the dispensations of divine providence, many things which are mysterious and incomprehensible. In the operations of our own minds there is frequently something not less strange. In the exercise of our own hearts there is a surprising inconsistency. Perhaps almost every person has observed that when there is no present temptation soliciting him, and he considers coolly and deliberately the consequences of vice, it seems surprising to him that he should yield to temptation, and that for a trifling momentary gratification he should be induced to break the peace of his own mind and provoke the righteous vengeance of his almighty Judge. It should seem that the principle of self-love alone, or a general regard to his own happiness, might prompt him to act more wisely. But when some particular passion or appetite is inflamed, he loses these views and persists in his former practices, and frequently acts in direct opposition to his present as well as his future interest. It is not easy to account for such conduct without supposing that his mind is blinded or infatuated by the influence of his corrupt passions. In most other cases when a person is deceived we suppose him to be true to himself and faithful to his own interest. But in this case he is both the deceiver and the deceived. He suffers some corrupt passion to gain such an ascendancy over him that every other consideration must give way. The calm dictates of the understanding and the remonstrances of conscience are disregarded. Some pretext is devised or some excuse framed for setting them aside and for following in the present instance the impulse of passion.²¹⁸

McKeen's argument is not against self-love, but against self-deceit. The fact that we can be deceived in our self-love does not mean there is no place for self-love. McKeen's pastoral insight does not lead him to deny self-love, as if it is not part of humanity's creation, but simply to expose where it has become depraved and disrupted as part of the fall.

²¹⁸ Sermon on Job 15:31, *Let him that is deceived trust in vanity: for vanity shall be his recompense*. First preached at Beverly, January 28, 1798.

3. Conscience

The issue of self-love does not disappear when we speak of conscience. Recall that Edwards argued that conscience is “a consciousness of being inconsistent with himself” or “a consciousness of doing that to others which he should be angry with them for doing to him,” or, “of forbearing to do that to them which he would be displeased with them for neglecting to do to him.”²¹⁹

Hopkins argued that disinterested benevolence involved being willing to be miserable forever for the sake of others. Edwards’ words are more careful and preserve a healthy self-interest. Edwards explicitly disagrees with Hopkins’ view.

Hence 'tis impossible for any person to be willing to be perfectly and finally miserable for God's sake, for this supposes love to God to be superior to self-love in the most general and extensive sense of self-love, which enters into the nature of love to God. It may be possible, that a man may be willing to be deprived of all his own proper separate good for God's sake; but then he is not perfectly miserable but happy, in the delight that he hath in God's good: for he takes greater delight in God's good, for the sake of which he parts with his own, than he did in his own. So that the man is not perfectly miserable, he is not deprived of all delight, but he is happy. He has greater delight in what is obtained for God, than he had in what he has lost of his own; so that he has only exchanged a lesser joy for a greater.

But if a man is willing to be perfectly miserable for God's sake, then he is willing to part with all his own separate good. But he must be willing also to be deprived of that which is indirectly his own, viz.

²¹⁹ Ibid., 589.

God's good; which supposition is inconsistent with itself. For to be willing to be deprived of this latter sort of good, is opposite to that principle of love to God itself, from whence such a willingness is supposed to arise. Love to God, if it be superior to any other principle, will make a man forever unwilling, utterly and finally to be deprived of this part of his happiness, which he has in God's being blessed and glorified; and the more he loves him the more unwilling he will be. So that this supposition, that a man can be willing to be perfectly and utterly miserable out of love to God, is inconsistent with itself.²²⁰

McKeen does not follow Hopkins. Hence his comments on conscience see it as designed to help us show true love to God. It does not merely tend to self-hatred. Preaching in Chapel on November 13, 1803, on the subject of the moral government of God, he places conscience as one of the 'evidences we have that God is the righteous Governor and judge of mankind.' He does not place it as the first evidence. He begins with 'the social principle.'

Accordingly, we may see in the constitution or order of things a tendency in right conduct to produce happiness, and as direct a tendency in wrong conduct to produce misery. This constitution is established by the Creator, and it directs us to regard him as the Governor and Judge of the world. If he were indifferent whether virtue or vice prevailed in the world, there would have been no reason for his establishing such a constitution of things rather than the contrary. But the various relations, connections and dependencies of men in a state of society appear to be subservient to the moral government of God.

The natural desires of having the esteem and good will of others is another provision which the Author of nature has made to restrain men from the practice of wickedness, and we may infer from it that the Author of our being who made this provision loves righteousness and

²²⁰ Jonathan Edwards [1731], *The "Miscellanies"* (Entry No. 530 'Love to God. Self Love.') (*Works of Jonathan Edwards Online Vol. 18*), Ed. Ava Chamberlain. 75.

hates wickedness, that he does encourage a moral government over us, and that this is one of the means by which he accomplishes the ends of it.²²¹

McKeen's concern with conscience is not simply as a private matter for the individual, but as something that feeds the social principle, the desire for the common good. He goes on from the social aspect to expound the individual aspect, and maintains his discussion of conscience in the light of virtue and benevolence. Preaching in Chapel on July 6, 1806, he says, "It appears to be a just and natural inference from this that it is the will of God we should practice virtue and abstain from vice, and consequently that he approves of one and disapproves the other; he loves righteousness and hates wickedness, and he will invariably act accordingly because as his wisdom and power are infinite, he cannot be deceived nor tempted with evil."²²²

Of course, both the individual and the social obligations are grounded in the moral nature of God. In the same sermon, McKeen goes on to say,

Imperfect beings such as men are may be and often are hurried, by irregular propensities and passions to act contrary to the dictates of their understandings and their consciences. They often do what upon reflection they disapprove. But this can never be the case of a Being

²²¹ Sermon on Psalm 58, *Verily he is a God that judgeth in the earth*. (Also titled 2 Timothy 4:8, *The Lord, the righteous Judge* and Psalm 22:28, *For the kingdom is the Lord's and he is the governor among the nations*.) Preached in Chapel on November 13, 1803. First preached in Beverly on March 9, 1794.

²²² Sermon on Revelation 15:4, *Who shall not fear thee, O Lord, and glorify thy name? For thou only art holy*. First preached in Beverly on September 28, 1800.

who is above the possibility of being surprised or misled by any false representations. And as we have the strongest reason to believe that he approves moral good and disapproves moral evil, it follows that his character is perfect and that his conduct is invariably directed by the unchangeable principles of truth and righteousness and goodness.²²³

Preaching in Chapel on April 7, 1805, he said,

The plan of government which God has adopted is infinitely more advantageous to us, and it represents his character in an infinitely more amiable light. He has given us sufficient evidence that he is righteous, and that he loves righteousness, and his conduct towards us is evidently dictated by infinite goodness. If we attend to the constitution of our minds, we shall [have] sufficient evidence that he who made us, and implanted a conscience in our breast, is a Being who requires us to obey him. If we attend to the conduct of providence upon a large scale, we shall find that righteousness tends to make them happy who practice it, and that wickedness tends as naturally to produce misery. And if we attend to the scriptures, we shall find the most active assurances that we must give an account to God of the things done in the body, and receive according to the things we have done.²²⁴

4. Instinctual Affections

It is at this point that the political and theological combine most clearly in McKeen. In various sermons he speaks of the natural affections such as that of parents to children, and gives evidence of the place of instinctual affections. But when it comes to love of country, that is the United States of America,

²²³ Ibid.

²²⁴ Sermon on Isaiah 30.18, *And therefore will the Lord wait, that he may be gracious to you.* (Also 2 Peter 3.15 *And account that the long suffering of God our Lord is salvation*). First preached in Beverly on January 31, 1796.

McKeen seems to grow in passion. In a Fast day sermon preached in Beverly, Massachusetts, in 1798, the theme of instinctual affections and benevolence is clear.

The love of our country is a branch of that general benevolence which we owe to all mankind, and which is very forcibly enjoined in almost every page of the gospel. Understood in this sense, it is evidently a very different thing from that passion which sometimes prompts the people of one nation to sacrifice the rights of another to the aggrandizement of their own. It is well known that when our Savior was upon earth the love which the Jews had for their own country was such a corrupt passion as this. They held the Gentile nations in abhorrence, and they were eagerly expecting to be soon the conquerors and masters of the world. With their ideas and feelings, had they been exhorted by Christ to love their country, they would certainly have considered it as a call to arms; they would have supposed him to be the temporal prince whom they expected to raise them to universal dominion. But in all his words and actions he studiously avoided everything which might lead them to suppose that his kingdom was of this world, or that he came to gratify their national pride and ambition.

Their notion of the love of their country was very wrong, though it is perhaps common in every age. An ambitious desire of making conquests, and laying other nations at the feet of our own, is often mistaken for the virtue recommended by our text; but it is one of the most criminal and pernicious passions. It has in all ages done incalculable mischief to mankind. The love of our country should always be accompanied with just regard to the rights of others. And it is as perfectly consistent with universal benevolence as a particular regard to one's own family.

Love to our country therefore will prompt us to support its government, to obey its laws, and to contribute to the happiness of our fellow citizens. There are no people upon earth who have so much reason to feel a cordial attachment to their country as we have. None have so much freedom and happiness to lose by subjecting themselves to the will of a foreign nation.

And as the United States of America are at present placed in a hazardous and afflictive situation by the unfriendly disposition, conduct and demands of an ambitious foreign power, I conceive it to be a duty which we owe to God, to ourselves and to our children, to determine as one man to maintain the independence and rights of our country, and to transmit to our posterity the fair inheritance which God has given us.²²⁵

That is a clear, and American, expression of affection as part of benevolence.

It is patriotic. Yet it is patriotism influenced by theology.

McKeen's inaugural clarion call is not merely rhetoric for the republic; it is part of his theology. The evidence suggests that he is committed to Edwards' notions on true virtue (and common morality) and seeks to assert this quietly in the life of the college. The evidence from the chapel sermons points to a sustained focus on this issue. This is not simply McKeen's response to the great George Washington, whom he loved.²²⁶ It is his response to God, the supreme Being, whom he loved more.

²²⁵ Sermon on Psalm 137:5-6, *If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget her cunning. If I do not remember thee, let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth.* Fast Day sermon, preached in Beverly, May 9, 1798. There is no evidence that this sermon was preached in the chapel, but it was published in 1798 and would have been familiar to many in the college.

²²⁶ Preaching in Beverly, on the anniversary of Washington's death, he refers to George Washington as "our beloved Washington." Sermon on Daniel 6:10, *Now, when Daniel knew that the writing was signed, he went into his house; and his windows being open in his chambers towards Jerusalem, he kneeled upon his knees three times a day, and prayed, and gave thanks before his God, as he did aforetime.* Preached in Beverly, on December 14, 1800, the first anniversary of the death of Washington. In another sermon, preached before the Massachusetts Legislature on May 28, 1800, he says, "Alas! Washington, whom we loved, and delighted to honor, is no more. The father of his country sleeps in dust. How long

IV. COMMON GOOD AND UNITARIANISM.

The previous discussions of Common Sense reasoning and True Virtue are directly related to the subject of common good. The discussion of virtue is also part of a larger theological dispute on the doctrine of the unity of God.

Williston Walker observes, "...by the end of the Revolution there were, or had recently been, pastors in eastern Massachusetts who openly denied the total depravity of man, who publicly controverted the doctrine of eternal punishment, and who advocated high Arian views of the Godhead. These men naturally dwelt in their preaching on the moral duties and on the cultivation of the virtues, rather than on their doubts and disbeliefs."²²⁷ In this section we will examine McKeen's doctrine of God, and the rise of Unitarianism, looking for evidence that suggests his call to common good is rooted in moral responsibility as a social duty separated from orthodoxy.

shall our tears continue to flow at the recollection of his dear name!" *A Sermon Preached Before the Honorable The Council, And the Honorable The Senate, and House of Representatives of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, May 28, 1800*, (Boston : Young and Minns, 1800).

²²⁷ Williston Walker, *A History of the Congregational Churches in the United States*. The American Church History Series, volume 3 (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1916). 330.

The slow drift toward the anti-Trinitarianism of Unitarianism²²⁸ also rumbles through the history of Bowdoin College. In his foundational study *The Beginnings of Unitarianism in America*, Conrad Wright comments that outside the twenty mile radius of Boston on the eve of the Unitarian controversy (1804-5), “there were only a few prominent Arminians.”²²⁹ He names two in Maine: Paul Coffin in Buxton, and Samuel Deane, Portland (formerly named Falmouth). Rev. Paul Coffin was one of the original Overseers of Bowdoin College. Rev. Samuel Deane was one of the original Trustees of the college. Of the two, the Rev. Samuel Deane was the more influential.

A. The Rev. Samuel Deane

The Rev. Samuel Deane, DD, looms large in the history of Maine and of Bowdoin College in particular. He was born on July 10, 1733, in Dedham, Massachusetts. He graduated from Harvard in 1760, and served as the college librarian from 1760 to 1762. In 1763 he was appointed tutor in the college and remained there until ordained as colleague to Rev. Thomas Smith, First

²²⁸ A good summary of the Unitarian Separation is provided by Williston Walker, (1916), *op.cit.*, 329-346. A more detailed account is given by Conrad Wright, *The Beginnings of Unitarianism in America* (Boston: Starr King Press, 1955).

²²⁹ Wright, 255. In calling them Arminians, he places them in the camp of religious liberals. In his introduction he states, “The doctrinal position of the liberals combined three tendencies which may be logically distinguished: Arminianism, supernatural rationalism, and anti-Trinitarianism.” 3.

Church,²³⁰ Portland, Maine, on October 17, 1764. When Mr Smith died, at the age of 94 in 1794, Deane remained as the sole pastor.

1. First Parish, Portland

Deane commenced a diary in 1761 which he continued to keep until his death.

He was involved in Maine's early attempts to gain independency from Massachusetts. He was deeply interested in agriculture and in 1790 published the first agricultural encyclopedia in the United States, *The New-England Farmer: Or, Georgical Dictionary. Containing a Compendious Account of the Ways and Methods in which the Important Art of Husbandry, in All Its Various Branches, Is, Or May Be, Practised, to the Greatest Advantage, in this Country.*

Important as this work may be, he is better known for his incipient Unitarianism and the divisions which ultimately erupted in Maine over that issue. David Raymond notes that Deane "...was not forward with his theology. So reticent was Deane that even his close friends, including one of the deacons of his church, were unclear about his theological views on the

²³⁰ William Willis, *Journals of the Rev. Thomas Smith and the Rev. Samuel Deane, Pastors of the First Church in Portland: With Notes and Biographical Notices: and a Summary History of Portland* (Portland: Joseph S. Bailly, 1849), 292. First Church is sometimes referred to as First Parish, or sometimes Old Parish.

controversial topics of the day.”²³¹ Pastors of Unitarian views were “more marked by omissions than by actual denials.”²³²

First Parish Church suffered division in 1788. Parishioners could not agree on the support of two ministers, or on whether they should repair the building, damaged by bombardment during the Revolutionary War. So a new society was formed and called, appropriately, Second Parish.

2. Edward Payson

Second Parish called Rev. Elijah Kellogg as minister. It is to be noted that Kellogg was also an original Overseer in Bowdoin College. In 1807, Rev. Edward Payson was called as his colleague. Calvin Montague Clark notes that “the passage of the First church and its parish from high Calvinism to Unitarianism was very gradual.”²³³ Both First Parish and Second Parish were interested in Edward Payson as associate pastor. This is significant because it shows that Deane, though Unitarian in his thoughts, was content to have an associate and colleague of more orthodox views.

²³¹ David Raymond, “Echoes of Distant Thunder? The Unitarian Controversy in Maine, 1734-1833.” *Maine History*, 46:1, October 2011, 10.

²³² Walker, *History of the Congregational Churches*, 330

²³³ Calvin Montague Clark, *History of the Congregational Churches in Maine* (Portland: The Congregational Christian Conference of Maine, 1935). 366.

Edward Payson chose to accept the call from Second Parish, and his preaching and attitude heightened the tension in Portland. Eventually, in 1809, First Parish called Ichabod Nichols, a Unitarian, as associate and colleague to Deane. When Payson heard Nichols defend his theology, he declared it unacceptable and refused to take part in Nichols' ordination. Eventually Payson began to be more strident and refused to permit Nichols to preach in Second Parish during the regular and customary pulpit exchanges. The habit of pulpit exchanges was common in the churches, and this refusal on the part of Payson was not well received.

3. Correspondence between Freeman and Cary

During the search for a colleague for Deane, one candidate who visited Portland was a certain Mr S. Cary. After his visit, in 1808, Deacon Freeman, of First Parish, corresponded with Mr Cary to clarify his views on certain matters. The correspondence throws light on Deane's views.²³⁴ Freeman is concerned that Cary is not Trinitarian. Deacon Freeman writes to Cary as follows:

In the first place, I consider, from what you said to me, and what I have heard from others, that it is not your present opinion that our Saviour was coexistent from eternity with the Father: — that he was not, on the contrary, as the Socinians believe, a mere man; but (as I conceive to be the Arian doctrine) that he was created before all worlds, the first and

²³⁴ The correspondence was published in *The Christian Examiner and Religious Miscellany*, January, 1848, Vol. XLIV, "Art. III, Unitarianism in Portland", pp 34-46.

noblest of all beings: — that you were, however, open to conviction, and, on weighing the argument on the subject would form an independent judgment for yourself.

He then acknowledges that few in First Parish believe in the doctrine of the Trinity. He is clearly seeking to clarify if Cary is an Arian. He understands that he is not Socinian. It is enlightening that Deacon Freeman is only now beginning to discover the views of his own minister on this subject. Deane has been settled in First Parish since 1764. Since the correspondence is dated 1808, it is clear that Deane was very careful not to dwell on this doctrine. It seems that questioning Cary brought to light more than Freeman expected. Freeman writes,

I observed to you that I thought but few of our parish believed in the Trinity. I formed my opinion, in some measure, from what was just before observed to me by Dr. Deane in regard thereto. But whatever may be the opinion of others, I cannot but think there is authority from Scripture to justify the belief. I have since conversed with Dr. Deane upon this subject, and find that he thinks that the Holy Ghost is God, but that he is not a third person in the Godhead. This sentiment is to me inexplicable.

Your opinion of the doctrine of the Atonement, Dr. Deane informs me, agrees with his. This sentiment I did not expect from him, for I had conceived that it was the general opinion of divines that it would not be considered to have been sufficient but under the idea that Christ was a divine or uncreated being, and that, without being immortal himself, he could not confer immortality on others...

Deacon Freeman seems to be in shock. He did not really know the views of Samuel Deane on either the doctrine of the Trinity or the Atonement. We quote several sections of Cary's reply not only as an example of the kind of

discourse on the doctrine of the Trinity, but for the references they make to Deane. Cary states the Unitarian cause with the classic arguments: the incomprehensibility of God, the unreasonableness of Trinitarian doctrine, the inability of our minds to comprehend God, the limitations of human language, and the difficulties of understanding Biblical texts on the subject.

...if we could only learn to give disputed points no more consequence than they really deserve. To me they seem hardly worth contending about; — certainly not worth contending about passionately; — because I cannot believe that a man who is known to be in the habit of fearing God and keeping his commandments, who has satisfied his understanding that Jesus Christ is a messenger from God, and that the Bible contains the message which God has sent us, and is the only rule of faith and practice, and does strive to conform himself to the example of his Saviour; — that such a man will finally forfeit salvation merely because he does not believe exactly as Calvin did, or Athanasius, or Hopkins.

Now, if this indeed is true; — if good men of all sects of Christians will meet together in heaven; — how is it possible to avoid the inference that the peculiar distinguishing tenets of these sects are equally unimportant, that is, equally unnecessary to salvation? ...The doctrine of the Trinity seems to have been defended and disputed with more zeal and acrimony than any other questionable subject; and why it should have been so I am unable to conceive, unless there really is a propensity in human nature to search most eagerly, and decide most peremptorily, on subjects which are absolutely above the reach of our understandings. For my own part, I cannot reflect upon the theories of men about the nature of the incomprehensible God, and the confidence with which they talk of his essence and substance, and the parts of which he is composed, and the mode in which his Son proceeded from him or was generated or created, without being astonished at human boldness and arrogance. My dear Sir, is it possible for such beings as we are, who cannot tell for our lives how a blade of grass grows, or what is the nature of our own body or soul, to form any sort of conception of *the nature* of the First Cause of all things, who is

invisible, and whom no man ever can see and live? And if we cannot comprehend his nature, can any thing be more preposterous than to draw up theories in human language, the object of which is to explain this unintelligible subject, and to believe them of importance enough to be made articles of faith, and to be received as fundamental and essential doctrines in a revelation from the Deity?

We know that God exists, and we know what are his moral attributes. We know that he has made us, has given us laws, and requires that we should obey. We know that his Son Jesus Christ, a glorious being, was sent to mankind to disclose to them the will of his Father; that he is our Master, the way and the truth and life...But when we attempt to go further, and undertake to settle the precise *nature* of Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, to explain the substance of each, or the mode of their existence, it is no wonder that we should be lost among insuperable difficulties, for we then meddle with things which are too wonderful for us. We then undertake to lay down as truths what God has not revealed to man, — at least what my Bible has not revealed to me. And why has not God revealed them? For this plain reason, because the human understanding, constituted as it now is, cannot comprehend them.

I treat this hypothesis with some freedom, because it is one of those speculative subjects alluded to in the introduction to this letter, which I take to be absolutely of human invention, absolutely unimportant in itself, and which must stand or fall as it is supported or otherwise by reason and the Scriptures. Supported by reason it certainly is not; and it has always been a subject of astonishment to me, how the world could for so many ages have believed it taught in the Bible.

What is most intriguing, however, are two strong statements he makes regarding Deane.

The only real Trinitarians are they who believe the Athanasian creed. I have been disposed to think that you did not believe this creed. Dr. Deane I know treats it with the utmost contempt. We must, however, as you justly observe, think for ourselves; and I am perfectly ready to own to you that it seems to me pure, genuine, unmixed nonsense.

Before I can admit it, I must give up my reason, my common sense, all the powers of comprehending truth with which God has blessed me; a sacrifice which I have never yet considered myself bound to make.

After such a scathing denunciation of the Athanasian doctrine, he closes with his admiration for Dr Deane.

... and remember me to Dr. Deane, whose remark I often think of, and am consoled with, that “the Deity will not punish us in another world for not having understood in this what cannot be understood.”

One wonders what this did to the relationship of Freeman and Deane.

Certainly Deane would not have used such contemptuous language to explain himself to his deacon. Yet Freeman was clearly shocked at this doctrinal swing. The controversy was about to come to the boil, and Congregationalism would begin to fracture not only at the level of Harvard College, but in the parishes of New England. One of the results of the Unitarian controversy was that the Cumberland Association drew up a constitution and creed in 1820 which was clearly intended to exclude Unitarians.²³⁵ Deane would not have approved. He died in 1814. Another man, also connected with Bowdoin, became prominent in the Unitarian controversy: Samuel Willard.

²³⁵ The full text is available in Abiel H. Wright, “Historical Review,” Cumberland Association of Congregational Ministers, *The Centennial of the Cumberland Association* (Portland, B. Thurston, 1888), 35-36, and in Calvin Montague Clark, *History of the Congregational Churches in Maine*, vol. 2 (Portland: The Congregational Christian Conference of Maine, 1935), 378-9.

B. Rev. Samuel Willard

1. Willard Family

Rev. Samuel Willard served as tutor in Bowdoin College from October 1804 to September 1805. He was a descendant of classic New England Congregational stock. His grandfather's grandfather was Rev. Samuel Willard (1640-1707), pastor of Old South Church, Boston, Vice-President of Harvard and author of *A Compleat Body of Divinity*, an exposition of the Westminster Shorter Catechism. His grandfather, also called Samuel Willard (1705-1741), was pastor at Biddeford, ME. His uncle was Rev. Joseph Willard (1738-1804), pastor in Beverly, MA, and President of Harvard. The family was well known to Joseph McKeen. Rev. Joseph Willard was a friend of McKeen. When Joseph Willard became president of Harvard, McKeen succeeded him to the pastorate of Beverly, MA. It is not surprising that McKeen employed Samuel Willard as a tutor.

2. Tutor in Bowdoin

The college had been open for two years, so there were first-, second-, and third-year students, Willard remembers, "seven in the first class, four in the second, and five, I think, in the third."²³⁶ As Willard remembers it, McKeen and Abbott "seemed willing, in general, to put the more difficult duties on

²³⁶ *Life of Samuel Willard, D.D., A.A.S. of Deerfield, Mass.*, edited by his daughter (Boston: Geo. H. Ellis, 1892), 41.

me... Among other things, I had the first class in the *Graeca Majora*, both prose and poetry; Enfield's Philosophy and Astronomy, and in Spherical Geometry. The second class I attended in Euclid, Livy, and Blair's Lectures."²³⁷

3. Schism in Deerfield, MA

Shortly afterwards Willard was installed as pastor of the church in Deerfield, MA. At this time his Unitarian views became known and caused "...that schism, which commenced at Deerfield, extended far and wide, and now affects our country, more or less evidently, in all its length and breadth..."²³⁸ This statement by Willard, may reflect his rather immodest view of himself, but it also indicates an early spark in the Unitarian separation. In his reflections on the event, fifty years later, Willard apparently tries to use the reputation of President McKean for his defence against the charge of schism. He writes,

The Orthodox claimed Dr. McKean (sic) as one of their number, and I cannot say that his Theological speculations were not with theirs; but I can say, that with the exception of six, or possibly eight Sabbaths, I attended on his preaching through the whole of a collegiate year, and was an interested hearer while I had many conversations with him on Theological subjects; and I do not remember a single sentence in all

²³⁷ Ibid., 42.

²³⁸ Samuel Willard, *History of the Rise, Progress and Consummation of the Rupture Which Now Divides the Congregational Clergy and Churches of Massachusetts, in a Discourse Delivered in the First Church in Deerfield, Mass. September 22, 1857* (Greenfield: H. D. Mirick and Co., 1858), 4.

these sermons and conversations to which I could not readily assent, with one exception, in which he did not come so near the Orthodox faith, as I did. If, therefore, he believed in the Calvinistic doctrines, he must have considered them of little or no comparative importance in winning souls to Christ, as very far from constituting the vitality and Divine power of the Gospel.²³⁹

Willard does not explain the ‘one exception’ in which he believed himself to be more orthodox than McKeen. Perhaps this is not surprising since after fifty years he is endeavouring to justify himself and his own position. The paragraph creates the impression that the respected McKeen would not have objected to Willard’s ordination, or that he would not have insisted on Calvinistic doctrines as essential for the gospel. By the term ‘Calvinistic doctrines’ Willard is not referring to doctrines such as predestination or election, or total depravity, but to the Calvinistic, Orthodox doctrine of the person of Christ. Willard’s memory of McKeen reflects Willard’s agenda. It appears that Willard believed that unless someone actually confronted him with error, then he was to be considered as a supporter.

Several times in the *History of the Rupture* he refers to ministers who made no attempt to oppose him formally and he construes this as approval of his doctrine. For example, he supplied the pulpit of “Father French, the Orthodox minister of the South Parish” of Andover. He says, “I think I supplied his pulpit not less than three whole days, with the constant attendance of several

²³⁹ Ibid., 7

men, who were then laying the plan of the Theological Institution; and as far as I can remember, I never heard that any one of them was dissatisfied with Mr. French for supplying his pulpit in that way.”²⁴⁰ This does not prove, however, that the sensitive founders of Andover Seminary approved of Willard’s theology. Later, Willard recalls visiting with Dr Holmes of Cambridge, known as one of the Orthodox clergy. Willard supplied his pulpit, and records that, “When he came out of church he gave me his hand, saying he wished me to regard that as a right hand of fellowship from him.”²⁴¹ Again, we sense that Willard is trying to prove too much.

The Unitarian controversy erupted at the institutional level with the appointment of Rev. Henry Ware as Hollis Professor of Divinity, in Harvard College. Walker remarks, “the struggle issued on February 5, 1805, in the election of Ware, and in the manifest passage of New England’s oldest college to the control of the anti-Trinitarians.”²⁴² The candidate he defeated was Rev. Jesse Appleton who, in 1807, would succeed Joseph McKeen as president of Bowdoin College. The Orthodox (or Trinitarians) reacted to the loss of Harvard by founding Andover Theological Seminary in 1808. There was widespread discussion of the issues in various publications, notably the

²⁴⁰ *History of the Rupture*, 10-11.

²⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 29-30.

²⁴² *History of the Congregational Churches*, 335.

Panopolist for the Trinitarians, and the *Monthly Anthology* for the anti-Trinitarians (or Liberals).

The controversy reached the local level when Congregational councils met to examine and ordain candidates to the ministry, and when those same councils exercised their policy of pulpit exchange. From this perspective, Willard's claim, in his lengthy title, that his ordination caused the schism, may be legitimate. His ordination controversy is an early example (perhaps the earliest²⁴³) of the controversy that would become all too common in Massachusetts in the next two decades, culminating in the establishment of the American Unitarian Association as a separate denomination in 1825.

Willard first visited Deerfield, MA, in March 1807. He preached on two Sabbaths. During the week there were two feet of snow, and on the second Sabbath, "there was, it was thought, about sixty sleighs at our church from all parts of the town; many of them from the distance of four or five miles."²⁴⁴ On May 18, the church issued a call to Willard to be their pastor. (Twenty-two

²⁴³ David Raymond records that "[t]he church-parish split in Dorchester, Massachusetts (1808-1812), has generally been perceived as the signal clash in the institutional separation phase of the controversy..." Raymond argues that a case can be made that Edward Payson's ordination on Dec. 16, 1807, as assistant in Second Parish, Portland, was the first clash in the battle for separation. David Raymond "Echoes of Distant Thunder? The Unitarian Controversy in Maine, 1734-1833." *Maine History*, 46:1, October 2011, 12-13. Willard's ordination controversy also took place in 1807, but six months earlier than Payson's.

²⁴⁴ *History of the Rupture*, 12.

male members voted for him, one against, and one or two abstentions.) On July 15, Joseph McKeen died.

Willard's examination for ordination was conducted on August 12, 1807, by a Congregational Council formed of two neighbouring Associations, Hampshire County and Northampton. Of this council Willard states, "I wished to be ordained by the harmonious consent of the council, or not at all; and therefore I nominated myself two or three Orthodox persons, in preference to those who were called liberal. I chose to put myself entirely into their hands, and trust the event of my ordination to their candor and Christian prudence."²⁴⁵

Willard had prepared a written profession of his theological views, "in which I endeavored to come as near the Orthodox standard, as I conscientiously could, and not a whit nearer..."²⁴⁶ The written document was not accepted, and the oral examination concentrated on the absolute Deity of Christ, or his equality with the Father. The Council refused to ordain him.

The Deerfield Church promptly applied to Willard to be stated supply. A town meeting was called and agreed to this proposal and the church then proceeded to "continue their invitation to Mr. Samuel Willard to settle with them in the

²⁴⁵ Ibid., 14.

²⁴⁶ Ibid., 15

work of the Gospel ministry.”²⁴⁷ The town concurred with this second church vote. In consequence, a second ordaining council was called for September 22. This led to tension. The congregation claimed their rights as Congregationalists to call the minister of their own choice. The second council, however, was unsure how to interpret the actions of the first council. Some viewed it as a judicial decision. Others refused to give the association such Presbyterian powers. This second council was composed of a larger number, including a “good proportion of those who were Orthodox in speculation, but liberal in their feelings.”²⁴⁸ He was ordained on September 23. Within both Associations steps were taken to dissuade members from exchanging pulpits with Willard, and denying him the right to be involved in the ordination of others. The lines were drawn between “the two great classes of Congregational Clergy.”²⁴⁹

Despite his attempts to draw McKeen into the controversy, there is currently no evidence that McKeen supported his views. Willard’s expression of Unitarianism as acceptable and Trinitarianism as speculation, finds no echo in McKeen’s preaching. The emphasis on common good as a social duty increased as emphasis on speculative theology decreased.

²⁴⁷ Ibid., 17.

²⁴⁸ Ibid., 18.

²⁴⁹ Ibid., 30.

C. Rev. Joseph McKeen and the doctrine of the Trinity

With this background of Samuel Willis and Samuel Deane, Joseph McKeen's relatively short spell in Bowdoin throws some light on the original orthodoxy of Bowdoin College. Students in a local college such as Bowdoin, with whom all these men were involved, were probably well aware of the rising controversy. So we expect McKeen's chapel sermons to illustrate his view. To determine McKeen's view on the subject, we shall examine his college preaching for evidence of a careful statement of the deity of Christ, or for reflection on the ontological relationship and economic relationship of God the Father and God the Son.

1. Reference to 'Trinity'

On reading the sermons, the first impression is that trinitarian dogma is not a subject McKeen emphasized. The word 'trinity' occurs once in the Chapel sermons.

But let us not think that being washed or sprinkled in the name of the holy trinity will save us, unless we have the answer of a good conscience, i.e. unless we have the testimony of our conscience that we fulfill the obligations or engagements that our baptism brings us under.²⁵⁰

²⁵⁰ Sermon on 1 Corinthians 10:1-5, *Moreover, brethren, I would not that you should be ignorant, how that all our fathers were under the cloud, and all passed through the sea; And were all baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea; And did all eat the same spiritual meat; and did all drink the same spiritual drink; for they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them; and that Rock was Christ. But with many of them God was not well pleased; for they were overthrown in the wilderness.* Preached in Brunswick on June 26, 1803. (The

There is no doctrinal explanation, simply a warning that baptism in the name of the holy trinity will not save us. This is hardly a definitive statement on a disputed doctrine. On first impression one would suggest that McKeen is too careful, too accommodating. One might suspect that he approaches the incipient Unitarianism of Deane. Perhaps this explains why Samuel Willard thought McKeen did not disagree with his Unitarian views.

2. Statements on Person of Christ

His sermons are full of references to the Father, the Son and the Spirit, but always in language that is found in the Bible. These are references with which no Unitarian would disagree. The use of the biblical words is one thing, but what is meant by them is the heart of the debate.

There are several examples of college sermons that speak of the deity of Christ, but always in a guarded, careful manner. Perhaps it is a manner calculated not to cause offence. Preaching on Isaiah 9:2, he says,

The Messiah is described as a child born, and a son given, who should have the government upon his shoulder and whose name should be called Wonderful, Counselor, The Mighty God, The Everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace. These titles and epithets could properly be

reference to Brunswick may mean the chapel, or the local church with the students in attendance). First preached in Beverly on August 3, 1794.

given to no mere man. They belong to the man Christ Jesus in whom the fullness of the Godhead dwelt.²⁵¹

Here are two statements concerning Christ, he is ‘no mere man,’ and he is the man ‘in whom the fullness of the Godhead dwelt.’ Most Unitarians would not disagree with either of these statements. Christ is certainly not a mere man, and yet the fact that the fullness of the Godhead dwells in him is not explained. It is, of course, a quotation of Colossians 2:9.

Preaching on Isaiah 57:15, McKeen clearly asserts that Jesus reveals the divine perfections, but leaves the matter unexplained.

A view of the purity of the divine perfections as they are revealed through Jesus Christ makes one of a humble and contrite spirit, lament that he is so unlike God, and so far short of that perfection at which he aims, and therefore the frame of his mind becomes habitually grave, sedate and serious, though it may be in various degrees in different persons as their constitutional temper or circumstances or situation in life may vary.²⁵²

Preaching on Colossians 1:14, McKeen comes close to reflecting on the ontological and economic relationship of the Father and the Son. His reflections are not deeply philosophical, but he does recognize the relationship

²⁵¹ Isaiah 9:2 *The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light; they that dwell in the land of the shadow of death, upon them hath the light shined.* Preached in Chapel on March 6, 1803. First preached in Beverly, on November 20, 1796.

²⁵² Isaiah 57:15, *For thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy; I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones.* Preached in Chapel on October 18, 1803. First preached in Beverly on September 18, 1791.

of the Father and the Son and the expression of this in the work of redemption. Reading the correspondence between Freeman and Cary highlights the fact that the doctrine of the atonement is involved in the doctrine of the Trinity. McKeen's doctrine of the atonement is clearly that of substitutionary atonement.

For this purpose he sent in due time his only begotten Son into the world to be a propitiation for our sins. On him were laid our iniquities, on him was the chastisement of our peace. He suffered and died for us. As he was near and infinitely dear unto the Father, the displeasure of God against sin is manifested to be infinitely great.

Had this been his disposition, we should never have heard of the Son of God becoming incarnate that he might suffer and die, that he might redeem us to God, and save us from sin and misery. God's gift of his Son to be the propitiation for the sins of men was truly an astonishing expression of his love to his unworthy creatures who had nothing but their wretchedness to recommend them to his favorable regard.²⁵³

Once again, few Unitarians would dispute McKeen's words. They clearly reflect Biblical language. In fact, McKeen's words were probably well received by Unitarians, since he refrains from 'speculative' theology.

Preaching on Philippians 3:7, "But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ," McKeen says,

We believe that thou art the Christ, the son of the living God. With this persuasion of the high character of Jesus and the importance of his

²⁵³ Colossians 1:14, *In whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins*. Preached in Chapel on March 25, 1804. First preached in Beverly on April 5, 1789 and again on November 6, 1791.

mission we need not wonder that he determined to hazard all in the service of his divine Master.²⁵⁴

Once again, it must be observed, a Unitarian would be comfortable with these words: ‘the high character of Jesus,’ ‘the importance of his mission,’ ‘the service of his divine Master.’ McKeen demonstrates the same reticence as Deane. The question is whether or not it was for the same reason, that he was an incipient Unitarian.

His sermon on Philippians 2:5 is where we would expect to hear definitive statements. It is a passage that explicitly speaks of Jesus ‘being in the form of God,’ and of ‘equality with God.’ The passage demands a trinitarian explanation. McKeen says, “And it is a circumstance much in favor of the divinity of Christ’s religion that it is better adapted to the condition of mankind.”²⁵⁵

In speaking of the ‘divinity of Christ’s religion,’ it does not appear that McKeen means that religion is god, but that religion comes from God. However, he does not choose to address the meaning of the phrases ‘in the form of God,’ or ‘equality with God.’

²⁵⁴ Philippians 3:7 *But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ.* Preached in Chapel on July 8, 1804. First preached in Beverly on April 2, 1797.

²⁵⁵ Philippians 2:5, *Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus.* Preached in Chapel on July 15, 1804. First preached in Beverly on May 22, 1791.

3. Christ as Lord and Master

Preaching on John 13:13, McKeen speaks at length on the importance of not binding the conscience of people to believe that which is not Scriptural.

However, unlike Cary, he does not think all Scriptural doctrine has to be understood in order to be accepted. Note the phrase in the following quotation, “whether the particular manner in which it is true be certainly known or not.”

We are to receive what is taught by Jesus.

What is implied in the acknowledgement that Christ is our Master and our Lord?

It implies that we take his word as the rule of our faith and practice, that we receive from him the law which governs our conduct, and that we judge the authority of his word or his example sufficient to decide any question concerning faith or duty. The business of all other teachers is only to recommend and enforce obedience to his precepts, and to assist people to understand the doctrines of Christ. And this is the true and only safe and proper end of using all books of religion written by men. They have no claim to a Christian’s belief any further than they are conformable to the will of Christ revealed in his word. If anything in them be advanced or maintained in opposition to the doctrines of Christ, fidelity to him as our Master must oblige us to reject it. Or if anything which is not discoverable by reason be advanced by any uninspired writer, it is not to be received as an article of a Christian’s faith, if it be not in the scriptures, even though it should not be contradictory to anything that is revealed. We may form conjectures, if we please, concerning many things which are not revealed and they may not contradict anything in the scriptures; but we are neither to hold them ourselves, nor impose them on others, as articles of faith. It has been too often the practice of churches and individuals to require assent to their own arbitrary interpretations of scripture. But whenever a professed disciple of Christ is required to give his assent to any article, if he cannot perceive its agreement with Christ’s revealed will, he ought to assert his liberty or his freedom

from the impositions of men, and require the authority of Christ to be shown for it, and to say, ‘One is my Master, even Christ.’

Everything advanced by men, however great, or learned, or wise, or good, should be received with caution, compared with the divine standard, and found agreeable to it before it is admitted as an article of faith. But on the other hand, regarding Christ as our Master implies that we receive as truth whatever is taught by him, *whether the particular manner in which it is true be certainly known or not*. There are some things in the scriptures hard to be understood. If we regard Christ as our Master however, we must believe that his words are true; though we may not be certain that we understand them right.²⁵⁶

In this sermon, McKeen goes on to explain the place of Jesus as faithful witness to the Father. It is clear from the following passage that McKeen has a high view of the place of Jesus. Yet he does not enter into discussion of such issues as ‘the nature of the Father, Son, or Holy Spirit, the substance of each, or the mode of existence’, to use Cary’s language.

This point being admitted and established that Christ was a divine teacher, or one who came from God, there can be no good reason for disputing or doubting what he taught. He was in the bosom of the Father, acquainted with the Father’s will, with the whole system of divine doctrines, and with everything that relates to our salvation. He was superior to all the prophets that were before him, and to all who succeeded him; for it was by his spirit that they were inspired to reveal divine truths to men. God did not give the spirit to him by measure; for in him dwelt all fullness of the godhead. He was qualified to be our teacher or master not only by his knowledge of his Father’s will, but by his fidelity in revealing so much of it as is necessary for our instruction and edification. He could have no interest in deceiving us, and no

²⁵⁶ John 13:13, *Ye call me Master and Lord; and ye say well; for so I am*. Matt. 23.10 *For one is your Master, even Christ*. Preached in Chapel on August 5, 1804. First preached in Beverly on April 1, 1792 and repeated on April 1, 1798.

disposition to do it. He is the faithful and the true witness. He sealed the truth of the doctrines which he taught with his blood. Moreover, he is qualified for being our Master by the authority and power with which he is vested as Head over all things unto his church, having powers and principalities made subject to him.²⁵⁷

4. The 'Name above every Name'

There are two Chapel sermons in which McKeen makes more detailed comments. The first is in a sermon on John 8:12.

Let anyone seriously read Christ's sermon on the mount and compare his explanation of the divine law to the Jewish interpretations, or let them compare it with the defective heathen systems of morality, and he can hardly avoid perceiving that Jesus Christ was indeed the light of the world, and that there is a purity and sublimity in his precepts which indicate him to be more than human.²⁵⁸

'No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him.' This passage perhaps may refer to all the manifestations ever made of God in creation or providence; for by Jesus Christ who is called his Word, he made the worlds and continually preserves and governs them. In this sense it may be said that it is altogether by Jesus Christ that any discoveries have ever been made of the being and attributes of the Deity. But what we are now to consider is the information concerning God which Jesus Christ gave when he appeared in the world in the form of man, and not what he revealed in his preexistent state while he was in the form of

²⁵⁷ Ibid.

²⁵⁸ John 8:12, *Then spake Jesus again unto them saying, 'I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life.'* John 12:46, *I am come a light into the world, that whosoever believeth on me should not abide in darkness.* Matthew 4:16, *The people which sat in darkness saw a great light; and to them which sat in the region and shadow of death light is sprung up.* Preached in Chapel on March 9, 1806. First preached in Beverly on October 9, 1791 and repeated on December 28, 1794.

God, the brightness of the Father's glory, and the express image of his person.²⁵⁹

McKeen acknowledges the preexistent deity of the Lord Jesus Christ. He clearly asserts, albeit in Biblical language, that Jesus is the form of God, the brightness of the Father's glory and the express image of God's person. He refrains from speculating on the meaning of the terms, arguing that the information of Jesus in the form of man is what we are to concentrate upon.

The second sermon in which his views are clear is from Philippians 2:9-10, titled, "Christ is the name above every name."

What is the full import of these scriptural expressions may be difficult for us to say or to conceive. However we learn from the declaration of Christ himself, and the inspired writers, that the Deity so inhabited or dwelt in the man Christ Jesus that divine titles were ascribed to him and divine honor paid him.

By him God created the worlds, and by him he manifested himself to the patriarchs and others in the early ages of the world; for no man hath seen the Father at any time: it is the Son who hath revealed him. That the Son of God should leave the bosom of the Father and humble himself so far as to become man was marvelous condescension, and it had been such if he had appeared in the greatest earthy glory and splendor.

By the name given to Christ we are to understand honor, glory and dominion. In this sense the word is often used in scriptures when it is said that the name of God is great. By Christ's having a name that is above every name is meant 'his being made Head over all things unto

²⁵⁹ Ibid.

his church' and what the apostle Paul says elsewhere may serve as a comment upon the text, 'God hath set him at his own right hand in heavenly places, far above all principalities and power, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come.' To this glory and dominion is the Mediator exalted in consequence of his sufferings in the days of his humiliation.²⁶⁰

We can summarize McKeen's views as follows. He believed that Jesus Christ was the preexistent Son of God. He believed that through him God created and preserves the worlds. He holds to every Scriptural reference to Christ as being more than a man. He is one who is in the form of God, the brightness of the Father's glory, the express image of his person. The names, titles, honour and place of God are all ascribed to Jesus. It is true that he does not enter into theological debate in his sermons on the meaning of such concepts as substance and nature and modes of existence. He is always satisfied with Scripture and does not believe he has to understand Scripture for it to be true. He is content with mystery.

Two other comments of McKeen need to be considered. First, First Parish, Beverly, in which McKeen served faithfully for seventeen years, split only

²⁶⁰ Philippians 2:9-10, *Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name, which is above every name; That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth.* Preached in Chapel on December 5, 1802. First preached in Beverly on December 16, 1792.

months after he left for Bowdoin. The split was between *Orthodox* and *Liberals*. McKeen preached his farewell sermon on August 22, 1802, and a few months later, on October 15, a small group within the congregation petitioned the General Court of Massachusetts for permission to establish a new society (church).²⁶¹ McKeen saw it coming. In his last sermon to the congregation he warns against division.

It is not expected that you will continue much longer to worship in one assembly. It has been often spoken of as an evidence of peaceable and conciliating disposition in you, that you have continued together until you are become so numerous that a division will not be injurious to you, provided you conduct it with the meekness of wisdom. If rather your numbers, or some difference in your sentiments, render a division expedient and conducive to your edification, let it be made, if possible, without contention, and without exciting a spirit of party. If this cannot be effected; if it be impossible but that offenses will come, the thoughtful and confident among you will remember that Christ has said, 'Woe unto the man by whom they come.' If a respectable member among you should so remember these words as to profit by them, this influence of your example and your persuasions may prevent much evil. And that there will be found a very considerable number of such persons among you, I cannot doubt.²⁶²

²⁶¹ See Caitlin Lampman, *Congregationalism Divided: A Case Study of Beverly, Massachusetts' First Parish Congregational Church Split, 1802-1834* (MA thesis, Simmons College, Boston, MA, 2013). Lampman's research leads her to suggest that the stricter Calvinists (and Trinitarians) left First Parish to form the new church, leaving the moderate Calvinists and liberals to eventually move towards Unitarianism. Her research does not include study of McKeen's sermons.

²⁶² Sermon on John 14:27, *Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid*. First preached in Beverly on August 22, 1802.

This passage reveals the spirit of the man. He is not anti-Trinitarian, but he is not schismatic. He desires the peace and unity of the church.

A second comment confirms this. Preaching in the Chapel on February 20, 1803, six months after leaving Beverly, and the petition of some to form another congregation, McKeen reminded the students in chapel about the example of Abraham separating from Lot in a kind and peaceful way. He said,

How often might angry debates and quarrels be happily prevented by such kind and generous behavior in either party? We should learn hence to yield somewhat of our own right in certain cases, when angry debate and strife may be prevented by it, and peace and friendship.²⁶³

Perhaps this is the reason McKeen was chosen to be first president of Bowdoin College. He was orthodox *and* peaceful. There is no evidence to suggest his view of common good is only the moral responsibility of the brotherhood of man. It is rooted in orthodox theology.

²⁶³ James 2:23, *...and he was called the friend of God*. Preached in chapel on February 20, 1803. Preached in Beverly on February 23, 1794.

V. COMMON GOOD, SCIENCE, AND MATHEMATICS

In this final section, we shall examine one example of how McKeen used the idea of common good. He believed the study of science would serve the common good. Natural philosophy was a subject that interested Joseph McKeen. Like most of his contemporaries, he viewed science as a way of understanding and explaining the works of God. The endowment by Thomas Hollis of a chair in Mathematics and Natural Philosophy in Harvard College ensured that generations of Harvard graduates would be well trained not only in the older geocentrism of Ptolemy, but also in the new heliocentrism of Galileo, Copernicus, Kepler and Newton. Since Hollis had previously endowed a chair of Divinity it is clear that the study of divinity and science were not thought to be contradictory.

Rev. Samuel Williams became Hollis Professor of Mathematics and Natural Philosophy in 1780. He held the position until 1788 when a dispute over his accounting led to his resignation. He moved to Rutland, Vermont, where he served as a minister, established the *Rutland Herald*, wrote various histories and helped found the University of Vermont.²⁶⁴

²⁶⁴ For more detail see Robert Friend Rothschild, *Two Brides for Apollo: The Life of Samuel Williams 1743-1817*, (Bloomington: IUniverse, 2009).

McKeen studied with Rev. Prof. Samuel Williams, probably during 1780-1. As soon as McKeen was appointed President of Bowdoin College, he began to lay a foundation for the curriculum that would include mathematics and natural philosophy. He received various scientific instruments and took the college in the same direction as Harvard. One of the most significant marks of the commitment to scientific study was his appointment of Parker Cleaveland. Appointed to serve as Professor of Mathematics and Natural Philosophy in 1805, he continued to serve at Bowdoin until his death in 1858. His contribution to the life of the college cannot be underestimated.

In 1808, Cleaveland first offered courses on chemistry and mineralogy. Eventually he published a textbook, *An Elementary Treatise on Mineralogy and Geology* (Boston, 1816), which became the standard text book for many colleges. Affectionately known as ‘the Father of American Mineralogy’ he helped establish the Maine Medical School in Bowdoin College in 1820, further cementing the importance of the study of science.²⁶⁵

There was no sense of tension between science and religion. Lyall’s *Principles of Geology* would not be published until 1830. Darwin’s *On the Origin of Species* did not appear until 1859. In this section we will examine McKeen’s

²⁶⁵ See Leonard Woods, “An Eulogy of Parker Cleaveland.” *Collections of The Maine Historical Society*, Vol. VI, 1859, 377-435.

contribution to science and his view on the study of natural philosophy as expressed in his chapel sermons.

A. McKeen's Mathematics.

The American Philosophical Society was founded in Philadelphia in 1743 under the leadership of Benjamin Franklin. This prestigious society served to advance knowledge in the sciences and humanities. McKeen had one paper published posthumously in the *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society*, "Observations on the Solar Eclipse of June 16th, 1806, made at Bowdoin College in the District of Maine" (Vol. 6 (1809) pp. 275-277).

1. The American Academy of Arts and Sciences

A second scholarly society, The American Academy of Arts and Sciences, was founded in 1780. It was a Society for 'the cultivation and promotion of Arts and Sciences.' There were sixty-two charter members, including many famous leaders such as John Adams, Samuel Adams, Charles Chauncy and John Hancock. Among the charter members were several men connected with McKeen and Bowdoin College, including James Bowdoin, Samuel Deane, Samuel Williams and Joseph Willard.

McKeen had two papers published in the *Memoirs of the Academy*. The first is a "Synopsis of Several Bills of Mortality" (*Memoirs of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences*, Vol. 2, No. 2 (1804), 62-66). The second,

published in the same edition, is “Deductions from Select Bills of Mortality” (*Memoirs of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences*, Vol. 2, No. 2 (1804), 66-70).

2. “Synopsis of Several Bills of Mortality”

In the first article, “Synopsis of Several Bills of Mortality,” McKeen collected statistics from several towns in Massachusetts. He set out the details for each town, recording the total number of deaths over a particular time frame. The time frame varies. For example, the details concerning Northampton are for the single year of 1786. There were 19 deaths, 4 were under the age of 1. The number of deaths for each decade is then recorded. There were no deaths over the age of 80. The records for Marblehead, 2nd Parish, are from 1787 to 1792. During those six years, there were 337 deaths. There were 75 deaths under the age of 1, with 78 between the ages of 1 and 5, and 2 over the age of 80. The longest period is for Edgartown, 1765 to 1791, 31 years. Over that time there were 367 deaths in the town. There were 97 under the age of 1, and the table divides for those over 70. It appears to read that over the age of 100 there were 4 ‘cert.’ and 3 ‘unc.’ We assume this means ‘certain’ and ‘uncertain,’ a reminder that not all those who reached the age of 100 could be sure they were actually over 100.

From the synopsis McKeen notes the total number of recorded deaths is 6576, although he acknowledges there is unevenness in the form of recording from

town to town. It is to be noted that this total is not a statement of equal time periods, as some were one year's records, some were longer periods. He did not record stillborn infants or deaths abroad, which presumably includes deaths at sea, which could be a significant number in certain communities. The conclusion McKeen draws is brief. "The laws, by which the waste of human life is governed, are to be learned from facts, not hypothesis."

3. "Deductions from Select Bills of Mortality"

In the second article, "Deductions from Select Bills of Mortality," McKeen arranges the list differently. He lists ages from 0 to 102 and then notes the number of deaths occurring in each year of age in five towns: Hatfield, Stow, Barnstable (east precinct), Hamilton and Beverly. Once again the number of years covered by each town is slightly different. Hatfield 1772 to 1792, 20 years; Stow 1775 to 1797, 22 years; Barnstable, east precinct, (East Parish) 1786 to 1796, 10 years (but missing records for the year 1793 – therefore 9 years); Hamilton 1772 to 1797, 25 years; and Beverly, 1st Parish 1785 to 1799, 14 years.

After listing the number of deaths in each town, he records the totals.

However, he subtracts half of those that are recorded as 0, 'because they do not all come into life at once.' By this subtraction he appears to be estimating that half of those who died before the age of one either died at birth, or were

stillborn. He eliminates these from the statistics. The totals for the five sample towns are as follows:

- Hatfield: $6281 - 100 = 6181$ deaths over a period of twenty years. An average of 309 per year.
- Stow: $7338 - 133 = 7205$ deaths over a period of twenty-two years. An average of 327 per year. There appears to be a misprint in the journal at this point. The average is recorded as 133. But this is the figure subtracted to correct deaths at 0 years and is an obvious scribal error, made by either McKeen or the printer.²⁶⁶
- Barnstable, (East Parish): $6462 - 84 = 6378$ deaths over a period of nine years. An average of 708 per year.
- Hamilton: $10,827 - 147 = 10,680$ deaths over a period of twenty-five years. An average of 427 per year.
- Beverly, (1st Parish): $17,388 - 317 = 17,071$ deaths over a period of fourteen years. An average of 1219 per year.

In a second column McKeen adds the rate of annual decrement for each age.

After listing these results, McKeen observes that they “would give the number of persons living in the several places of observation, if the births and deaths were equal.” However, “the true number exceeds the number deduced from

²⁶⁶ This is confirmed when McKeen records the total for Stow in a summary on the next page as 327.

the tables, in nearly the same proportion that the births exceed the deaths.”

The true numbers are: Hatfield 709, Stow 830, Barnstable, East Parish 1365, Hamilton 900, and Beverly, First Parish, 2561.

McKeen draws the following conclusion:

The mean annual number of deaths in the preceding places of observation is nearly 98, and the births nearly 213; the natural increase therefore is 115. Now, if 2990, the number of inhabitants deduced from the tables, were the real flock, this rate of increase would be sufficient to double the number in a little more than 18 years and one third. But as the real flock of inhabitants to be doubled by this increase is 6359, the period of duplication is 38 years and 7 tenths. It hence appears that the increase of population in the old towns in New England is not so rapid as has been supposed.

In fact, he adds another table which includes the time of observation, the number of inhabitants, the annual deaths, births, increase, and periods of duplication. This final table shows that “even old towns are increasing at very different rates.”

4. Understanding “Bills of Mortality”

Patricia Cline Cohen’s work *A Calculating People: The Spread of Numeracy in Early America*²⁶⁷ provides valuable information in understanding the significance of “Bills of Mortality” and the significance of statistics for the common good. The growing interest in numeracy and mathematics in Colonial

²⁶⁷ Patricia Cline Cohen, *A Calculating People: The Spread of Numeracy in Early America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press. 1982).

and Republican America was not only connected with exploration and commerce, “but as the result of a slow but fundamental shift in the way men thought about human affairs and divine intervention.”²⁶⁸ If life and death were all according to God’s plan, there was no point in quantifying it. When ministers did begin to quantify it, they first discovered a kind of elegance to the numbers, which reinforced their preaching that life is short and unpredictable, and one should prepare to meet the maker. The more they looked at the numbers, the more variations they began to observe. McKeen asserts the fact of mortality, ‘the waste of human life’ in the first article. It is the variations that he points out in his second article.

Bills of mortality had been commonly available in London since around 1530.²⁶⁹ While there were parish records available in the Colonies, it was not until the publication of a newspaper in Boston, the *Boston News-Letter*, that bills of mortality began to be published. In 1704 the newspaper published the first set of bills, beginning with the year 1701. This continued until 1774, when the quest for independence became more interesting news. Unlike the London bills, the Boston bills did not include cause of death, merely the number of deaths. There was no editorial reflection on these numbers. Their use was limited to the religious reflection on mortality. This soon began to

²⁶⁸ Cohen, 82.

²⁶⁹ Ibid., 40.

change. Cohen observes, “Discussion of population growth and decline and reports of numbers of births and deaths were featured in newspapers, sermons and pamphlets, and through popularized demography the reading public was introduced to a form of quantitative reasoning about human behavior.”²⁷⁰

Cohen argues that this is indicative of the move of science in America away from Puritan fatalism. This new use of mathematics was the beginning of a shift from the search for divine intentions to the quest for natural causes. The tables showed patterns that confirmed providence and the control of human affairs by God. But as local data were collected and tabulated, it became clear that the patterns were more complex and irregular. McKeen clearly believed in the sovereignty of God, but he was not afraid to observe the complexities and irregularities of the data. In this sense, he was one of the scientists of the new republic. The science of mathematics, particularly in statistics, would become increasingly important in the new republic. Significantly, statistics would become important in the definition and maintenance of the common good.

5. Statistics and the State

Chapter 5 of Cohen’s book gives an important insight into the context of McKeen’s early statistical work. She calls it “political arithmetic” and observes there was “a fad for statisticks” and “authentic facts” in the 1790s.²⁷¹

²⁷⁰ Ibid., 84.

²⁷¹ Ibid., 150.

The desire to collect definite facts about the nation was essential for “assessing the American experiment in republican government.”²⁷² These “authentic” facts would undoubtedly validate the whole enterprise of being America. Men began to gather all kinds of facts about towns, counties and states.

One of the early works was produced by Samuel Williams, McKeen’s private tutor in mathematics and science. He produced a series of Vermont almanacs, and finally published *The Natural and Civil History of Vermont*. In the preface to the second edition, Williams writes,

In the narrations, the reader will find a minuteness of dates, facts, and circumstances, not common in European productions; and not very entertaining in itself. This method was adopted with choice, and by design. Persuaded that the American commonwealth is yet in the early years of its infancy, and unable to comprehend to what extent, magnitude, and dignity, it may arise; the author of these sheets views the history of a particular state, rather as a collection of facts, circumstances, and records, than as a compleat and finished historical production. The more important the *United States* shall become in the future periods of time, of the more importance it will be to be able to find a minute and authentic account of the facts, proceedings, and transactions, from whence the grand fabric arose. To collect and record such facts and proceedings, so far as they relate to this part of the country, is what I have attempted.²⁷³

The early statisticians were drawn to their work by a desire to preserve the republic and to seek the common good. There may be a certain naïveté, for

²⁷² Ibid., 151.

²⁷³ Samuel Williams, *The Natural and Civil History of Vermont*, 2 vols., 2nd edition (Burlington VT: 1809), 1:12-13. Also quoted by Cohen, 152.

they believed that “if only enough facts were known, disagreement on public issues would end.”²⁷⁴ The political landscape of 1790s America was marked by conflict over the formation of political parties. As Alexander Hamilton argued for the strengthening of the federal government by the formation of a national bank, so Thomas Jefferson argued against such strong federal government, preferring power to remain with the states. The introduction of party politics led many to fear for the future of the new republic. All sides hoped that authentic facts would preserve the union of states, since they believed “that a comprehensive knowledge of general social facts could be the new foundation of politics...Facts would dispel the factious spirit.”²⁷⁵

A census was mandated by the Constitution (Article 1, Section 2), and is taken in the United States every ten years. The first census of the United States took place in 1790. As politics became more partisan, this gathering of facts became contentious. The reason, suggests Cohen, is that statistics began to be employed in determining the common good. This was a shift from an ideal of common good, to common good as the greatest good of the greatest number. Common good was now destined to transform into a majoritarian version. The collecting and analyzing of data signalled two things. First, it reflected pride in the new republic, as a land of rising power and glory, all of which

²⁷⁴ Cohen, 154.

²⁷⁵ Ibid., 155.

could be quantified. McKeen shared this pride. He was a proud republican. Secondly, it signalled a shift in the understanding of common good, from something absolute, revealed, given, to something relative, to be determined by majority. In time, this would have a profound influence on public policy. Cohen observes, “The common good was being broken into constituent parts, and the social order could now be comprehended through arithmetic.”²⁷⁶ McKeen could not have foreseen the use to which statistics would be put in the new republic. His interests were in the brevity of life, and the orderliness of God’s control of human affairs.

B. McKeen’s View of Science

In several sermons McKeen discusses the relationship between natural revelation, reason and revelation. His commitment to the scientific observation and study of the created world is clearly demonstrated in his own mathematical skills, the procuring of scientific apparatus for the college and the appointment of the destined-to-be-great Parker Cleaveland. In this section we will highlight several of McKeen’s statements as they relate to the study of the natural world.

²⁷⁶ Ibid.. 164.

1. Science, Reason and Creation

The place of reason is important. In this regard McKeen clearly stands in the tradition of New England Calvinists. E. Brooks Holifield comments, “They thought of theology as a delicate balance of human reasoning and divine biblical revelation, an appeal to ‘the evidence of scripture and reason.’ They aspired to give reason its due credit while subordinating it always to the revealed word.”²⁷⁷ McKeen lived in that happy time when it was assumed that the truths of special revelation (the Bible) were consistent with the truths of general revelation (creation). The following extracts from his chapel sermons show the importance of reason and rationality.

Preaching in Chapel on November 13, 1803, he said,

The frame of this visible world is such a striking monument of the power of the Creator that we cannot easily conceive how a rational creature can have any serious doubt of his existence. His wisdom and goodness also are evident from his works. The earth is so formed to be a convenient habitation for the creatures that dwell in it. Provision is made for their support and comfort. And we see innumerable demonstrations of benevolent design from which we may most reasonably infer that the world was made by a Being who is both wise and good.

These first principles of religion are asserted and illustrated by divine revelation, but they do not depend on supernatural revelation for their evidence. The works of God furnish us with the evidence of his existence which must be acknowledged before any revelation can be received as from him. Hence inspired writers appeal to the things that

²⁷⁷ *Theology in America*, 25.

are made to prove the existence of the Maker. The invisible things of him, saith the apostle Paul, from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and godhead.²⁷⁸

Reason is held very high. The statement, “The works of God furnish us with the evidence of his existence which must be acknowledged before any revelation can be received as from him,” seems to suggest that no one can move from the book of creation to the book of Scripture without acknowledging the impact of general revelation. McKeen is convinced that very few people have trouble acknowledging there is a Creator. The real problem, in his view, is not the issue of creation, but the issue of accepting that the Creator exercises a moral government.

But though there are comparatively few who deny the existence of God, there are more who doubt or disbelieve his moral government. Because we do not see its effects so clearly as we do the effects of his creating power, doubts have arisen concerning it.²⁷⁹

In his sermon to the chapel on September 1, 1805, in words that sound like echoes of Edwards, McKeen again asserts the power of reason in combination with the observation of creation.

Every effect depends on some cause. The things that are made have a maker. And the greater the order, beauty, or utility of the things that are made, the clearer and stronger is the evidence of wisdom and

²⁷⁸ Sermon on Psalm 58, *Verily he is a God that judgeth in the earth*. (Also titled, 2 Tim 4.8 *The Lord, the righteous Judge*, Psalm 22.28, *For the kingdom is the Lord's and he is the governor among the nations*.) First preached in Beverly on March 9, 1794.

²⁷⁹ Ibid.

goodness of him who made them. The world which we inhabit, and the system of which it is a part, exhibit no marks of having been self-existent, nor of having been produced by chance or the fortuitous concourse of atoms, as some ancient atheists used to speak. Nor is it easy to conceive that a rational being should embrace such an opinion, unless by the practice of wickedness he has first made it for his interest that there should be no God.²⁸⁰

He goes on to detail what the works of God reveal, and begins to hint at the inadequacies of pagan learning, a theme that he will address at length in another sermon.

However ignorant the ancient heathens were, or modern heathens are, on things of this nature, or however inattentive they generally were to their discoveries which God has made of himself in his works, it is certain that much knowledge, and very important knowledge of God, might have been obtained from them.²⁸¹

The heathens had the works of God before their eyes, from whence without his written word they might have learned his being, power, wisdom and goodness. The heavens declare the glory of God, and the earth abounds with tokens of his goodness. The wonderful formation of man, his powers of mind and body, the succession of seasons and the order of providence, speak to the ear of reason a very plain and intelligible language. They proclaim that there is a being above, the Maker, Preserver, and Governor of the world. The faculty of distinguishing between right and wrong, or between moral good and evil, and the tendency of virtue to make men happy and of vice to make them miserable afford us strong evidence that our Maker loves

²⁸⁰ Sermon on Romans 1:21, *When they knew God, they glorified him not as God*, (also titled Daniel 5:23 *And the God in whose hand thy breath is, and whose are all thy ways, has thou not glorified*). Repeated in Chapel on August 10, 1806. First preached in Beverly on March 1, 1801.

²⁸¹ Ibid.

righteousness and hates wickedness, and that we are the subjects of his moral government.²⁸²

2. Knowledge Derived from God

McKeen did not expect that reason and revelation would be contradictory. In a sermon on Genesis 16:13, *And she called the name of the Lord that spake unto her, Thou God seest me*, McKeen sets out an epistemology, an understanding of our knowledge as derived from God. He asks several questions and then says “reason answers these questions as the Scriptures do.”

We know that we did not make ourselves, nor the world which we inhabit, and reason teaches us that the Maker of all things must be a being of wisdom and knowledge.

Whether we turn our attention within or without ourselves, we perceive innumerable marks of design in the Maker. We ourselves are his workmanship; we have a faculty of knowing which we must have derived from him. And it is inconceivable that he should make us what we are if he were not endued with wisdom, knowledge and understanding. His works teach us that his knowledge is as much superior to ours as his nature is. We cannot set any bounds to it. In this way the psalmist reasoned from the dictates of nature itself with some in his day who impiously said, ‘The Lord shall not see, neither shall the God of Jacob regard it.’ ‘Understand, ye brutish among people and ye fools, when will ye be wise? He that planted the ear, shall he not hear? ... He that teacheth man knowledge, shall he not know? ... And as we were made, so we are continually preserved by his power. And can we be unknown to him, in whom we live, and move, and have our being? Can we conceal any of our thoughts, words or action, from him

²⁸² Ibid.

who gave us, and continually supports in us, the powers of thinking, speaking, and action?

Reason answers these question as the Scriptures do, which teach us that the eyes of the Lord are in every place, that all things are naked and open to them; that his eyes are upon the ways of man, and that he seeth all his goings, that there is no darkness nor shadow of death where the workers of iniquity may hide themselves.²⁸³

It is to be observed that McKeen understood the importance of reason not only in employing rational arguments to demonstrate the authenticity of Scripture, but also in moving to the end of living well. Note the place of “true interest and happiness” in the following sermon, and also the implicit danger of making too much of created things.

The world, viewed as the workmanship of God, is good; it is good for those purposes for which it was made. Were the world and the things of it used as they ought to be, they would lead us to God, and would contribute to our true interest and happiness.

But when we set our chief and highest affectations on the creature, we no longer make it the means of leading us to God, we put it in the place of God. We expect that from it which it was not designed to afford us, and it is not strange if we then find it to be vanity. But we ought not for this reason to find fault with the world, nor the things of it, considered as the workmanship of God. When applied to those uses for which they

²⁸³ Sermon on Genesis 16:13, *And she called the name of the Lord that spake unto her, Thou God seest me*, Preached in Chapel on November 3, 1805. First preached in Beverly on September 8, 1792.

were made, they are good; but if we expect our chief happiness from them, they will not answer our expectations.²⁸⁴

3. Insufficiency of Reason

Reason, however, is insufficient. Revelation is necessary for people to know God in the fullest sense. There have been many great minds in the history of the world and none of them have been able to reason their way to a biblical theology of the one, true God. Here is a college president who pushes pupils to understand the great learning of Ancient Greece and Rome and yet is critical of that very learning as insufficient for the fundamental responsibility of knowing God.

Preaching in Chapel on December 23, 1804, he reminds students that a rational system of natural religion does not inevitably lead to the worship of the one, true God.

It is well known that what are called at this day systems of natural religion, and which are thought to be so plain that they might easily be known and understood without any special revelation from God, have been in a great measure learned from the Scriptures. If we may judge from the general opinion and practice of heathen nations, we may suppose that polytheism or the belief and worship of many gods instead of ONE is the religion most natural to man. We cannot easily

²⁸⁴ Sermon on Job 15.31 *Let him that is deceived trust in vanity: for vanity shall be his recompense*. Preached in Chapel on August 2, 1801 and again on August 25, 1805. First preached in Beverly on Beverly January 28, 1798.

conceive what should first induce men to make gods of birds and beasts, of sticks and stones, but it is certain that they did do it. And when superstitious and idolatrous practices were once established by long custom, it was extremely difficult to convince men of their folly and absurdity so far as to prevail on them to renounce them.²⁸⁵

His argument is not against natural religion *per se*, but simply that it is insufficient, and once cemented by tradition it is very hard to reason men out of it. He proceeds to demonstrate that even the great learning of the ancient Greeks and Romans did not move people away from superstitions to true religion.

There were some men among the ancient Greeks and Romans of great learning and abilities who were convinced of the folly and absurdity of the popular superstitions, but they never had influence enough to explode them nor to introduce among the people a rational system of natural religion. We have no evidence that all the boasted reasons and philosophy of ancient Greece and Rome were able to persuade the people of any country, city or village to forsake their superstitious and idolatrous rites, and to worship the ONE, living and true God who created the heavens and earth.

However highly any may think of the powers of the human mind, and of the sufficiency of reason to lead men to the knowledge of the most important truths of religion, yet it is a fact that cannot be denied that a fair experiment was made. Philosophy, eloquence, human sciences in general, the arts of peace and of war were cultivated with great diligence and success. The works of many men eminently learned have been handed down to us, and we may justly admire the great progress that they have made in human science.

²⁸⁵ John 4:22, *Ye worship ye know not what; we know what we worship; for salvation is of the Jews*. First preached in Beverly on June 10, 1797.

But the proficiency they had made in divine knowledge was comparatively very small. Scarce any point of what is now called natural religion was settled by them. Some, who spoke occasionally in high terms of the greatness, majesty and glory of the deity, supposed that he did not concern himself with the affairs of his creatures, that he left the world to the government of fortune or fate. They had no distinct ideas of a future state, nor any steady expectation of rewards for the virtuous, nor punishments for the vicious. The persons to whom they assigned honor and happiness in the world to come were generally such only as had performed great and illustrious actions, the celebrated heroes and bloody conquerors of the world.

It is easy to perceive that such a system of religion had no little tendency to improve men's morals. And with good reason the apostle Paul said that, 'The worldly wisdom knew not God.' And any who at the present day think that they reason along from a consistent, rational system of religion and morality, and discover sufficient motives to enforce the practice of it, they may suppose that they are qualified to do what the greatest philosophers in ancient times were unable to accomplish. And that they endeavor to explode the Christian system to make room for their own, we may suspect either that they possess a great share of vanity or that they are unfriendly to the virtue and happiness of mankind.²⁸⁶

From this McKeen moves on to observe that the Jews possessed a true knowledge of the living God, not because they were blessed with superior rational ability, but because they received revelation from God.

While all other nations acknowledged a multitude of gods, [the Jews] maintained the existence of ONE Supreme Being. The Creator, Preserver and Governor of the world. They believed in his omnipresence, his perfect knowledge of all things, his wisdom, power and goodness, and in his universal providence. How did they get these ideas, when no other people had them? How did they learn to detest the

²⁸⁶ Ibid.

worship of idols, when the philosophers of Egypt, Greece and Rome were bowing down to sticks and stones that were hewn into the form of men and beasts? It is not easy to answer these questions without supposing that they were taught their religion by revelation.²⁸⁷

Of this revelation, McKeen observed that we are not to neglect it. It is the way of God to remove such a gift, and give it to others who will make proper use of it.

Should we neglect and despise it, the darkness of heathenism may again overspread our land; the gospel may be taken from us and given to others who will be more thankful for it and make a better use of it. When the Jews who had been the salt of the earth lost their favor, they were cast out and rejected; or in other words, when they became so corrupt as to refuse and reject the gospel, it was taken from them and given to others. Let us not be high minded but fear, for if God spared not them, let us take heed lest he also spare not us.²⁸⁸

McKeen was not going to read the book of nature without the book of Scripture to guide him, nor would he set aside the place of the supernatural power of God. He believed in the place of the natural and the supernatural. His approach to using the common good in his study of science shows his view of common good is not defined by the majority, but by theology.

²⁸⁷ Ibid.

²⁸⁸ Ibid.

CONCLUSION

McKeen's view of common good is not simply a political or social view – he is primarily a pastor and theologian and his view of the common good reflected these important aspects of his life and work.

He chose to preach certain sermons in the Chapel. The particular sermons address the relevant theological themes for a theological understanding of common good. There is extensive reflection on reason and revelation, on the persuasiveness of general revelation and the need for special revelation, and the noetic effects of sin.

McKeen does not appear to have adopted the Scottish Common Sense Reasoning. He had a clear understanding of sin and the effects of sin upon human faculties. The call to common good, as McKeen framed it, is not rooted in an arbitrary morality, but it is rooted in theology.

He is clearly familiar with *The Nature of True Virtue* by Jonathan Edwards. The language of Edwards forms the basis for McKeen's call to common good. Virtue and vice are, in McKeen's view, defined by God. While only the regenerate may be capable of true virtue, all human beings bear the image of God and are called to strive for true virtue. Benevolence is an obligation made

clear not only by the gospel, but also by the nature of creation. The call to common good is based on humanity's creation in the image of God.

McKeen's theology is not speculative. He is careful in his statements regarding the Trinity. This may have confused some into thinking that he was not orthodox, but rather more liberal. The confusion is based on their misunderstanding of his desire for peace. The call to common good is not based merely on the brotherhood of man; it is based on the sovereignty of God.

His call to common good is one that embraced the rising study of science. He makes use of his skills and interests as a mathematician to maintain that life is not random or chaotic. There is orderliness in the universe and the call to common good is a reflection of the presence of absolutes, given truths that relate to duties to God and to neighbours.

Further study in the development of these ideas by the ministers who were his presidential successors would be profitable in establishing the early impact of his views on the life of the College, or any drift from it. It would also be profitable to study the life and contributions of the students who received instruction from McKeen. This would be valuable in assessing the effect on public life in Maine, particularly the move to separate Maine from Massachusetts that finally occurred in 1820.

President McKeen was a preacher – an evangelical preacher. Perhaps the study of his sermons will stir an interest in McKeen’s “constant recognition of higher ends in education than the development of mental energies, and cultivation in letters and science.”²⁸⁹

²⁸⁹ Quoted by Egbert C. Smyth, *Three Discourses upon the Religious History of Bowdoin College, During the Administrations of Presidents M’Keen, Appleton, & Allen* (Brunswick, J. Griffin, 1858), 9.

Appendix

Joseph McKeen's Inaugural Address

The following is the text of Joseph McKeen's inaugural address delivered on September 2, 1802, as reprinted in 1807 by the Portland-based Thomas B. Wait & Co.

Inaugural Address

The candor I have experienced from the reverend and honorable gentlemen who compose the boards of trustees and overseers of Bowdoin College, will not, I trust, be withholden on this occasion. It is this confidence alone, which enables me to rise and address you, at a moment when the weight of the charge I have consented to undertake, bears with peculiar force upon my mind.

The organization of a literary institution in the district of Maine, which is rapidly increasing in population, is an interesting event, and will form an important epoch in its history. The disadvantages with which the district has contended from the days of its early settlement, have been numerous and discouraging. The scattered inhabitants were long in a weak and defenceless state: for more than a century the sword of the wilderness was a terror to them; and they were frequently constrained to lay aside the peaceful instruments of the husbandman, and to seize the weapons of defence. Planted in detached settlements along an extensive coast, and depending on precarious supplies of subsistence from abroad, it was long before they could enjoy the means of education with which some other parts of New England were early favored. Add to this, that deep and strong prejudices prevailed against the soil and climate, by which immigrations were discouraged, and the population of the district long retarded. These mistakes have yielded to the correcting hand of time; and Maine is rapidly advancing to that state of maturity, in which, without being forcibly plucked, she will drop from her parent stock.

While the wilderness is literally blossoming like the rose, and the late howling desert by the patient hand of industry is becoming a fruitful field, it is pleasing to the friends of science, religion, and good order, to observe a growing disposition in the inhabitants to promote education; without which, the prospect of the future state of society must be painful to the reflecting and feeling mind.

In this assembly it cannot be necessary to expatiate on its importance to mankind; whether we consider them as inhabitants of this world, or as destined for an immortal existence in a state of retribution beyond the grave. The page of inspiration teaches, that for the soul to be without knowledge, it is not good; without the knowledge of the duties of his station in life, no man can act his part with honor to himself, or advantage to the community. Without knowledge, a man must be a stranger to rational enjoyment; time will often be a heavy burden to him; and to rid himself of such and incumbrance, he will be strongly tempted to abandon himself to sensual gratifications, which will incapacitate him for manly and worthy pursuits, and render him an object of pity to some, and of contempt to others.

A man, who intends to practise any mechanic art, must make himself acquainted with it, or he cannot expect to succeed. Instruction is surely not less necessary to one who contemplates the profession of law, physic, or divinity; without it, he can have the confidence of none but the ignorant, and he cannot depend even on that. As they have no fixed principles, by which to form their judgment, they easily fall a prey to the delusive arts of any new pretender to superior knowledge, especially in medicine and theology. When the title to a man's estate is disputed, he generally endeavours to employ an able advocate; when the health of his body only is concerned; he can trust the prescriptions of an empiric: but, if undisturbed in the possession of his estate, and enjoying sound health, he is too often contented with such instructions on the subject of his eternal interests as he can obtain from the most illiterate vagrants, who understand neither what they say, nor whereof they affirm.

I would not be understood to assert, nor even intimate, that human learning is alone sufficient to make a man a good teacher of religion. I believe that he must have so felt the power of divine truth upon his heart, as to be brought under its governing influence. But since the days of inspiration were over, an acquaintance with the force of language, with the rules of legitimate reasoning, and especially with the sacred scriptures, which can be acquired only by reading, study, and meditation, is necessary to qualify one for the office of a teacher in the church.

That the inhabitants of this district may have of their own sons to fill the liberal professions among them, and particularly to instruct them in the principles and practice of our holy religion, is doubtless the object of this institution; and an object it is, worthy the liberal patronage of the enlightened

and patriotic legislature, which laid its foundation, and of the aid its funds have received from several gentlemen, especially that friend of science whose name it bears. That their generous intentions may not be frustrated, it becomes all to take heed, who are, or may be, concerned in its government or instruction.

It ought always to be remembered, that literary institutions are founded and endowed for the common good, and not for the private advantage of those who resort to them for education. It is not that they may be enabled to pass through life in an easy or reputable manner, but that their mental powers may be cultivated and improved for the benefit of society. It if be true, that no man should live to himself, we may safely assert, that every man who has been aided by a public institution to acquire an education, and to qualify himself for usefulness, is under peculiar obligations to exert his talents for the public good.

The governors and instructors of a literary institution owe to God and society the sacred duty of guarding the morals of the youth committed to their care. A young man of talents, who gains an acquaintance with literature and science, but at the same time imbibes irreligious and immoral principles, and contracts vicious habits at college, is likely to become a dangerous member of society. It had been better for him, and for the community, that he had lived in ignorance; in which case, he would have had less guilt, and possessed fewer mischievous accomplishments. He is more dangerous than a madman, armed with instruments of death, and let loose among the defenceless inhabitants of a village. In one case the danger is seen, and an alarm is instantly given to all to be on their guard; in the other it is concealed, and the destroyer is embraced and cherished by those who are soon to be his victims.

Let it never be imagined then, that the sole object of education is to make youth acquainted with languages, sciences, and arts. It is of incalculable importance, that, as education increases their mental energies, these energies should be rightly directed. It is confessed, that to give them this direction exceeds the greatest human skill. A Paul might plant, and an Apollos water; to command increase is the prerogative of Deity. But as the husbandman is not discouraged from cultivating and sowing his land, by the consideration, that without the genial warmth of the sun and the rain of heaven, his labor will be all in vain, neither should we despair of success in forming the minds of youth to virtue and usefulness in life, because we cannot command it.

Though the principal labor and responsibility will fall to the share of the immediate instructors, these honorable boards will give me leave to remind them, that, without their prompt and steady support, the instructors will be able to accomplish much less than is probably expected of them.

The volatility of a youthful mind frequently gives rise to eccentricities, and an impatience of the most wholesome restraint; the mildest government is thought oppressive, and the indulgent parent's ear is easily opened to the voice of complaint; imaginary fears are excited, that the genius of a darling son will be cramped, his spirits broken, the fire of his ambition quenched, and that he will be doomed to drudge through life in a sphere far below that for which nature had destined him. His youthful genius must be permitted to expand by its native and uncontrolled energies; and no doubt is entertained, that, in manhood, his virtues will hang in clusters upon him. I confess, that I am not so much of a modern philosopher, as to subscribe implicitly to this doctrine. In the natural world we find, that without culture, weeds outgrow more useful plants, and choke them; and reasoning from analogy will lead us to suppose, that without restraint or discipline, the mind of a youth will resemble the field of the slothful, and the vineyard of the man void of understanding.

It is admitted, that, as excessive pruning may injure a tree, so may discipline, too severe, an ingenuous youth. It is proper to consult his genius, and assist its expansion, rather than to force it into an unnatural direction. But an attention to order, and the early formation of habits of industry and investigation, are conceived to be objects of vast importance in the education of youth. I may venture to assert, that such habits are of more importance than mere knowledge. It is doubtless a desirable thing to facilitate the acquisition of knowledge; but, in aiming at this, there is a serious danger to be avoided, that of inducing an impatience of application, and an aversion to every thing that requires labor. Could we fill the mind of a youth with science by as easy a process as the modern chemist fills a vial with factitious air, it may be doubted whether his education would be of much use to him. In this connexion, it may not be improper to suggest an advantage arising from the study of what are called the learned languages; it inures a youthful mind to application, and is, in this respect, useful; even if no advantage arose from the knowledge of them. The mind acquires strength and vigor from exercise, as well as the body. We should think a parent guilty of a gross error in the education of his son, if he never allowed him to use his limbs, and appointed a servant to carry

him in his arms, or convey him in a carriage. We should be guilty of a similar error in education, if we aimed at making a youth learned without study. It is important, that he should have full employment for the exercise of his mental powers, rather than be carried in the arms of his tutor to the temple of science. Perhaps I have said more than was necessary, on the utility of acquiring habits of industry and application, while youth are in the course of their education. If the importance of the subject will not justify me, I have no apology to offer; and must transgress a little longer upon your patience, while I declare, that, in my opinion, a youth had better be four years employed “*nihil operose agendo*,” in diligently doing what would be utterly useless to him in life, than in light reading, which requires no thinking.

If habits of application be of so much importance, it is desirable, that all concerned in the government and instruction of the college should concur in enforcing subordination, regular conduct, and a diligent improvement of time.

Give me leave then, gentlemen, to invite your zealous co-operation with the immediate instructors in ordaining, and executing, such laws and regulations as will be likely to keep our students, during their residence in college, as fully employed as will be consistent with their health. Employment will contribute not a little to the preservation of their morals, the prevention of unnecessary expense, and the preclusion of pernicious customs, which, once introduced, cannot be easily abolished. The importance of uniting our efforts to effect these salutary purposes cannot escape the notice of a reflecting mind. Should we be so happy as to succeed in forming a number for usefulness in church and state, we may expect our numbers to increase, when more ample accommodations and means of instruction will be necessary.

And now let me entreat all good men here present, who wish to see their fellow citizens enlightened, virtuous, free, and happy, to exert the portion of influence which they possess, in favor of this infant institution; and to unite in fervent supplications to the great Father of light, knowledge, and all good, that his blessing may descend upon this seminary; that it may eminently contribute to the advancement of useful knowledge, the religion of Jesus Christ, the best interests of man, and the glory of God.

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