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John Quincy Adams at Prayer

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At seventy-three years old, John Quincy Adams embarked on a winter lecture tour to share his views "On Faith" and drew on his "intercourse with the world" to describe the "many liberal minded and intelligent persons—almost persuaded to become Christians" whom he had met. So powerful was Adams's religious message that when his youngest son came across the manuscript years later, he simply docketed it: "Two sermons/ JQA." The speech, delivered from Boston to Salem and Hartford to Brooklyn —but never printed—laid out his decades of seeking and the formulation of Adams's own theology. Overall, Adams came to believe that man's unity of faith, hope, and charity could defeat earthly ills and clarify choices in the early republic's burgeoning religious marketplace. "Faith must have its bounds, and perhaps the most difficult and delicate question in morals is to define them clearly," Adams said, praising the American government's nonintervention in forming official articles of faith. "But allow me to say that this unbounded freedom of religious faith, far from absolving any individual from the obligation of believing, does but impose it upon them, with a tenfold force."[1] This insight was especially true of Adams's own religious history. Therefore this essay offers a reintroduction to America's sixth president based on the diverse circles of prayer that he moved through, and the religious poetics that he created to narrate that pilgrimage. It ends with a glimpse of the curious afterlife that American religious culture assigned to him.

Throughout the large life that he led on the world stage, John Quincy Adams devoutly chronicled people, places, events, and religions like no other American statesman of his era. As a leader of the early republic's fledgling diplomatic corps, and later, as an antislavery firebrand, the lifelong Protestant used his

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[1]John Quincy Adams [JQA], *On Faith*, draft in JQA's hand, listing lecture dates from October 27, 1840 through November 20, 1840; reprised on March 24, 1841 and November 1 [2?], 1842, docketed by his son, Charles Francis Adams: "Two Sermons / J.Q.A. / 1825 / not printed," The Adams Family Papers, Boston: The Massachusetts Historical Society. Hereafter cited as Adams Papers.

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public and private writings to valorize political office as the epitome of a Christian patriot's service to Providence. During his stints as ambassador, Secretary of State, President, and Congressman, Adams remained unswervingly committed to the projection of America as a Christian commonwealth. His intense engagement with the world's believers and skeptics also fueled a remarkable personal odyssey that mirrored his generation's shift from rigid Calvinism to liberal Arminianism. Reimagining John Quincy Adams at prayer, then, illuminates the remarkable evolution of the Unitarian conscience.[2] Over time, he came to care less about the use of religion for self-perfection, and far more about the practical power of faith to achieve social justice over "national sins" like slavery. He set aside youthful demands for evidence of miracles, and grew to embrace the divinity of Christ as he worked out matters of faith in the dual context of politics and poetry. Man's will forged belief, Adams argued, and that belief made and sustained the Christianity needed to counter any trial. Faith, he concluded, was a "natural and essential denomination of the human soul."[3]

How and why John Quincy Adams came to define and redefine religion matters deeply, because often the form of worship that he attended was not his own. Constant travel led Adams to develop the cosmopolitan Christianity that shaped his worldview, but religion remains an understudied aspect of his life.[4] The

[2]Many excellent works exist to outline the shifts in antebellum religion and culture that John Quincy and Louisa Catherine Adams experienced and reflected upon, including R. W. B. Lewis, *The American Adam: Innocence, Tragedy and Tradition in the Nineteenth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1955); Clive Bush, *The Dream of Reason: American Consciousness and Cultural Achievement from Independence to the Civil War* (London: Edward Arnold, 1977); Harold P. Simonson, *Radical Discontinuities: American Romanticism and Christian Consciousness* (Rutherford: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1983); David Morse, *American Romanticism, Volume 1, From Cooper to Hawthorne* (Totowa: Barnes & Noble Books, 1987); Nathan O. Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1989); Conrad Edick Wright, ed., *American Unitarianism, 1805–1865* (Boston: The Massachusetts Historical Society and Northeastern University Press, 1989); Lewis Perry, *Boats against the Current: American Culture between Revolution and Modernity, 1820–1860* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993); James E. Block, *A Nation of Agents: The American Path to a Modern Self and Society* (Cambridge, Mass.: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2002); John Gatta, *Making Nature Sacred: Literature, Religion, and Environment in America from the Puritans to the Present* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004); Leigh Eric Schmidt, *Restless Souls: The Making of American Spirituality* (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 2005); Daniel Walker Howe, *What Hath God Wrought: The Transformation of America, 1815–1848* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007); Paul E. Johnson, *The Early American Republic, 1789–1829* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007); and, Lorman Ratner et al., *Paradoxes of Prosperity: Wealth-Seeking Versus Christian Values in Pre-Civil War America* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2009).

[3]Adams, *On Faith.*

[4]The classic biography is Samuel Flagg Bemis's two-volume work, *John Quincy Adams and the Foundations of American Foreign Policy* and *John Quincy Adams and the Union* (New York: Knopf, 1949, 1956). For surveys of Adams's career and intellectual development, see also: Jack Shepherd, *Cannibals of the Heart: A Personal Biography of Louisa Catherine and John Quincy*

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relentless tug of a diplomatic itinerary constantly uprooted and replanted Adams, along with wife Louisa Catherine and their three sons, John 2nd, George Washington, and Charles Francis. Throughout the first three decades of his career he led what he called a "wandering life" through The Hague, Prussia, St. Petersburg, Paris, and London—all sites largely bereft of opportunities to hear Unitarian preaching on a regular basis. When Congress was in session, the chaplains who shaped Adams's moments of reflection between debates were rarely clergy of his own denomination. His life was filled with unique trials—children and siblings horribly lost, close friendships worn thin by his political principles, and a vicious election race—but in terms of religion, Adams managed to remain both curious and firm. While he found theological hermeneutics fascinating to trace, he was most taken with the variety and exoticism of religious culture that he observed. Though he and other Unitarians were most at home in a faith that, by the Civil War, was snidely described as centered in "the fatherhood of God, the brotherhood of man, and the neighborhood of Boston," Adams's cosmopolitanism set him apart. He clearly relished traveling through other liturgical seasons and sampling new beliefs. Reflections on the theology and rites of Roman Catholics, Anglicans, Greek and Russian Orthodox, Hindus, Muslims, and Jews all appear in his diaries, letters, and miscellany books. And as each new encounter faded into his diary, Adams pensively returned to the faith in which he was raised. By far, he preferred the Congregational "essentials of Christianity," Adams wrote in 1846, adding: "I cheerfully join in social worship with all others willing to receive me in Communion with them."[5]

I. Answering the Great Ends of Existence, 1792–1825

Thanks to a peripatetic childhood, Adams acquired his cosmopolitan outlook on religion fairly early, dividing his youth between the wooden pews of his parents' First Parish Congregational Church in Quincy, Massachusetts, and the grand cathedrals of Europe, where he acted as his father's diplomatic attaché. Both parents came from a fairly liberal wing of Congregationalism. John Quincy closely followed the piety and practices of his New England forebears, taking sermon notes on Sunday and studying history, sacred and profane, during his whirlwind education at Harvard. Like his peers, much of

Adams (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1980); Paul C. Nagel, *John Quincy Adams: A Public Life, A Private Life* (New York: Knopf, 1998); Lynn Hudson Parsons, *John Quincy Adams* (Madison: Madison House, 1998); and Robert V. Remini, *John Quincy Adams* (New York: Times Books, 2002).

[5]JQA to Reverend Alvan Lamson, September 25, 1846, letterbook copy, Adams Papers.

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his religious education was homemade, and interlaced with literary pursuits—at times, *Tristram Shandy*'s directive to answer the "great ends of existence" guided Adams just as much as did the family Bible.[6] His uncle and tutor, the Reverend John Shaw, often parried with the teenager on questions of good and evil; Adams's precocious queries demonstrated a youthful irritation with pulpit authority as the final word on theology.[7] Preachers were, to his mind, much as his father and others had struggled to describe them in the Massachusetts Constitution of 1780, the "public Protestant teachers of piety, religion, and morality" who encouraged Christians to be good subjects of the commonwealth.[8]

In 1796, Adams accepted his first major diplomatic post as minister to the Netherlands, and the following year he married Louisa Catherine Johnson, the sociable daughter of a London tobacco merchant. Louisa's parents were nominally Unitarian, but hardly regular churchgoers, and her religious background was broad. She was raised first as an Anglican, and then tutored at a Catholic convent school in Nantes.[9] John Quincy and Louisa Catherine represented a new wave of interdenominational marriage, a cultural route that many antebellum Americans explored without rupturing their households.[10] Adams did not care if he married outside of his denomination, and he put little pressure on Louisa to convert. Yet when Louisa sat down to write her memoirs in the late 1820s, becoming the *first* First Lady to do so, she recalled a husband and father for whom she willingly sacrificed her own mixed set of creeds, so confident and appealing was his outlook on faith. "I likewise joined in the Duties of his religious exercises as a tribute of respect to him, and as an example to my little ones," she wrote.[11] The catalogue of their Stone Library in Quincy reflects the shared breadth of their religious reading habits: diverse sermons, hymnals, and Bibles printed in Greek, Latin, French, German, and Hawaiian.[12]

[6]JQA, Diary, May 16, 1792, Adams Papers.

[7]Robert A. East, *John Quincy Adams: The Critical Years, 1785–1794* (New York: Bookman, 1962), 31–34.

[8]For John Adams's drafting of the Massachusetts constitution and the role of religion in the document's Declaration of Rights, see Gregg L. Lint et al., eds., *The Papers of John Adams* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1989), 8:228–271.

[9]For Louisa Catherine Adams's reflections on her childhood, education, and formative years, see "Record of a Life," and "The Adventures of a Nobody," in eds. Judith S. Graham et al., *Diary and Autobiographical Writings of Louisa Catherine Adams*, 2 vols. (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2013), 1:1–356.

[10]See Anne C. Rose, "Religious Individualism in Nineteenth-Century American Families," in *Perspectives on American Religion and Culture*, ed. Peter W. Williams (Malden: Blackwell Publishers, 1999).

[11]*Diary and Autobiographical Writings of Louisa Catherine Adams*, 1:185.

[12]JQA made close lists of his book and pamphlet acquisitions throughout his life. The sermons mentioned here are cited at his Miscellany for the years 1803 to 1825 (Adams Papers), next to his New Testament chapter summaries. See also Henry Adams, *A Catalogue of the Books of John Quincy Adams, Deposited in the Boston Athenaeum* (Boston: Printed for the Athenaeum, 1938). The 1843 Hawaiian Bible, printed in Oahu and presented in late May of 1845, bears an

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Letters between husband and wife framed the news of daily life around the "blessings of Providence," and lunges at understanding why God afflicted or blessed their small family.[13] Frequently, the young ambassador spent his New Year's Eve diary entries agonizing over who might improve the soul of John Quincy Adams more: Providence, or the man himself. When Louisa experienced a series of miscarriages—at least four in the first three years of marriage, all suffered abroad—the stress and agony of repeated disappointment caused them both to seek out faith. Another tragedy, the death of their infant daughter Louisa in St. Petersburg in fall 1812, shattered much of Adams's mental world. He simply could not fathom the Providential reasoning that would justify so many consecutive episodes of loss. Grappling with the great ends of existence, he now saw, required a religious dexterity that he had yet to achieve. Feeling melancholy, Adams turned to any and all religions for peace from the "bitter sorrows" and "rebellion of the Heart" that came from God's "chastening hand." He was likely aware of how his private outbursts of emotion might be "read" in an age of revival. "Religious Sentiments become from day to day more constantly habitual to my mind. They are perhaps too often seen in this Journal," Adams wrote. "God alone can make even Religion a Virtue; and to him I look for aid that mine may degenerate into no vicious excess."[14]

The multiple losses redoubled Adams's efforts to instill Christian morality in his surviving children. The painful fact that Adams and his wife spent nearly six years separated from two of their sons did not excuse the task of Christian parenting. A throwaway line from one of George Washington Adams's letters in early 1811, reaching his parents nine months later when the Russian waterways melted to allow mail, stirred great concern. His son's fondness for reading Bible chapters aloud to his elderly aunt was laudable, the father wrote approvingly, but it was not enough. The remedy was vintage Adams. Over the course of the next two years, he issued a series of instructional *Letters on the Bible* describing how to read Scripture, when to apply its lessons, and why it merited special distinction in world literature. "No book in the world deserves to be so unceasingly studied, and so profoundly meditated upon as the Bible," he wrote.[15]

inscription of gratitude to JQA from the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, "for the kind interest he has taken in the Sandwich Islands."

[13]As she prepared her memoirs, Louisa often referred to JQA's more precise diary entries to sharpen her recollection of people or events. While we cannot know if JQA ever read his wife's diary, it is worth noting that most of her entries took the form of "journal letters" that were occasionally edited and sent to either JQA or his elderly father.

[14]JQA, Diary, December 31, 1812, Adams Papers.

[15]JQA's instructions were collected and published as *Letters of John Quincy Adams to His Son: On the Bible and Its Teachings* (Auburn: James M. Alden, 1850). Hereafter cited as *Letters*.

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His own mastery of Biblical scholarship, Adams thought, was amateurish. Sometimes he could not find a decent copy to peruse during his travels, even in one of the five or so languages he could read. Though he rose to study several chapters before breakfast, sometimes his attention slid away. "Sometimes I say to myself, I do not understand what I have read; I can not help it; I did not make my own understanding: there are many things in the Bible 'hard to understand,' as St. Peter expressly says of Paul's epistles," Adams acknowledged. He cautioned his sons to persevere. The Bible, as Adams lectured in his letters home, should be read in four ways: as divine revelation, historical record, system of morality, and finally, as an unparalleled literary composition.[16] Further, the Bible provided several layers of history: universal, national, institutional, family, and individual. He emphasized that the Sermon on the Mount contained the most eloquent expression of Christianity's greatest tenets, including the principles of nonviolence, the Ten Commandments, the Beatitudes, and the Golden Rule. Finally, Adams found special resonance in the history of Abraham, whose trials of character tested his obedience to God as he coped with a childless wife and the weight of constructing a great nation.

Such was the religious life of the mind for John Quincy Adams in St. Petersburg. Hard at work on a commercial treaty with Czar Alexander I, religious rites captivated the American minister's interest, and gave him a way to interpret Russian civilization. In a three-month stretch, he sampled Sunday services, baptisms, weddings, funerals, and high holy days at a Catholic church, a Kazan Church, and the English Factory Church (the Anglican outpost in St. Petersburg). Adams interviewed Greek Orthodox priests, curious how they calculated the date for Easter. He interrogated the local Jesuit headmaster regarding schoolboys' hourly curricula. He assessed the "Frozen Market" by the Monastery of St. Alexander Nevsky, noting the liturgical accommodations that merchants made for religious observance.[17] No detail of how people lived their religion in other lands slipped through his capacity for wonder, curiosity, or outright judgment. He recorded how religions marked the life cycle, where the faithful buried their dead, what they wore, and the gestures of supplication that they used at prayer. In December 1814, readying to serve as President Monroe's Secretary of State and as an officer of the newly created American Bible Society, a more mature Adams channeled his faith toward new beginnings in his native country. He had married outside of his denomination, immersed himself in biblical scholarship, and widely surveyed foreign religion. If leaving America had allowed Adams to grasp for the fullest formation of his faith, then returning home would certainly test it.

[16]*Letters,* 13.
[17]JQA, Diary, January 2, 1812, Adams Papers.

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II. The President as Poet, 1825–1848

Just as historians have hailed Andrew Jackson as the "symbol for an age," a politician who came to represent the introduction of the country's roughest and newest characters into elite circles of influence so, too, the figure of John Quincy Adams stands as the "pilgrim for an age." At least three of his poems open with pilgrims complaining of weakness, weariness, strife, or despair; all of them are equally perplexed about how to greet God. The peak of Adams's poetry-writing occurred as he suffered three more sudden tragedies: the deaths of his father (1826), sons George (1829), and John 2nd (1834). Adams's own health began to fade, and he suffered a paralytic stroke in late winter 1846. In a presidential career marred by nasty personal politics, writing poetry remained one of Adams's greatest joys. Usually he galloped ahead of his colleagues to set the intellectual trends, but for once, Adams was merely following the wave of popular interest in Coleridgian Romanticism.[18] Much of the prevailing excitement over the nation's physical beauty and a general desire to resurrect the merits of its Puritan past came across in the appreciative religious themes of Adams's poems.

John Quincy Adams was not a natural poet, but he was a devotee of great literature. Ever a diligent student, Adam's torturous process of writing poetry showed him to be a fine mimic of the art. He especially admired the "noble and magnificent sentiments" of Plutarch's *Lives* (so "Christian like" in scope but marred by an "inattention to Chronology"), and the human condition as Shakespeare framed it in *Hamlet*. Like his parents, Adams often invoked lines from Pope's *Universal Prayer*, Milton's *Paradise Lost*, and anything by Dryden or Sterne. The sixth president went along with the prevailing literary trends by composing pastoral odes to sun-dials, pretty young women, rainbows, and even a hot-air balloon, but a more serious love of the Psalms' melodic language drove his style. Poetry was an enjoyable linguistic maze for Adams to parse, and he approached writing it with all the rigid calculation that he once reserved for fixing weights and measures.

Yet Adams's contribution to the "Unitarian literary renaissance" was, as he knew, inescapably amateurish. His "rubbish" books and miscellanies, filled with a fair amount of interlocking revisions, show how curled up in editorial anguish he could become over a single line of verse. Often, at first pass, Adams appeared frozen in the familiar writer's dilemma of word choice and, like the lawyer that he was, willing to argue from every angle. But a closer look at his acts of revision suggests that poetry served as the intellectual

[18]For JQA's use of the pastoral mode to explain the historical progress of civilization and its impact on society, see Wendell Glick, "The Best Possible World of John Quincy Adams," *The New England Quarterly* 37 (March 1964): 3–17.

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landscape in which Adams, through wrenching self-examination, puzzled out how to approach God. One poem, frayed by endless rewrites, began, "My soul, before thy Maker, stand." Adams crossed out "stand," in favor of "kneel," then proceeded to reconsider his choice, on and off, for some time. When it finally appeared as part of *Poems of Religions and Society*, an anthology published shortly after his death, Adams had, finally, opted to "kneel."

At the center of his poetry lay two themes, the significance of Christian fellowship and the search for American identity. One of the most fascinating aspects of Adams's religious development was his headlong pursuit of an idealized Christian patriotism through the political, intellectual, and institutional channels of a national culture that was steadily ripening and opening to the world. After enduring a checkered presidency and a tumultuous career in Congress, Adams's poetry began to reflect the trials of a Christian patriot whose faith had to be seriously refitted for a republic in peril from forces within. Overall, Adams's vision of the rising American republic was powerful, Protestant, and prudent. Professing that the two "keys" to his own "political creed" were internal union and independence from foreign exploitation, Adams blended his religious goals with the interests of the state.[19] Or, as he put it in an 1837 poem: "Almighty father look in Mercy down, / Oh! grant me Virtues to perform my part / The Patriots favour and The Statesman's art." All of the American religious history that he knew filled out the remaining stanzas: a judicious (or judic*ial*) Providence who favored *this* nation above all others, the ancient directive to men and women to refine Christianity through citizenship, and the expectation that any heavenly reward still depended on the fulfillment of patriotic duty. He titled it "A Congressman's Prayer."

In the final years of his life, Adams offered poems that celebrated the Psalms and made prophecies to other "sons of the Pilgrims," reminding readers that a "Nation's living power" corresponded directly to her people's trust in divine mercy. The poem for which Adams remains best known, "The Wants of Man," first appeared in 1841, and the Christian parable coincided with Adams's most famous legal drama, the *Amistad* case. It was a fairly straightforward diatribe about vanity and greed, and his rendition of human wants ended with "the seals of power and place, / The ensigns of command, / Charg'd by the People's unbought grace, / To rule my native land." Was the Christian patriot tallying up his life? If so, the pilgrim had found, in poetry, a way to express Christian patriotism and to weave his religious dilemmas into the fabric of the nation. On February 21, 1848, Adams took his usual seat in Congress, and listened to debates for an hour before the vote came up. He had seriously opposed the motion—to commend recent victories in the Mexican War—and rose again to press his

[19]JQA to Skelton Jones, April 17, 1809, Adams Papers.

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argument at a little past one o'clock. A sudden "fit of apoplexy" (likely another stroke) drove him down; he lingered in a coma in the Speaker's Room before dying two days later. "His own wishes are gratified," one newspaper reported of Adams's final hours, "for it was his wish to die in harness."[20] Americans closed in to mourn Adams's death with scenes of public religiosity, covering the Capitol in black crepe and lining the streets for a glimpse of his silver-mounted coffin. Dinner parties and sermons were given in the dead president's honor, and a stately funeral procession carried his body back to Quincy. After the Congregationalist William P. Lunt, minister of the First Church, eulogized Adams's sacrifice "upon the altar of his country and his God," he directed the pallbearers to "rise up, and take these remains of the patriarch, and bury him with his fathers. There may he rest in peace until the resurrection of the last day."[21]

III. "Heaven Not as Adams Expected"

Six years after his death, John Quincy Adams began to speak again. This was the belief of Josiah Brigham, a self-described "modern spiritualist" and a long-standing member of Adams's family church. Brigham had attended Adams's funeral, even funded publication of Lunt's sermon. Much as Adams wished to be portrayed, one of Brigham's biographers recalled him as "frank and affable," a "Christian gentleman" who was ever mindful of religious duty.[22] In the early 1850s, the Quincy businessman began hosting private séance circles at his palatial home to entertain his wife and daughter, who were both "rapping and tipping mediums." Through his civic connections Josiah Brigham was always meeting new people, and sometime in late June of 1854, he made the acquaintance of a "respectable, unassuming young man, of only common-school education, with no pretensions to more than common capabilities." This was Joseph Dutton Stiles, who quit his job as a printer when he "perceived he possessed mediumistic powers."[23] Stiles quickly impressed Brigham by contacting the spirit of the banker's dead brother; then he moved on to the "Sixth Sphere" of the "Spirit Land," where he encountered John Quincy Adams.

According to Stiles's book, *Twelve Messages from the Spirit of John Quincy Adams*, Adams took roughly six hours to get his bearings in the celestial plane,

[20]"Mr. Adams's Illness, *Daily Republican* (Springfield, Mass.), February 24, 1848.

[21]William P. Lunt, *A Discourse Delivered in Quincy, March 11, 1848, at the Interment of John Quincy Adams, Sixth President of the United States* (Boston: Dutton and Wentworth, State Printers, 1848), 1–44.

[22]"Josiah Brigham, Esq." in John Livingston, *Biographical Sketches of Distinguished Americans, Now Living* (New York and London, 1853), 66–69.

[23]"Preface," in *Twelve Messages from the Spirit of John Quincy Adams, through Joseph D. Stiles, Medium, to Josiah Brigham* (Boston: Bela Marsh, 1859). Hereafter cited as *Twelve Messages.*

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his "new sphere of duty." Greeted by his parents and John Hancock, Adams discovers a "celestial telegraph" that allows him to communicate with the living through mediums, and to control their thoughts via quasi-poetic messages of Christian fellowship. An itinerant pageant of historical figures moves through the scenes, occasionally colliding: Salem witches and Christopher Columbus, Patrick Henry and Benedict Arnold, slave children and Pilgrims. In a late twist, Adams comprehends that heaven is not what he expected, and warms to the theme of organized religion as defective and misleading. He condemns churches as antiquated institutions that have built up "sectarian platforms" and have not "met the spiritual exigencies of the people."[24] A foray into the "Temple of Peace and Good-Will" with William Penn, Martha Washington, Shakespeare, Hannah More, Jane Grey, Empress Josephine, and Peter Whitney manages to resolve most of Adams's doubts in human nature. A hovering circle of spirits (Jefferson, Hamilton, Burr, and Israel Putnam in that number) descends in semi-finale to bless "Spirit-life, one grand reception day."[25]

Bizarre as it may sound, *Twelve Messages* may be the best testament to John Quincy Adams's appreciation for American religious culture; surely few would have enjoyed reading it as much. Here was his faith bounded and unbounded, American pilgrims and European heretics, Unitarian clergy and Congregationalist counterparts, Calvinist forebears and a new generation of emancipated blacks. Adams's religious conscience was just as crowded, and his place in American religion just as curious. Scion of a famous family rooted in New England Congregationalism, Adams frequently comes across in American history exactly as he (correctly) feared colleagues might describe him: cold, awkward, and Calvinist to the core.[26] Yet in reading the nation's leader as an important social historian of religion, we can begin to see how antebellum Americans struggled with the heritage of Protestant theology, how a president negotiated public responsibility through the lens of religious duty, and why a generation chose to widen its theological views beyond the inherited confines of Calvinism. Adams's intense pursuit of new religious experiences suggested greater stirrings of liberalism within Protestant life, too. As a young man, he had likely borrowed his father's copy of Condorcet's *Outlines of the Progress of the Human Mind* and seen the marginalia scribbled there, "Philosophers must arrive at perfection *per saltum*." As he encountered new forms of faith and culture, the making of John Quincy Adams's religion happened in much the same way, by a leap or a jump.

[24]*Twelve Messages*, 180.
[25]*Twelve Messages,* 191, 202.
[26]JQA confided to his diary on June 4, 1819 that he often appeared to be "a man of reserved, cold austere and forbidding manners; my political adversaries say, a gloomy misanthropist, and my personal enemies, an unsocial savage. With a knowledge of the actual defect in my character, I have not the pliability to reform it" (Adams Papers).

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