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A DECLARATION OF DEPENDENCE: ROBERT SMITH'S 1775 HUMILIATION SERMON

EDITED BY C. P. SEABROOK WILKINSON*

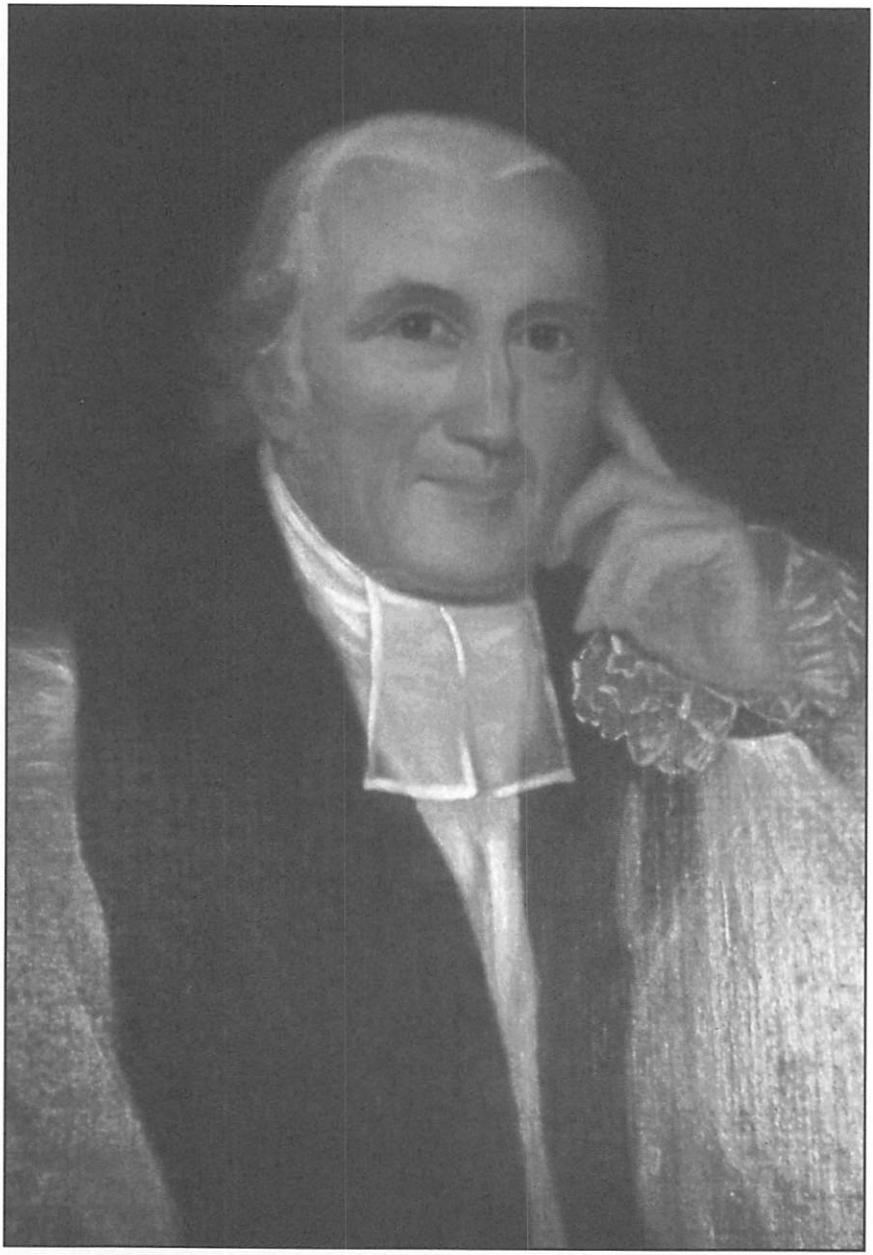
BY 1775 THE REVEREND ROBERT SMITH (1732-1801) HAD PREACHED more than a thousand sermons, most of them from the great canopied pulpit of St. Philip's Church, Charles Town, where he had been rector since 1759 and would remain so until his death. The sermon he gave at St. Philip's on the Fast Day of February 17, 1775, was probably the first of his to be commissioned—by Colonel Charles Pinckney, President of the First Provincial Congress of South Carolina. He wrote his Humiliation Sermon under singular circumstances, to deliver to a body that had not existed a year earlier. Actually, a sign of the confusion of the times, two separate bodies with overlapping memberships came to St. Philip's that February Friday—the 33rd and last Royal Assembly of the Province, and the First Provincial Congress of what would soon be the independent republic of South Carolina. Robert Smith began life as an eighteenth-century Englishman, but when he delivered this sermon, perhaps the most important of his long reign at Charleston's premier church, he was, like most of his auditors, in process of *unbecoming* an Englishman. A fair summary of Smith's positional shifts in this troubled time is made by Frederick Dalcho, writing only a generation after the Rector's death:

> The Commencement of the misunderstanding between the Parent Country and the Colonies, found Mr. Smith a loyal and faithful subject of the British realm, in church and state. In its progress, however, he was affected with the common indignation at the conduct of the Ministry, which characterized the policies of the day, among the most respectable of the inhabitants of So. Carolina, and felt it to be his duty to exert all the influence which his character, fortune, and station gave in animating the minds of his friends and people, for the conflict which he saw approaching.[1]

Dalcho rightly stresses Smith's sense of duty as his chief motivation for the alteration in his loyalties, but the rector's notion of animating minds was very different from that of such of his auditors as William Henry Drayton.

*C.P. Seabrook Wilkinson teaches English at the College of Charleston.

[1]Frederick Dalcho, *An Historical Account of the Protestant Episcopal Church, in South-Carolina, from the first Settlement of the Province* . . . . (Charleston: Miller, 1820), 219.



Portrait of Bishop Robert Smith (1732-1801). Smith was Rector of St. Philip's Church from 1759 until his death. Image courtesy of Middleton Place Foundation, Charleston, S.C.

The official brief for this sermon is reflected in Smith's unusually elaborate title: "Preach'd Before the Commons House of Assembly, and the Members of the Provincial Congress—at the request of the House, & Members of said Congress on Febry 17th 1775—observ'd as a day of fasting & humiliation, on account of the unhappy differences beetween Great Britain & her Colonies." Interestingly, Smith does not use the word "colonies" in the sermon itself. Two resolutions relative to this day of humiliation are recorded in the *Journal* of the Provincial Congress for the last day of its first session, January 17, 1775:

> RESOLVED, That it be recommended to the inhabitants of this colony to set apart Friday the 17th day February next, as a day of fasting, humiliation and prayer, before Almighty God, devoutly to petition him to inspire the King with true wisdom, to defend the people of North-America in their just title to freedom, and to avert from them the impending calamities of civil war.[2]

A further resolution furnished the specific order for this sermon:

> RESOLVED, That every member of the Present Congress, who may be in town, do meet at the Commons House of Assembly, and proceed from thence, in a body, to attend divine service in St. Philip's church: and that the President do request of the Rev. Mr. Robert Smith, that he will prepare and preach on that day, a sermon, suitable to the importance of the occasion.[3]

Smith's fast-day sermon was the centerpiece of an official occasion consciously staged as such. In John Drayton's edition of his father William Henry's *Memoirs*, the event is thus described: "While this unpleasant controversy, was going on, the 17th day of February arrived . . . And on this occasion, the Commons-House of Assembly, with their mace before them, went to St. Philip's Church."[4] The distinguished audience must have come prepared to hear overtly "pro-American" sentiments—after all, the spread of the fast-day sermon to the South, which had never been keen on fasting, was a conscious propagandistic ploy: "The idea of Colonial fast days was

[2]William Edwin Hemphill, *Extracts from the Journals of the Provincial Congress of South Carolina, 1775-1776* (Columbia: South Carolina Archives, 1960), 29.

[3]Ibid., 30.

[4]John Drayton, *Memoirs of the American Revolution, from its Commencement to the Year 1776, Inclusive* (2 vols.; Charleston, 1821), I, 214.

introduced into the Southern colonies by alert propagandists in 1774."[5] In New England the fast-day sermon had long since been politicized, indeed polemicized—as the very title of Samuel Sherwood's celebrated sermon for the Connecticut fast of August 31, 1774 makes plain: *A Sermon, Containing, Scriptural Instructions to Civil Rulers, and all True-Born Subjects.*[6]

Robert Smith gave the Congress an address which virtually ignored the agenda sketched in the resolution declaring a fast-day. Certainly Smith did his best to provide "a sermon, suitable to the importance of the occasion ...," yet without catering to the expectations of those who were important on that solemn occasion. He made no mention of the King, nor did he assert the Americans' "just title to freedom"; he did not even raise the specter of a "civil war." From the text onwards Smith's steady emphasis was not on the rights of man but on man's duty to God. For him, one of the chief duties of the preacher, on any occasion, was to remind his auditors of their duty to their Maker. This Humiliation Sermon was not an exhortation to seek independence but a declaration of dependence on God Almighty.

The observance of a day of solemn humiliation sounds quintessentially New England, but the practice was actually much more widespread, for such days were observed in Old England too, and, at least from 1756, in the South. Smith's was very unlike the typical New England humiliation sermon, for his tone was neither hectoring nor threatening, and he permitted himself no extravagant imagery or melodramatic rhetoric. His was hermeneutics very much in the eighteenth century English tradition. These periods required to be spoken decorously in a soft and solemn voice—an Oxbridge voice, for the Rector of St. Philip's was a former fellow of Gonville & Caius College, Cambridge.[7]

[5]Philip Davidson, *Propaganda and the American Revolution, 1763-1783* (New York: Norton, 1973), 95. Davidson was apparently unaware that such fast days had been proclaimed in Charles Town at least as early as 1756.

[6]Sherwood soon gets down to his agenda: "But tho' sovereign rulers cannot, while they continue in their high office and character, be called to account, by any under them; yet 'tis possible for them, by acting contrary to the design and intention of their office, to dissolve the society over which they rule; and so, at once lose all their sovereign power and authority." Ellis Sandoz, ed., *Political Sermons of the American Founding Era, 1730-1805* (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1991), 387-388. Even more blatantly political is Moses Mather's *Appeal to The Impartial World*, in which this fellow Connecticut divine moves with expedition to the specialist political vocabulary Smith is so careful to play down, declaring in his second paragraph that the issue is "The fate of America, the right and liberties of millions." Ibid., 443.

[7]Robert Smith's style is not unlike that of Thomas Secker, who was Dean of St. Paul's (1750-1758) while the future Rector of St. Philip's was a young man in and out of London, and some of whose unadorned and outwardly undemonstrative sermons Smith may have heard: "The virtues of Secker's style are those of his person:

Robert Smith was the provincial head of a church that had been for seventy years, since the time of Queen Anne, "by law established." Yet on this February day he found himself speaking to a distinguished audience apparently bent on all sorts of disestablishment. Indeed a number of dissenting clergy, sitting as delegates, must have been present. Along with one of his own subordinates, the Anglican rector of St. Matthew's, Paul Turquand, sat the Reverend William Tennant, pastor of St. Philip's dissenting neighbor to the west, the Charleston Independent Church, and the Reverend John Harris, a Presbyterian from Ninety Six District.[8] Smith was evidently reluctant to climb down from his pulpit and become part of the body to which he was preaching; although elected for St. Thomas & St. Dennis, the parish in which lay his largest plantation, to both the Second Provincial Congress (1775) and the First General Assembly (1776), he never qualified for either, and he formally declined to serve in the former.[9] He already had an adequate platform, the most prestigious pulpit in the South.

The invitation to deliver this important address recognized his position as the highest-ranking clergyman of South Carolina, as well as parish priest of the most important men in the Provincial Congress he was to address. It also probably acknowledged the growing split among Anglicans. Usually the Commons worshipped as a body at St. Michael's, but both the rector of that church, the Reverend Robert Cooper, and his assistant, the Reverend John Bullman, had become objects of deep suspicion on account of their overtly pro-British stance in the continuing political crisis. Bullman had already been summarily dismissed, and Robert Cooper would be after offering public prayers for the king on the very day of the battle of Sullivan's Island.[10] Colonel Charles Pinckney might not have known exactly what Smith would say, but he must have known that he was more likely to please his auditors than the Rector of St. Michael's.

As Commissary of the Bishop of London, Robert Smith was essentially bishop-in-waiting—and indeed he would, after another twenty years,

dignified, formal, authoritative." James Downey, *The Eighteenth Century Pulpit: A Study of the Sermons of Butler, Berkeley, Secker, Sterne, Whitfield and Wesley* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969), 113. A portrait of Robert Smith in the collection of the College of Charleston, of which he was founding president, suggests that he possessed the same personal attributes, and might have had a similar pulpit presence.

[8]Hemphill, *Extracts from the Journals of the Provincial Congress*, xxiv.

[9]N. Louise Bailey and Elizabeth Ivey Cooper, *Biographical Directory of the South Carolina House of Representatives. Volume III, 1775-1790* (Columbia, S.C.: University of South Carolina Press, 1981), 672-673.

[10]For the dismissal of Bullman, see 3-34; for that of Cooper, 37-38. George W. Williams, *St. Michael's, Charleston, 1751-1951* (Columbia, S.C.: University of South Carolina Press, 1951).

become first Bishop of South Carolina in 1795. He was very much identified with the ecclesiastical establishment, so he must have found it a delicate matter to address a body now openly at odds with the political establishment of the Royal Lieutenant Governor, William Bull, who denounced the occasion on which Smith was to preach as "without legal authority, and for purposes derogatory to the King's government."[11]

Smith evidently found it extraordinarily difficult to speak the relevant truth to the Provincial Congress: the manuscript of this sermon is a nightmare of crossings out, superscript changes, and interpolated passages on the verso. Numbers of tensions quiver beneath the apparent blandness of this address. Robert Smith was an Englishman who had become thoroughly attuned to Carolinian ways as he became assimilated into the ruling class of the province. Much to the annoyance of such visitors of the immediate prewar years as the Philadelphia Quaker William Dillwyn, who records a dinner at which the Rector of St. Philip's "took occasion to observe that Persons coming from the Northward & England received a Polish at Charles Town which they all wanted at first coming there,"[12] Smith had become a practiced apologist for his slave society, and an encomiast of the South Carolina planter oligarchy. Courtesy of advantageous alliances with two successive heiresses, he was a wealthy planter in his own right. This status gave him a large measure of the authority with which he spoke on this and on other occasions. He could look at the likes of the Pinckneys more or less from their own level.

[11]A more vocally revolutionary priest, Charles Woodmason, railed bitterly against Smith as a toady of the establishment. In a letter of March 26, 1771, Woodmason had complained that the Rector of St. Philip's was in cahoots with the Bishop of London, whose jurisdiction included all American Anglicans: "This Gentleman wrote over a long letter of Exclamation against me, attributring his ill success in getting of Clergymen to fill the vacant Parishes, to my false Informations .... I was voted an Enemy to the Province—Unfit to stay in a Country that gave me Bread; for abusing, and depraciating it—So hard is it to speak Truth!" Charles Woodmason, *The Carolina Backcountry on the Eve of The Revolution: The Journals and other Writings of Charles Woodmason, Anglican Itinerant*, Richard J. Hooker, ed., (Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 1953), 192.

[12]Quoted in: Carl Bridenbaugh, *Cities in Revolt: Urban Life in America, 1743-1776* (New York: Capricorn, 1964), 344.

The text of the Humiliation Sermon appears here in its entirety. For ease of reading, the editor has incorporated superscript changes into the text in bold italics. Interpolated passages that appear on the verso are denoted here in bold and in brackets. Page numbers refer to sermon pagination.

Text of the Humiliation Sermon

Box 7, No. 11: 17 February 1775

Preach'd

Before the Commons House of Assembly, and the Members of the Provincial Congress—~~Febry 17th 1775~~—at the request of the House, & Members of said Congress on Febry 17th 1775 — observ'd as a day of fasting & humiliation, on account of the unhappy differences between Great Britain & her Colonies—[p.1]

Deuteronomy 5C 29V

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 *for ever*~~—after them~~.

Were there no other evidences of the Being and Providence of Almighty God, than those which observation and experience point out; the manifestations of a wise and merciful Superintendence are very clear and demonstrable.—God hath not left himself without a witness in any part of his Creation,— in the wonderful contrivance of the universe—and the wise disposal of its several parts;—in the support of that Nature he commanded into being;—and in his care of those Creatures he called forth to life and happiness.

In speaking of the operations of almighty power, we talk indeed of Nature, and Natural Causes, as if independent of providence;—but what is [p. 2] Nature, but the hand of God—and natural Causes, but secret effects of Omnipotence, directing us, in the most striking and intelligible manner, to the first efficient cause of all.

But lest the notices of providence should either be overlook'd or forgotten by us,—Almighty God in his great mercy to mankind, set up the Jewish people as a standard to the several nations of the world;—giving us thereby a monument of his care and circumspection;—and teaching us a lesson we seem extremely averse to learn, how important & insufficient we are without it.

The favour and guardianship *of Heaven* are so necessary to communities and individuals, that if they are but withdrawn,—prosperity and happiness are withdrawn with them;—and yet so vain and foolish is the heart of man, as to ~~forfg~~ forget or disregard the important truth.—We form schemes of happiness, and deceive ourselves with a weak imagination of security, without ever taking God into the question;—no wonder [p. 3] then, if our hopes prove abortive, and the conceits of our vain minds end in disapointment and sorrow.—For inclined to attribute our prosperity to the

wisdom of our own councils, and the arm of our own flesh, we become forgetful of him from whom our strength & wisdom are deriv'd;—& are thus betray'd into that fatal security, which ends in shame, in misery & ruin.

As a curb therefore to the arrogance of man, in the Jewish history, God hath declared his power over, and government of, the world;—instructing us, that apart of his blessing, vain is the counsel & the help of man: that with it, the most improbable means can administer happiness, & afford security.—And that the way to obtain this blessing, is by fearing him and keeping his commandments.

The ~~words~~ part of Scripture under our present consideration (which are the words of God himself) is very express to this point—He declares, that if they fear him, and keep all his commandments always, that it should be well with them, [p. 4] and their children for ever.—From this declaration the deduction is natural & easy—that if they did not fear him & keep his commandments, it would *not* be well them, and their children for ever.

As to the article of fear he lays great stress upon it, because it is in a great degree the support of Religion,—and accordingly tells us, when Ephraim spake trembling, he exalted himself in Israel; but when he offended in Baal, he died.—As to the observation of his commandments, he insists upon it as a duty both general & perpetual, that we should keep them all ~~always~~ and that always. And we are bound to it under the strongest penal sanction: "for those that honour him, he will honour, & those that despise him, he will lightly esteem—

[It is not my intention to enlarge upon the duties of fear and obedience, because they are of themselves pretty obvious—neither does the occasion of this days Solemnity require it—but should]

Should any one ask—"why is the Almighty so concern'd about the conduct or behaviour of men: or what need he concern himself whether they fear ~~or~~ or obey him or not? The question is sufficiently presumptuous, but the answer is plain;—" that it is his *goodness*, not his *interest*, which prompts [p. 5] him to it. And if he expresses himself with a desire that shows something of uneasiness, when considered in a human light; 'tis only because he is earnest that we should avoid that punishment, which rigorous justice will of necessity demand. His desire of obedience is, that we should be saved: and if he calls upon us to observe his laws, it is because his judgements are ready to vindicate any contempt that may be cast upon them.— 'Tis remarkable of the Israelites, that after every general revolt from God, we find them groaning under Burthens, afflicted by Tyrants, oppressed by Conquerors. When they repent, God hears their prayer, & sends them a Deliverer.—If *at* any time they rest themselves upon Egypt, and rely upon human policy more than upon a divine promise, his indignation to them is equal to their prevarication with ~~them~~ him. If, again, they become sensible of their Error, and humble themselves by a submission proportionate to

their Crime, his Favour is restored then. [p. 6]

—We may observe, that their great Lawgiver Moses, took great pains, to prevent their being misled by a false notion of God Almightys Mercies. ~~Him~~ He was ever warning them, that they were not to conclude themselves the favourites of heaven, because that favor was merely conditional; that they might forfeit all by disobedience, & would become as miserable, as they might otherwise be happy. When he reminds them of the mighty things that God ~~did for~~ had done for them in Egypt, it was ~~to remind them~~ always to stimulate them to such a conduct as would shew their gratitude.—He taught them to look back to their first Original, & to recollect how unconsiderable they were, when the Almighty first distinguish'd them. — He bids them remember how he preserved & protected them, when they were a wandering Family, & were glad to sojourn where they could find admittance. "A Syrian ready to perish was their Father, & "he went down into Egypt with a few". This was [p. 7] the solemn confession they were oblig'd to make every year. Yet such was the regard of the Almighty to this perishing Syrian, and to his Fathers destitute Family, that he suffered no Man to do them wrong, but reproved even Kings for their sake.

We have here taken a short ***but*** view of the wonderful mercies that were shown to this extraordinary Nation. The question that now occurs, is,— "What could be the meaning & design of all this? Why was this munificence bestow'd, and all those favours heaped upon them? Was it merely an act of the Divine Will, without any end or reason proposed?—Was it not rather a Lesson to all mankind, to convince them of the Almighty s power, & to show us that notwithstanding such miraculous distinctions, yet we shall no longer continue the favourites of ~~heaven~~ God, than while we fear him & keep his commandments.—

For we must observe, that this very people no sooner rejected the counsel of God, than they [p. 8] were given up by him into the hands of their Enemies, they fell by degrees from Empire to Slavery, till at length they were scatter'd over the face of the Earth, & continue to this day the monuments of divine judgment to every incorrigible people.

The history of this unfortunate people, is a lesson of concern & instruction to us—Let us then from their example, take particular care, 'lest iniquity be our ruin. And in urging this argument, may we not take up the wish of the Text—" That there were such an heart in us, that we would fear God & keep his commandments, that it might be well with us, and our Children after us. ~~If the cause of God, & obedience to his laws be our glory~~

Happy were the people of Israel, while they retaind allegiance to the Lord their God **[while their manners & integrity were of that stamp, which the divine goodness could not fail to bless with favour & protection— And]**

—And happy will be any other ~~nation~~ people, while they continue virtuous

& religious;—for all the kingdoms of the earth are Gods;—& he ruleth alike in all.—He bestows and he withdraws [p. 9] his mercy;—not with an arbitrary or partial hand; but by the strictest rule of unbiass'd equity. he confers his blessings on those alone, who by true desert, and moral worth, are proper objects of it.—~~It is~~ Under a strong conviction of this great truth

[& sensible that the success of all events depend on God, ~~that we are ser~~ I hope it is, that we are here met together, to search & try our ways; that the iniquity of our hearts obstruct not that protection we have so much reason to implore ~~in this our day of supplication and prayer~~]

~~that the good people of the Province are called to this public meeting, to search & try *your* their their ways; that the iniquity of our hearts ostr obstruct not that protection we have so *much reason to implore, for* so solemnly implor'd this our day of distress.~~

But it would be injustice done to this Audience not to acknowledge the seriousness with which you have implored the Divine aid;—an earnest this, I trust, that you will certainly obtain it.—

You have truly join'd, in owning the necessity of this days supplication & prayer;—that as differences have arisen ~~between & because of longstanding~~ between our Mother Country and us;

—not on our part, I hope, *as some would insinuate*, through the unreasonable thirst of power, or factious discontent, but in the sole [p. 10] Defence of undoubted rights;—we should ~~bless them~~ beg the Almighty to bless our endeavours ~~*through* that unanimity, love, & peace may again be establish'd between us.~~

[~~peace and her lovely train, unanimity, harmony, love, with healing in their wings, may be~~ and grant that peace, unanimity, harmony & love, with healing in their wings, may again be establish'd between us,—And]

And thus far all is well.—In acknowledging the absolute power of God; our dependence on his mercy, & unworthiness of it, we have acted a proper & becoming part;—but let us remember this;—that we have ill answered the intentions of this public call, if we rest the duty here; confine it to the church & closet,—to acts of mere devotion only;—and extend not the reflections, suggested by this solemn occasion, to our principles & manners;—to every branch of our conduct, both in public and private life.—If this be not the consequence, this days devotion, will be like the devotion of too many persons on a sick-bed.—We whose business it is to attend people in that melancholy circumstance, are often witnesses of their sorrow for a life ill-spent, their dreadful agonies under [p. 11] the apprehension of Gods justice,—their fervent & earnest desire of pardon,—& above all, their solemn promise of amendment, if God would be pleased to restore them to their former health.—But we have likewise the grief to be often, too often, witnesses of those peoples returning to their former habits, as soon as it has pleased God to restore them. Their piety depended on the continuance of

their distemper; and the fervor of their devotion rose and fell with the irregular beatings of their pulse.—If then we are serious ~~and earnest~~ in thus humbling ourselves before God for our past offences, & of engaging his blessing by a future amendment of life;—If we mean well to our country, and are in earnest in our wishes for its happiness; we must, in the language of Scripture, cease to do evil, & learn to do well; we must acquire those virtuous habits & dispositions, which alone can recommend any people to the God of uprightness, and effectually ~~see~~ secure them his protection.—And [p. 12] as national virtues are the only efficient means of securing national felicity—and as national virtues are but the virtues of individuals collected; it is the duty of every private person, as a member of that society in which he dwells, to be very cautious lest his misconduct, joind to the misconduct of ***many*** others, be the fatal bar to the divine protection.

Being therefore in the hands of one, who requireth truth in the inward parts; who is privy to all our thoughts, & spieth out all our ways;—may it not be proper for each on this occasion, to retire within himself, & ask his heart these important questions;—Am I the very person I would appear to be;—concern'd for my own, & the public good?—Are my pretensions to virtuous & religious ~~actions~~ practices, sincere & real;—or being the daubings only of outward varnish, do they hide the deformity of a foul heart, of iniquitous deed, & base design?—In my several relations ~~of~~ ***in*** life, do I pursue that conduct—do I follow that design, which alone can answer the end [p. 13] of providence, by deriving glory to God, and good to Man.
—Whatever is my part in life, do I act it well,—
and contribute my share to public happiness? As a member of ***the Community*** ~~Society~~, a parent, a master, or a servant; is my behaviour such as the eye of Heaven can approve?
—Are my intentions upright; my sentiments benevolent; my behaviour exemplary; my professions sincere;—or frustrating the ends of God's moral government, & confounding the order intended by providence, do I suffer every selfish, & sordid passion to rule in my breast without controul?—In fine, is the end I aim at a right & laudable one;—or have I not considered whether in my passage through life, I have proposed to myself any end ~~at all~~ or no.

Should a review like this appear distasteful; we may well suspect, there is something wrong within.—For why should we desire an acquaintance with ***the world, & its*** almost every trifling object; & shun by far the most important of all,—an acquaintance with ***that little world***—our own lives & hearts?—Is it because the [p. 14] the interview would give us pain? perhaps we dare not look within, because we cannot with complacency.

As we of America, were long bless'd with signal marks of Gods forbearance; our gratitude to Heaven should have born some proportion to the mercies vouchsafed.—Disobedience under our circumstances was

doubly heinous, & will greatly increase the offenders punishment.—For how did God surround us with blessings on every side; while other Countries were the seat of War, & felt all the miseries of sword, of fire & famine?—While we were secure, & free from danger, populous Cities were consumed, & fruitful countries destroyed, so that as the seas encompass the land, the protection of Heaven bless'd us on every side.

[What returns we made, for these lengthenings of our tranquility does not indeed appear—no suitable ones at least—and will ~~would~~ not God visit for these things—yes, he will, ~~& the~~ & that speedily—for alas! a day of darkness & gloominess (if I may be allowed the expression) hangs over our heads, & perhaps waits only for the effect of this days humiliation, before it closes upon us with a night of clouds and thicker darkness.]

~~What returns we have made, for these lengthening's of our tranquility, had~~ *does* ~~not indeed appear—no suitable ones at least of thanks, this~~ for alas, ~~a day of darkness & gloominess, *if I may be allowed the expression*, a day of clouds & thick darkness *which* hangs over our heads, & perhaps waits only for the effect~~ [p. 15] ~~of this days humiliation, before it closes upon us with a night of clouds & thicker darkness *might have been dispers'd* indeed, my Brethren~~

[There is no knowing what the decrees of heaven are with respect to a sinful people; how long they may stand, or when fall, so hid from the eye of man; but of this we may be assured, that a sincere repentance & solemn humbling themselves before God, is the only way to avert or prolong the date of their ruin—Let us then upon this solemn occasion turn unto the Lord, & he will have mercy upon us, & to our God who will abundantly pardon. Let us take this opportunity to begin our amendments—we have] we have many follies to restrain, many vices to subdue;—and though there appears not that daring impiety of which some complain; yet that religion has lost much of its force amongst us, is very *evident*: ~~plain~~; from that disregard for worship, that love of dissipation & of pleasure, and that dissoluteness of manners which is daily before us.—Instead of that cordial affection which as Christians should unite us with the closest bands, how often are the smallest differences in sentiment made the weak foundations of a confirmed aversion for each other.—And the noble benevolence of the Gospel forgot amidst contentions for childish opinions, & indifferent rites.

How often are the moral, those essential duties of our religion, which alone can make us good & useful men, exchang'd for shadows, chimeras, nothing. [p. 16]

To a God of truth & purity, practices of this kind must be highly odious.—As the only means then of securing that divine protection, we ~~shall~~ should earnestly resolve to put away the evil of our doings, to fear God, & keep his commandments, cherishing those virtuous & religious principles,

which will ever add to our real welfare.—When virtue & true religion flourish in a state it is happy & prosperous;—
when they decline, the strength & glory of it declines also; & avarice, luxury & effeminacy lead the way to ruin.—It is the genius of true religion to inspire the mind with every noble virtue;—the love of our country, generosity, fortitude, temperance.—But it is the genius of irreligion to instill, narrow, selfish principles;—a contempt of every thing great & noble;—monopolizing avarice & mean cowardice.—The different tendencies of these principles should surely then, direct us in our choice of them; & our own experience of this influence, should confirm us in it. [p. 17]

Can we then hesitate a moment which to prefer?—But as we have now acknowledg'd our folly, & in the most solemn manner vow'd better obedience;—let us in earnest set about the great work of a reform.—Let ~~us~~ each of us in our sphere & station contribute our share.—let those on whom *a kind Providence* ~~fortune~~ has lavish'd her favours, *Men of large fortunes and extensive influence* ~~Who call themselves Gentlemen, & whose status in life *entitles them* gives them a right to that appellation~~, lead the way, & thousands will catch the fashion from them.—Let them be examples of every noble & virtuous acquirement, *of love for their Country* ~~of~~ temperance, moderation, fidelity & honour, let them reverence that Almighty Being on whom they depend for all things; & they will find the advantage of so wise a conduct—they will find it in the willing obedience of their children, in the duty & faithfulness of their dependents; in the constancy of their friends; in the *love &* approbation ~~also~~ of their country;—and the admiration & fear of their enemies.—

[Nay their fame shall reach beyond the ends of the earth, shall mount up to the battlements of Heaven, & become the praise & admiration of Angels.]

~~*As*~~ ~~Instead of~~ As to those whose circumstances & station in life may not, perhaps give them much influence over others—I must inform them, that they may do [p. 18] something towards averting Gods judgments, by reforming their own families & themselves, which can hardly fail of having some affect on their acquaintance; however it will give them an interest with the Almighty. The lowest of us may ~~*a lover of his country*~~, be just, temperate, honest & pious. Even the Beggar, tho cloth'd in rags, can have his mind adorn'd with the robes of righteousness. He can send up his prayers for his Country with as much faith and ardency as the greatest upon earth, & his prayers will as soon be accepted at the throne of heaven.

[In a word—as the sins of a Community are made up of the sins of Individuals, & can no otherwise be diminished than by the reformation of Individuals—and as it is in ~~the power~~ every man's power to reform himself—'tis also in every mans power to contribute something towards appeasing God's wrath, & procuring his protection, & consequently

towards saving himself & Country from ruin.— Instead]
~~In fine, let *any individual, whether* high or low, rich or poor—for it is in the power of high & low, rich & poor [two words illegible], let him [one word illegible] for [three letters illegible] himself~~ Instead *then* of that neglect of the Almighty Father of all, a profanation of his sacred name; that spirit of envy & hatred, of trifling & impertinence, that love of pleasure and of pride which prevail among us, let the love of God & of each other, the virtues of generosity & candour, of fortitude & public spirit take place in our practice.— Then may we hope with [p. 19] confidence, that our Israel will be safe under the protection of the most high; & that it will be well *with* us and our children for ever.

To conclude—

Having then, my Brethren, so many instances, and lying under so many and so sacred Obligations, if there be any virtue, if there be any praise; think of these things. Forsake your sins; be pious; be virtuous; be firm, waiting patiently for the Lord: And humbly implore his favour and assistance, ever acknowledging your dependence on him, & constantly trusting in his goodness & power. On these conditions we may entertain good & certain hopes, that God will finally bless us; & that we shall at last be delivered out of *all* our troubles; & thenceforth continue long to flourish in peace, in *plenty* ~~riches~~, & in Liberty.—

Part of Robert Smith's rhetorical strategy was to make his audience *wait*, earnestly straining for what they had come to hear, so that for a number of paragraphs he would have sounded to be equivocating, or perversely disdaining any specific reference to current events. This rendered the effect all the greater when halfway through his address he finally declared by expressing an unequivocal "patriot" sentiment. This is a thoroughly pastoral sermon, for Smith was speaking to a greatly enlarged, or at least altered, congregation—the Provincial Congress was his flock *du jour*.

With its implicit appeal to Reason, the sermon's opening paragraph could only have been written in the latter half of the eighteenth century. It celebrated the rational, knowable, and demonstrable ways of God to man. How startlingly these apparently bland sentences would have fallen on an audience that must have come expecting thunder, but instead found themselves hearing a still small voice of calm reasonableness. Right from the start Smith built an implied contrast between the all-wise government of God and the very imperfect government of Lord North, to which no direct reference was at any point made. He insisted with everything he did and did not say that this was a *religious* occasion, not the political turning point it also was. If "the manifestations of a wise and merciful Superintendence are very clear and demonstrable," it would have been equally clear to all

present that the unwise superintendence of earthly powers had caused these American colonists to form a Provincial Congress. Smith wished to emphasize the individual as much as the corporate moral responsibility of his auditors. The preacher's first comment on his text implied a parallel between America and Israel that he would use strategically throughout. He accused his hearers, the rulers of his incipient republic, of failure to see things in proper perspective: God should be *at the center* of whatever planning they were about. At a time of acute ideological, economic, political, and military insecurity, Smith probed rhetorically for the source of true security and found it in God, marveling in his quietly astonished tones that "We form schemes of happiness, and deceive ourselves with a weak imagination of security, without ever taking God into the question." In a time when the politicians before him were doubtless expecting words of commendation for the steps they had taken in the previous month in their first session (including the commissioning of this very sermon), some reassuring tribute to the self-sufficiency of a people poised to assume self-rule, Smith reminded his hearers that the growth of American power and economic might was not the doing of local magnates but of Divine Providence. In an atmosphere in which questions of autonomy, or even some form of independence, were swirling about, Smith's whole sermon was about the necessity of dependence on Almighty God. The real source of power was not in London, in Philadelphia, or three blocks away in Broad Street at the Provincial State-House, but in Heaven. Only with God's blessing could the people prosper, and the only way to obtain that blessing was to be a godly people. So potent was that blessing that, if secured, even the disorganized and divided American colonies might be able to control their own destinies. Smith bypassed the whole question of a British administration, satisfactory or otherwise, suggesting ever more explicitly as his argument unfolded that the laws that must be kept were "his commandments," that obedience was owing to a heavenly, and not necessarily to an earthly, king.

He employed words that had an obvious political charge in 1775—punishment, justice, obedience, law, judgment, revolt, and tyranny—in the context not of American relations with Britain, but of God's with his Chosen People. The prospect of the rebellion so much in the air, and in the correspondence of many of the men before him, finally came into the open with the electric noun "revolt," but it was carefully insulated in the context of the Hebrew type he had been developing. Smith warned his audience to trust in the Lord, who alone could send an oppressed people "a Deliverer." When he cautioned that God's chosen "might forfeit all by disobedience," he was aware that his audience were considering risking all they had in an act of disobedience to an earthly monarch.

The reference to "every incorrigible people" emphasizes Smith's conviction that the Americans were a corrigible people, who must accept

the judgments and commandments of God if they were ever to be a people at all. He was very careful about using the world "nation" to apply to the American states. In the manuscript he used the word, then crossed it through and wrote "people" instead—the chosen alternative left open the question of political allegiance. At last, after perhaps a quarter of an hour's delivery, came a clear allusion to the question of the hour, an acknowledgment that "differences have arisen between our Mother Country and us." Smith reminded his auditors that they were met to pray that conflict be averted, not that any side have its way. In its inherent caution and conservatism, Smith's political temper appears to have been similar to that of his close friend John Rutledge, who would soon become Governor of the independent republic of South Carolina, and whose eldest son would later marry Smith's eldest daughter.

The Rector questioned, "If we mean well to our country," without seeking to clarify just what constituted that country, but he was edging closer to a political declaration as he reminded that national aspiration—he could risk the adjective but not yet the noun—must depend on the moral strength of individuals. He challenged his hearers not to look outward but to look into their own hearts. Having counseled self-examination, he indicated that his concern was with but also beyond the immediate political situation: he was steward of souls, not merely chaplain to institutions.

Smith never lost sight of the place repentance must occupy in the enactment of solemn humiliation. In the light of his eventual acknowledgment that America was a country, one of his later superscript additions is especially significant, for patriotism, "love for their Country," is put at the head of the virtues this reforming people ought to cultivate. Smith seemed to get a sense of history at last, or to yield to a rare craving for hyperbole, to overstate for once when he considered the nation-building role of those before him: on the facing page he added, "Nay their fame shall reach beyond the ends of the earth, shall mount up to the battlements of Heaven, & become the praise & admiration of Angels." But at once he returned to earth and to the question of God's wrath, insisting that first priority must be averting that wrath, "& procuring his protection, & consequently towards saving himself & Country from ruin." Ruin was not a rhetorical embellishment but a stark prospect, for all present were aware independence would never come without an armed struggle of incalculable ferocity.

At the close of his penultimate paragraph, in one of those quietly inserted touches that must have been so effective to his earnest (and perhaps somewhat perplexed) listeners, Smith went upbeat and at last fully identified his country-in-becoming with the Old Israel: "Then may we hope with confidence, that our Israel will be safe under the protection of the most high; & that it will be well with us and our children for ever." The latter half of

the sentence, adapting the final clause of his text from Deuteronomy, brought the sermon gracefully full circle.

His final paragraph began with an entreaty to those present to reflect on his words. As throughout, the obligations he mentioned were first sacred, then political. He exhorted the Congress to get on God's right side first, and he reminded them again that the only way forward was to acknowledge humble dependence on God. That done, all might yet be well, Smith assured his chastened hearers, and as his very last word offered them the sentiment for which they had been waiting: "On these conditions we may entertain good & certain hopes, that God will finally bless us; & that we shall at last be delivered out of all our troubles; & thenceforth continue long to flourish in peace, in plenty ~~riches~~, & in Liberty." What a beautifully orchestrated climax!

Pages 8-10 of the manuscript find Robert Smith agonizing over his words to an ever greater extend, as the verso pages are crowded with versions, sometimes two or three, of statements crossed out on the recto leaf. Even how to characterize this day became a problem, as between the leaves of Page 9 he juggled three alternatives, all apparently rejected, as all are scored through: "this our day of supplication and prayer" became "this public meeting" and then "this our day of distress." The manuscript of the "Humiliation Sermon" confirms the extraordinary difficulty Smith experienced in writing these pages: it is the much overwritten record of a wrestling match, as he tuned and toned up and down, and agonized over such charged words as "nation." Perhaps sometimes there are alternate versions of passages on the facing pages so that he might gauge reaction before delivering one or the other (we must remember that this Humiliation Sermon was a performance, not a published text.)[13] Usually in his manuscript sermons Smith's corrections are attempts to refine his expression, but his concern in this sermon is much more with content. As one looks at the manuscript and delves into the crossings-out the conclusion is inescapable that Smith knew this would be the most important sermon of his life, and certainly the most difficult to pitch. In the majority of Smith's manuscript

[13]In his chapter on Archbishop Secker, Downey outlines the options for delivery available to an eighteenth century preacher: "Generally speaking, there are four ways in which a sermon may be delivered. (1) It may be read, *verbatim*, from a prepared manuscript. (2) It may be given *extempore*, with the preacher relying on a skeleton outline or trusting entirely to memory. (3) It may be first written out, then committed to memory, and delivered *memoriter*. (4) It may be prepared in manuscript, condensed to outline, and delivered from notes," 106. Obviously both options (2) and (4) would appear to be ruled out for Smith by the surviving manuscript of this and hundreds of other sermons, but we do not know the extent to which he memorized his manuscript, or whether he ever risked *extempore* interpolations to the carefully prepared pages before him.

sermons, there are long stretches with no crossings-out, no second thoughts, but this occasional sermon is the record of second thoughts of a transplanted and now assimilated Englishman obliged to make a personal, religious, and political declaration all at once.

The Commons-Congress may have been surprised by what they heard on February 17, 1775, but there is no evidence that anyone expressed disapprobation or disappointment, and Smith was again the natural choice for the next and even more important Day of Humiliation, a *national* one this time, in July. A resolution adopted in the second session of the First Provincial Congress in June is eloquent of just how sharply the situation had deteriorated since Smith's first Humiliation Sermon:

> RESOLVED, That it be recommended to the inhabitants of the parishes of St. Philip and St. Michael, when they attend divine services in place of public Worship, to take with them their fire-arms and ammunition.[14]

That second day of humiliation was a far more significant one, for now the occasion had political overtones even Smith could not ignore: "The American Union was confirmed, not in July of 1776, but, in the eyes of the Calvinist ministry, in July of 1775, 'Congress Sunday,' July 20, when churches throughout America held a day of humiliation, fasting, and prayer, long lingered in Christian memory as perhaps the most glorious moment of the Revolution, if not of American history."[15] This time Smith seems to have been less subtly suggestive and more forthright in expressing patriotic sentiments, for Edward McCrady reports that "[T]he Commons went in procession with their silver mace before them to St. Philip's Church, where again a sermon suitable to the occasion was preached by the Rev. Robert Smith—a sermon which was said to have assisted in confirming their patriotism and settling their determination."[16] Most unfortunately, this second Humiliation Sermon cannot now be located in the manuscript vault at St. Philip's, so it is not possible to compare Smith's two Humiliation Sermons of 1775.

In his first 1775 Humiliation Sermon Smith addressed those who held power. In 1780, with the British now clearly "the Enemy" even to this British-born and British-educated cleric, and that enemy on Johns Island only eight miles from St. Philip's, and a siege imminent, the prospect was much altered. Perhaps because he lacked leisure to compose something

[14]Hemphill, *Extracts from the Journals of the Provincial Congress*, 58.

[15]Alan Heimert, *Religion and the American Mind: From the Great Awakening to the Revolution* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1966), 403-404.

[16]Edward McCrady, *The History of South Carolina in the Revolution, 1775-1780* (New York: Macmillan, 1901), 57.

afresh, Smith adapted for this occasion on February 27, 1780 a Humiliation Sermon he had delivered, ironically enough, in England, probably in 1769 when he was there for his health; the manuscript notes that it was delivered at Shepton Mallett, and then at Leominster. Here he added about five pages' preface to the original, and made liberal use of the facing pages to adapt an old sermon to a frightening new situation. The additions are interesting for the light they shed on the development of Smith's thought in the five years since the first Charleston Humiliation Sermon. As in the earlier address, Smith was nervous about using the noun "nation," the more so at a time when American nationhood was looking like a lost cause; here he scored through what had been a safe enough word to use in England in 1769, replacing "nations" with "communities,"[17] and "nation" with "people,"[18] as he had done in revising the first Humiliation Sermon in 1775. The most telling alteration was: "[H]ave we any regard for our rights & liberties either Civil or Spiritual which as ***Citizens of America*** ~~Englishmen~~ we enjoy."[19]

Robert Smith's Humiliation Sermon of February 1775 was anything but flamboyant, but in its subtle emphases, its reticences and apparent simplicity, it was an eminently successful performance, worthy of its audience and occasion. After all, some of the best minds in what was to become the United States of America sat before him, including Signers of the Declaration, Framers of the Constitution, a President of the Continental Congress, a future national Chief Justice, and a future two-time presidential candidate in the country yet to be.[20] The sermon exhibited the power and suggestiveness of general vocabulary, adroitly deployed. Soon Smith would put down his pen, for just as guns appeared in church in June 1775, "[t]he Rev. Robert Smith shouldered his musket and amidst scenes of the greatest danger, both by precept and example, stimulated to intrepid resistance."[21] Perhaps the

[17]Smith, "Fast Sermon. No. 345." Bishop Smith Sermon Collection, St. Philip's Church, Charleston.

[18]Ibid., 23.

[19]Ibid., 5. About this time Robert Smith made a much more systematic series of excisions in the great folio altar edition of the *Book of Common Prayer* which had been presented to St. Philip's by the Royal Governor, Thomas Boone, in 1762. With thick bold strokes uncharacteristic of his penmanship he crossed through all mention of the King and the Royal Family, substituting the Continental Congress as appropriate. Of late years this relic has been displayed on Carolina Day, South Carolina's own recently revived national day.

[20]The members of Commons and Congress who were in town were expected to attend. Upcountry delegates had probably gone home, and a few of the lowcountry ones would have been on their plantations, but there is little doubt that most of the lowcountry delegates, and nearly all of the leaders of the body, were present.

[21]Edward McCrady, *The History of South Carolina under the Royal Government, 1719-1776* (New York: Macmillan, 1899), 450.

most moving words in all of the many thousands in the Bishop Smith Sermon Collection at St. Philip's are to be found in another sermon manuscript. On Good Friday 1780, he took time off from military duty at the fortifications on Charles Town Neck to deliver an old sermon for this most solemn Christian commemoration. Afterwards, Robert Smith scrawled on the title-page of this sermon the curt observation, "Very few present—the Enemy at hand." And so they were, and within a month they would take Charles Town, imprison the Rector of St. Philip's, sequester his estates, and send him into exile, from which he would return in triumph only in 1783. Smith would have said that only his firm dependence on God could have seen him through such dark hours—how terrible and strange that his own native land should have become "the Enemy." Little did Robert Smith or any of his auditors on February 17, 1775 know how many unproclaimed fast days and days of humiliation lay between them and nationhood.