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Rev. Charles Clay

And the Calvinistical Reformed Church of Charlottesville, Virginia During the American Revolution

by Mark A. Beliles

The Rev. Charles Clay (1745-1824) of Albemarle County, Virginia is a wonderful example for pastors today of what it means to be a "watchman" on the wall. Thomas Jefferson wrote that Clay was "particularly known" to him during the American Revolution as both an "exemplary...rector" and also a "well informed politician." Rev. Clay, while ministering in Albemarle from 1769 to 1785, was chosen in 1777 by Jefferson to be the pastor of an independent local congregation which Jefferson helped establish. Clay was also a prominent figure in politics since he served as an Albemarle County Court Justice, as a Bedford County delegate to the Virginia Convention that ratified the Constitution, and as a candidate for the United States House of Representatives. Furthermore, Clay was the minister of choice to preach special public sermons on Fast days and to the local militia. Let us learn more about this pastor's important ministry.

Early History of Clay and Saint Anne's Parish

Instead of going the usual route of study for the ministry at the College of William and Mary (which was not known for being very evangelical), Clay was personally trained for the priesthood "by private study" with the Anglican revivalist Rev. Devereaux Jarratt. In fact Charles Clay was the only candidate for the ministry that Jarratt and Archibald McRoberts, the two most prominent Anglican evangelicals in Virginia, ever mutually recommended.

The selection of an evangelical disciple of Jarratt would be clear evidence of the religious sentiments of a parish, unless the Governor appointed him without the vestry's participation. It is highly significant then that in 1769 the vestry of St. Anne's Parish in Albemarle County selected Rev. Clay to be their minister without waiting for the customary recommendation from the Governor. Since Jarratt had already lived in Albemarle and preached there for about seven years, the vestry was certainly aware of what kind of minister Clay would be. This evidence suggests that St. Anne's Parish was evangelical in its leanings by this date. In fact, two of the three Anglican parishes in the region by 1769 had evangelical rectors: Clay in St. Anne's parish in Southern Albemarle County and Thomas Martin in St. Thomas Parish in Orange County. Rev. Clay lived on glebe (i.e. church) land on Totier Creek in southern Albemarle County and preached in the parish's churches for eight years.

Fifty handwritten sermons by Clay have been preserved. However, they have been overlooked in all studies to date of Virginia's religious culture and Thomas Jefferson because they have never been published, and were only recently donated by descendants of Clay to the Virginia Historical Society in 1992. Clay's messages are especially enlightening because, as Bishop Meade said in his early history of the Episcopal Church in Virginia, they were "energetic and evangelical beyond the character of the times." He also records that one of Clay's sermons "...on the new birth was most impressive." Clay's preaching reveals a theological orthodoxy and evangelical style. One evangelistic sermon (#23) was delivered every year between 1774 and 1777 and it assured people that God will not reject them if they come to him. A sermon entitled, In This Was the Love of God Manifested (#37), was first preached on Christmas day in 1774. This one Bishop Meade raved about for its boldness in condemning fiddling, dancing, and drinking. In it Clay closed the sermon focusing on Christmas festivities as follows:

Let your joy be such as becomes Christians. Is the way to praise God to curse, swear and blaspheme, to game, to get drunk, to run into every excess of riot regardless of all law human and divine as many of you are known to do? Is the way to show your zeal for God, to worship the Devil? This (i.e. Christmas) is a solemn Feast to the Lord Jehovah....If so, in what manner have you attempted to glorify him in it?...What can be more impious than to imagine you glorify God by thus spending the day...in drunkenness and debauchery, revealing...
and swearing, fiddling and dancing?

Another example is sermon #12 preached in 1775 which warns that God is the adversary of the sinner. It began with Matthew chapter 5, verses 23-26: "Agree with thine adversary quickly wholes thou art in the way with him, lest any time the adversary deliver thee to the Judge, and...thou be cast into prison." Clay used this Scripture text to describe the sinner's precarious and hopeless condition before a holy and offended God, and the realities of an eternity in hell for all those who fail to avoid the sentence of the eternal judge. Clay's compassion is expressed quite emotionally as he closes with these words:

My brethren, your souls, your precious souls are at stake; you hang by a very slender thread over the bottomless pit. O call upon God while it is time; Harden not your hearts against him. Let what I have said have its due weight. Do not steel your hearts against what I have offered. Do not refuse a blessing at my hands, but come to the Lord Jesus Christ and be at peace with him. Remember, it is not I, but the Lord Jesus Christ himself that speaks and says unto thee: 'Agree with thine adversary quickly wholes thou art in the way with him.'

Clay's Early Patriotic Years

In 1774, when the conflict with England resulted in the blockade of the Boston harbor, it was Thomas Jefferson who initiated the idea that the Virginia House of Burgesses proclaim a Public Day of Fasting and Prayer to be observed throughout the colony "...to implore the divine Interposition for averting the heavy calamity, which threatens destruction to our civil rights." Jefferson also proposed "...the inhabitants of the parish of Saint Anne that Saturday the 23rd instant be by them set apart for the purpose aforesaid, on which day will be prayers and a sermon suited to the occasion by the reverend Mr. Clay at the new church on Hardware river." Jefferson said that this additional Albemarle Fast Day service was attended by "a great multitude" of people and that "the people met generally with anxiety and alarm in their countenances." Clay, Jefferson reported, in "harmony with the liberties of mankind, conformed his public prayers to the spirit and the injured rights of his country." The effect, Jefferson said, "was like a shock of electricity, arousing every man." In fact, just three days later the freeholders of Albemarle met at the courthouse and denounced the violation of their rights by the Parliament of Great Britain, called for a boycott of trade with England, and said that the only legitimate legislature that they recognized was their own. They said that they were "ready to join with our fellow-subjects (in Colonial America)... in executing all those rightful powers which God has given us." The Virginia House of Burgesses agreed with their resolution and denounced Britain's closing of the port of Boston. Hearing this, the Governor dissolved the Assembly but then the members just moved to Raleigh Tavern in Williamsburg and there proceeded to call for a Continental Congress to convene.

In the central Virginia Piedmont, no better example is there of political action and political preaching than in the ministry of Rev. Charles Clay. Clay's fifty handwritten sermons that have survived provide examples as to how he electrified his audiences with patriotic oratory. In 1774 and 1775 he preached from 2 Chronicles 7:14 about how God would heal their nation if they would humble themselves and pray and turn from their wicked ways. Praise of Clay by early historian Hugh Grigsby gives a proper sense of significance of this forgotten leader of the Central Virginia Piedmont. He said that Clay's merit was "...greater than that of [Samuel] Davies. Davies was a dissenter...who exhorted his countrymen to take the field against...the French and the Indians... (but) Clay...went a step beyond... He was a priest of the Established Church...but...did not hesitate for an instant to sunder all political and religious connection with a King who sought to enslave Virginia. He stood on a platform too elevated for most of his clerical brethren...he stood almost alone." The Beginnings of the Calvinistic Reformed Church

Then Clay began to experience opposition from some in his parish. In December of 1776 the new state Constitution suspended all state-collected tithes and required the election of twelve new vestrymen in early 1777 for a one year term. Now all income would have to be generated voluntarily by subscription. Some of the vestry clearly did not want to make the effort to raise Clay's unpaid salary by soliciting voluntary contributions. Of the seven vestrymen, five of them resigned before 1777 (Furthermore, Jefferson, along with Wilson Cary and William Oglesby, were appointed to fill the vacancies in February 1777 but they all refused to serve.) There was such chaos that the vestry did not even have a meeting between July 1775 and February 1777. When the vestry finally was able to meet again on April 25, 1777 they discovered that six more long-standing vestrymembers had also decided to quit. But the heaviest loss was Clay, who said that he would no longer preach in St. Anne's Parish churches until they agreed to pay him salary owed him from 1774. He probably did not formally resign from the Anglican church until 1779 however, in hope that the matter would be resolved.

In the meantime, Rev. Clay and two of Saint Anne's leading members, Jefferson and Filippo Mazzei, proceeded with an effort to start a new independent church. They signed a document Jefferson drafted in February of 1777 entitled a Subscription to Support a Clergyman. It said: "We the subscribers... (are)
It is certain that the church actually came into being because of the following: (1) St. Anne’s vestry records, which extend up to 1785, state that he had quit by 1780 (i.e. his sermons were not preached to them), (2) Clay’s sermons list about 40 dates between 1777 and 1785, with some notations saying specifically that they were preached in the Albemarle Courthouse in Charlottesville, and (3) Jefferson’s regular contributions recorded in his Account Book (such as August 15, 1779: “Pd revd Charles Clay in consideration of parochial services”) were in addition to his continued payment of “the parish levy (for) St. Anne’s.” The table below shows that all but one of Clay’s thirty-three dated sermons were preached in the era of the Calvinistic Reformed Church (1777-1785).

The dates in this table are when most of the seventeen undated sermons were probably preached as well. The time of Clay’s greatest productivity of new sermons was while he was at Saint Anne’s Parish between 1769 and 1776. However, the frequency of preaching was greatest between 1773 and 1780, which covers Clay’s last four years with St. Anne’s Parish and his first four years with the Calvinistic Reformed Church. There was an increase of frequency again in 1784 and 1785 when he began to look for other ministry locations. The Calvinistic Reformed Church, then, worshipped in the Albemarle Courthouse in Charlottesville for about seven or eight years (1777-1785).

A few of the other Anglicans who signed the subscription included Jefferson’s brother Randolph, John Jouett (owner of Swan Tavern and father of Captain Jack Jouett), and members of the Marks, Garth, Key, Tandy, Moore, and Minor families. Two members in particular, are deserving of additional comment. One was Col. John Harvie. John Harvie became Delegate to the Continental Congress and a signer of the Articles of Confederation in 1777. On receiving from Governor Jefferson the appointment of Register of the Land Office, he moved to Richmond, and continued in the discharge of its duties until he died in 1807. About the same time Harvie was appointed by the legislature to a committee along with George Mason and Jerman Baker to prepare two bills: one for religious freedom and another for saving the property of the formerly Established church. It was Harvie who actually presented the famous Virginia Statute for Religious Freedom in the General Assembly on June 12, 1779.

### Dates and Frequency of Clay’s Sermons:

The numbering system used to identify the sermons below are based on the order they appear in the folders of the Clay Family Papers. (Funerals are in parentheses.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Sermons preached for first time:</th>
<th>Sermons repeated:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1769</td>
<td>18, 25, (32), fragment</td>
<td>18, 25, (32)</td>
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<tr>
<td>1770</td>
<td>7, 5, 27, 41, 42, fragments</td>
<td>5, 18, (32), 47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1771</td>
<td>9, 33, 47, fragment</td>
<td>18, 25, 27, (32), 47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1772</td>
<td>23, 43, 45</td>
<td>5, 25, 27, (32), 43, 45, 47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1773</td>
<td>(1), 21, 31, fragment</td>
<td>4, 23, 25, 31, (32), 42, 43, 45, 48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1774</td>
<td>4, 14, (17), 37, 39, 48</td>
<td>(1), 25, 27, 31, 42, 43, 45, 48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1775</td>
<td>12, 13, 22, (50), fragment</td>
<td>(1), (17), 22, 23, 27, 31, (32), 42, 45, 48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1776</td>
<td>fragments [probably #10]</td>
<td>(1), (17), 23, 25, 31, (32), 42, 45, 47, (50)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1777</td>
<td>19, 29, (35), fragment</td>
<td>19, 25, 27, 31, (35), 42, 45</td>
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<tr>
<td>1778</td>
<td></td>
<td>(17), 28, 29, (35), 41, 42, 43, 47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1779</td>
<td></td>
<td>12, 13, 25, (35), 41, 42, (50)</td>
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<tr>
<td>1780</td>
<td>fragment [probably #2]</td>
<td>(1), 19, 25, 29</td>
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<tr>
<td>1781</td>
<td></td>
<td>5, 7, 9, (17), 19, (50)</td>
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<tr>
<td>1782</td>
<td></td>
<td>25, 27</td>
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<tr>
<td>1783</td>
<td></td>
<td>(1), 5, 7, 18, 19, 27, (35)</td>
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<td>1784</td>
<td></td>
<td>(1), 19, 21, 26, 29, (32), (35)</td>
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<tr>
<td>1785</td>
<td>38, fragment</td>
<td>29, 37, 45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1786</td>
<td></td>
<td>(1), (17), 18, 38,</td>
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<tr>
<td>1787</td>
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<td>17</td>
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<td>1788</td>
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<td>19</td>
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<tr>
<td>1789</td>
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The Papers of Thomas Jefferson, Julian Boyd says that "T. J. organized" the church first under the name the Protestant Episcopal Church, but finding this name unpopular, proposed the second name.
Another member of this new church was Filippo Mazzei, an Italian grape-grower who moved to America from Florence in 1773. He is credited as being the first to establish a winemaking business in Virginia. He settled near Monticello and quickly became involved in leadership of the area. He was elected to the vestry of St. Anne’s Parish in 1774 and given responsibility for the poor. Mazzei had apparently been candid in expressing support for religious freedom, which prompted a visit in 1775 by a dozen Presbyterians in the county. They wanted to recruit someone to run for office who would fight for their causes, so a delegation went to visit Mazzei and prevailed upon him to stand for election, with their promise to help him. As a result, Mazzei was elected to the County Committee of Safety which governed Albemarle during the Revolution. Once elected, he drafted in the spring of 1776 the Instructions of the Freetholders of Albemarle County to their Delegates in Convention, in which he urged them and Mr. Jefferson to discontinue mandatory contributions for clergy of only the established Anglican Church. It would be a few more months however before the religious taxes earmarked for ministerial salaries were suspended. In his memoirs Mazzei states that “I went every Sunday to the churches of all denominations. After their minister had delivered the sermon and recited the prayers, I made a speech setting forth principles of equality (concerning religion).” When Clay and Jefferson started the new independent church in 1777, Mazzei joined them.

It is significant that the local Anglican champions for religious freedom — Jefferson, Harvie and Mazzei — were all among the original members of Clay’s independent Calvinistic church. The church came to an end because of wartime financial hardships and the absence of its major financial supporters.

Filippo Mazzei visited Europe in late 1779 and moved there perma-

nently in 1784. Col. John Harvie was frequently absent in service in the Congress and other business, and then moved to Richmond in the early 1780s. Jefferson, the church’s largest contributor, moved to Paris in 1784, and was also frequently absent in service for the nation before that. Without their financial support Clay could not continue.

**Clay’s Political Preaching**

In 1779 Governor Jefferson’s public letter of recommendation for Clay said: “The reverend Charles Clay has been many years rector of this parish, and has been particularly known to me... His deportment has been exemplary... and his attention to parochial duties unexceptionable.” Jefferson’s letter also said: “In the earliest stage of the present contest with Great Britain while the clergy of the established church in general took the adverse side, or kept aloof from the cause of their country, he took a decided and active part with his countrymen, and has continued to prove his whiggism unequivocal, and his attachment to the American cause to be sincere and zealous.” During the War for Independence Clay was known, Jefferson also said, for his continual prayers in church, “ever addressing the God of battles for victory to our arms.”

Clay preached regularly to the American troops stationed in the area. Grigsby has commented that Clay’s sermon on the Governor Among the Nations was not only preached in 1776, but also “preached at Charlottesville before a company of Minute-men” in 1777. He said that it “...reminds us of that preached on a similar occasion seventeen years before by Samuel Davies... ‘Cursed be he,’ (Clay) said, ‘who keepeth back his sword from blood in this war...’ He proclaimed that ‘the cause of liberty was the cause of God’ and therefore implored the men to ‘plead the cause of their country before the Lord with their blood.’ Although calling the men to courage in battle, he also appealed for virtue, repentance and reformation among all people, but especially the leaders. He said:

“This duty is particularly incumbent upon you who are placed in a more exalted station, and to whom the eyes of the people look up for examples, and you my native brethren of the military who are entrusted with your country’s cause... If you expect to be cheerfully obeyed by your men in the day of battle and providentially protected in the hour of danger, recommend yourselves to Heaven by your piety... For the most proper and effectual way we can take to preserve our valuable privileges and to promote national prosperity, is not to merely express a clamorous zeal for liberty.”

Five essential doctrines of American political philosophy were evident in Clay’s sermons. Clay’s sermon (#13) concerning The Necessity of National Humility and Repentance (dated 1775 and 1780) identified the source of "wars and fightings" as arising from the "lusts" of men. He emphasized their sins as the reason God was judging them, including "infidelity" and "contempt... (for the) Bible... (and its) Divine inspiration." Clay also focused this sermon on the "body politic." Its concluding prayer, which clearly applies to the earlier date of delivery in 1775, has very interesting historical content:

*Most gracious God, we humbly beseech thee that these Colonies may ever be under the care and protection of a kind Providence, and be prospered in all their interests both spiritual and temporal; and that the Divine blessing may descend and rest upon all our rulers, and upon the Representatives of the People in their several Assemblies and Convention now or hereafter to be assembled; especially on the general Congress now convened by divine permission at Philadelphia, that thou wouldst be pleased to direct and prosper all their consultations for the advancement of thy Glory, the good of the Church, the
safety, honour and welfare of our gracious Sovereign; and that they may be directed to wise and effectual measures for preserving the union and securing the just rights and privileges of the Colonies; that America may be redressed of her many grievances with the restoration of her invaded rights, and a reconciliation with the Parent State, on terms constitutional and honourable to both, and that her civil and religious privileges may be secured to the latest posterity; That . . . peace and happiness, truth and justice, religion and piety, may be established among us for all generations. These and all other necessaries for them, for us, and thy whole Church, we humbly beg in the name and mediation of Jesus Christ our most blessed Lord and Saviour:

This prayer’s references to "representatives" and "constitutional" processes suggests that he held to the idea of a fundamental constitution, and that government is a binding compact or covenant made between rulers and peoples by their consent. The main body of this sermon also has a phrase that says "liberty is the inheritance of British subjects" but that things have drastically changed so that "now my brethren...the hand of arbitrary power is stretched out over you!" Clay then brings his audience to the fearful reality that "we are now on the eve of a bloody war." Then he follows it with the warning that they may be forced to lay "down our arms and liberties, (and) submit to live as ignoble slaves, upon the nods and smiles of the arbitrary designing sycophants of a corrupt Court [of King George III]." It is clear that Clay believed in the idea that the people have a sovereign right to hold their rulers to account, and to resist oppression and tyranny and defend their rights through responsible representatives.

Another of Clay’s sermons entitled The Governor Among the Nations (#10) has no definite date began with the text: Psalm 22:28 – For the Kingdom is the Lord’s, and He is the Governor Among the Nations. Clay described the subject as "God’s providential government as exercised towards mankind", and in the sermon explained in detail "the methods of Providence towards societies." The primary purpose of this sermon was to bring comfort and faith in the midst of their sufferings and fears. After a lengthy treatment of the history of Israel and showing the "superintendency of Divine Providence...in public revolutions (and) the rise and fall of empires" such as Assyria, Babylon, the Persian empire, Alexander the Great, and the Romans, Clay said:

Let us check each desponding thought now in the day of our distress and place our confidence in God alone, and though our enemies rage and threaten us with desolation and destruction, yet let us not despond but seek the Lord by prayer and supplication and cast our burdens on Him, for when all worldly supports fail us, we may rest satisfied in this, that things are not left to a blind chance. The Kingdom is the Lord’s, and He is the Governor among the nations. The Lord shall reign for ever, even thy God O Zion unto all generations. The heathen may rage and the people may imagine a vain thing; the kings of the earth may take counsel together against the Lord and against his Christ: But He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh and the Lord shall have them in derision. Though he may seem to forsake his church for a time, he will take care that the gates of Hell shall not finally prevail against it.

The idea of a fundamental constitution based on God’s higher law is seen in this sermon when Clay emphasized "that men should be subject to the higher powers. These powers are said to be ordained of God, ordained for the punishment of evil doers." He taught that "the authority which they are invested with is properly and originally derived from God the Fountain of all power" and revealed in His "divine laws." Clay also pointed out that "Providence proceeds not merely in a way of arbitrary sovereignty, but according to steady and righteous rules and for wise ends and purposes." He spoke of being "blessed with a good constitution of government," and also referred to a "fundamental constitution" and the "church constitution." Clay mentioned their "liberties and privileges civil and religious", and also referred to the "principles of self-love and self-preservation" which are principles found articulated in John Locke's writings.

The political principle that government is a binding compact or covenant made between rulers and peoples by their consent, is articulated by Clay when he asserts that civil authority comes from God, not "in an immediate way, but mediately by the choice, consent or submission of the people." Clay also asserted that "revolutions of kingdoms and states...are under the special direction and superintendence of Divine Providence," and he affirmed that there were "just and necessary wars." Here again is expressed the idea of the sovereign right of the people to hold their rulers to account, to resist tyranny and defend their rights through responsible representatives. Clay applied these principles directly when he told the people that "the rapes, the thefts and depredations committed upon our Brethren to the northward," referring to the war that had begun in New England, should be "sufficient to rouse you up to resist before they come home to your own houses and families." He cited "the present unnatural war" and boldly called on the people to "defend your country and the sacred cause of liberty which is the cause of God."

Typical of clergy in that time, Clay’s sermons cited not only "the Holy Scriptures" but also "reason" as a means of understanding truth. Clay also referred to "God as the Author of Nature", "God the Supreme Ruler", "God the Fountain of All Power", "the Supreme Governor of the World", "the Supreme Universal
farming the glebe land in Albemarle. Clay also began serving as a justice of the peace in Bedford County in 1782, even while holding the same public office in Albemarle through the year 1783.

In Bedford his political activity was resumed. In 1788, Rev. Charles Clay was elected as a delegate representing Bedford County at the Virginia Constitutional Convention. In the Convention, he voted not to ratify the U.S. Constitution without first a Bill of Rights being added to secure "the great principles of civil and religious liberty." Hugh Grigsby wrote that "the political principles of Clay were as fixed as his religious." In the Convention he spoke against Congress having the power to tax, saying by it we have "virtually relinquished the great object attained by the Revolution." Clay also opposed Congress having the power to call forth the militia, saying, "Our militia might be dragged from their homes and marched to the Mississippi."

During the struggle over the ratification and amendments to the United States Constitution and over religious freedom (1784-1791), a new religious political movement came into being. This new political movement began to emerge around 1790 and controlled national affairs within a decade. Harvard historian Alan Heimert writes: "There were many preachers -- many more than historians allow -- who avidly and vocally supported the Republican party, and did so in the conviction that Republicanism embodied the first principles of evangelical Christianity... Many of the clergymen who in the period of Republican ascendency found their way into state legislatures... mingled the two careers, generally with their people's understanding that Republican politics was an appropriate channel for the expression and achievement of evangelical goals."

In Virginia Rev. Charles Clay was one of these "evangelical republicans" who formed a political alliance with Jefferson and James Madison. For example, in 1790 Clay received a letter from Jefferson saying: "I understand you are a candidate for... Congress... I am sure I shall be contented with such a representative as you will make... You are too well informed a politician, too good a judge of men, not to know, that the ground of liberty is to be gained by inches, that we must be contented to secure what we can get from time to time, and eternally press forward for what is yet to get. It takes time to persuade men to do even what is for their own good. Wishing you every prosperity in this... undertaking... Thomas Jefferson."

Clay failed to win his election, but wrote, "I have to thank you for your very obliging letter when I last offered myself as a candidate... The letter was of very essential service in the upper counties." Clay said that he planned to run again because the districts would be redrawn and asked if Jefferson would send letters "to some particular Gentlemen in each county to be delivered just before the election." This was more involvement in the race than Jefferson wanted. He wrote back to Clay saying that "the letter to you on the former occasion... was addressed to yourself" and thus could be used as a general endorsement. However, Jefferson said that he was uncomfortable with the idea of writing directly "to persons... unknown to me." Jefferson added that he was determined "never to intermeddle with elections" beyond this general kind of endorsement.

Clay's political career did not continue but he served as an attorney for Jefferson in Bedford County as early as 1792.

Clay's Final Years

It was in Bedford County that Clay built Petty Grove next to Poplar Grove, a retreat owned by Thomas Jefferson. Clay continued his relationship over the next thirty years with Jefferson whenever the statesman came to his neighboring retreat.
Letters survive between the two men from the period after Jefferson’s retirement from the White House in 1809. Clay warned Jefferson in 1814 not to proceed with a public edition of Jefferson’s digest of the words of Jesus because he feared "...how it may effect your future character and reputation on the page of history as a patriot, legislator and sound philosopher...The public might not sufficiently appreciate your good intentions, but ascribe it to views as inimical to the christian religion in particular, and eventually to all religion from divine Authority, which I am surprised you can have no intention of doing."\(^4\) Jefferson heeded the advice of his former pastor and kept it private, however, Clay’s words became true as a result of Jefferson’s writings becoming public much later through modern historical research. In a letter to Clay in 1815, Jefferson said: "I have probably said more to you [on religion] than to any other person, because we have had more hours of conversation...in our meetings at the Forest [i.e. Poplar Forest]." Clay’s knowledge of Jefferson’s beliefs and the relationship these two men shared is therefore very important to modern Jeffersonian scholarship.

**Conclusions**

Rev. Charles Clay’s newly discovered sermons and the historical data regarding the Calvinistical Reformed Church provides new evidence of the thinking of religious communities in the Central Virginia Piedmont at the time of the Revolution. It reveals that the Charlottesville area at the time was strongly evangelical and that the area’s leaders for religious freedom such as Jefferson, Harvie and Mazzey publicly identified with Clay and his church. When Jefferson was writing his most famous public documents such as the Virginia Statute for Religious Freedom and the Declaration of Independence, he was publicly identifying with and voluntarily financing Clay’s preaching and ministry. Although this essay does not prove Jefferson to personally be an evangelical, it nonetheless offers some modification to common assumptions about him and the cultural forces behind the revolutionary cause in the Charlottesville area.\(^47\) The primary force was the evangelical Anglican and Calvinist preaching and leadership of Rev. Charles Clay—a model for all pastors today.

**Endnotes:**


2. Jefferson’s Subscription to Support a Clergyman, February 1777 (See Boyd, Vol 2, pp. 6-9). The editor notes that "If not only granted the largest sum among the subscribers but continued payments for others as well as himself over several years" (See his Account Books, 9th Mch., 18 Aug., 1778, 28 Apr., 15 Aug. 1779.)

3. See Boyd's comments on the Testimonial for Charles Clay, 15 August, 1779 (Boyd, Vol 1, p. 67). These editors form their theory based on the fact of two subscriptions to raise the support of a clergyman of which the first called the church the Protestant Episcopal church. It cannot be proven exactly which one of these names was the one settled upon, but I have always used the Calvinistical Reformed name for convenience throughout this paper.

4. Langhorne, p. 6. The vestry book minutes on page 19 specify the late Rev. and Clay” on December 22, 1779. This shows that he had quit as its minister. Historical sketches of Clay state that he stepped ministering for St. Anne’s Parish after 1777. See, p. 51.

5. James A. Bear, Jr. and Lucia C. Stancliff, 15 August, 1779 (Boyd, Vol 1, p. 69). It is also known that there was a patriotic Rev. Holmes and a Rev. Dankele that preached in St. Anne’s Parish during and after the war. See, p. 51. Three times – April 5, 1777, June 17, 1778, and September 10, 1778 – Jefferson gave to both St. Anne’s and Fredericksburg parishes on the exact same day.


9. This document is found undated in Jefferson’s papers (Boyd), and also in a collection of Mazzey’s writings, pp. 9-10). Mazzey wrote that “it would be the same as to say: you are allowed to think as you please, but you are to pay for other people’s thinking... It is not the trifling tax we are asking upon... it is the precedent contrary to liberty. It is not the right of the Dissenters we are now supporting, it is the right of mankind.” Once a new state constitution was adopted in the summer of 1776, Mazzey worked closely with the dissenting churches to enlighten the people on the articles’ economic religion.


12. Jefferson’s Subscription to Support a Clergyman, February 1777 (see Boyd, Vol 2, pp. 6-9).


15. Use of this word shows that this prayer was made in the 1775 pre-independence delivery only.

16. The Continental Congress was deliberating in both the summer and fall of 1775.

17. The sermon has added above this last sentence the word “in” where it previously said “on the eve of.”

18. The titles of Clay’s sermons used here are my own doing in order to identify them easily. Clay’s sermons usually simply had an opening text without a title.

36 This would have been Col. Francis Taylor’s Albemarle County Battalion (a.k.a. the Convention Army Guard Regiment) which had the responsibility to guard the prisoners at the Barracks to the west of town.

37 It is noteworthy that one of Clay’s evangelical mentors, Archibald McRoberts, also started an independent church in Virginia. Two years later Clay’s independent church began in Albemarle. See Gundersen, p. 195. McRoberts later began to attend the Hanover Presbyterian ministerial meeting in 1787 and joined his independent church to the Presbytery. See William H. Foote, Sketches of Virginia, (Philadelphia, PA: William S. Marten, 1850), pp. 492-494.


39 His Account Book has the last business entry at St. Anne’s Glebe on April 6, 1780, and the first entry in Bedford County on January 6, 1781 (See Clay Family Papers, Richmond). He married Edith Davies in 1777.

40 Grigsby, p. 344.


42 Jefferson to Clay, 27 January, 1790 (Boyd).

43 Clay to Jefferson, 8 August, 1792 (Boyd).

44 Jefferson to Clay, 11 September, 1792 (Boyd).

45 Now known as Ivy Hill. It is found today off Rt. 633 in the Ivy Hills subdivision.

46 Charles Clay to Jefferson, 20 December, 1814 (Lipscomb and Bergh).

47 Jefferson gradually became more unorthodox in his religious beliefs after his retirement from the White House. This period is often emphasized by modern scholars and obscures the earlier period.

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