percent. In 1974, only one third of the people said that they could trust their leaders. 7

Most people have been alarmed by this phenomenon. In every area of American life, eulogies are being delivered over the grave of authority. Within the church most of the energy and effort is extended in the direction of shoring up the institution, encouraging people to trust leaders and follow established policies. In politics, candidates are valiantly attempting to convince people that they are more trustworthy than their rivals. Although it is clear that rampant disrespect toward authority and fear of power is finally destructive of social cohesion, there is a healthy cynicism which characterizes the current American attitude toward leaders and institutions. It has been long in coming, but the combination of Watergate and Vietnam have prompted the American people to begin to see power as the revolutionaries did—as human, sinful, and potentially a threat.

III

The corollary of this conception of power was the understanding of liberty. Power and liberty were locked in a constant, cosmic conflict. Power resided in the government; liberty inhered in the people. While power was aggressive and imperial, always seeking to dominate, liberty was consistently on the defensive, resisting the encroachments of power. Further, the colonists invariably portrayed power as male and liberty as female, a feminist twist to the interpretation of the American Revolution.

What is often missed in this rhetoric of liberty was the way in which many colonists linked political liberty to religious freedom. “Civil and religious liberty is the foundation of public happiness and the common birthright of mankind,” argued William Livingston. “It is the duty and interest of every individual to keep a watchful eye over it and to cherish it with the utmost care and tenderness.” For Livingston, a drafter of the Constitution, the union of church and state was “the most fatal engine ever invented by satan for promoting human wretchedness.” 8

From Livingston and others like him emerged the disestablishment of the church and the separation of church and state, perhaps the most revolutionary act of our American Revolution. For the first time since Constantine, a state had declared that the existence of a particular church was not necessary to ensure the viability of the state. Likewise, the American churches, slowly but gradually, embraced liberty as more conducive to their prosperity than the establishment of any one church. Today it is virtually impossible to recover the radical departure from previous history that the separation of church and state represented,

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7 The poll was conducted by the University of Michigan Center for Political Studies and the Gallup Organization and reported in Newsweek, April 12, 1976, p. 30.
8 “Remarks on the origin of government and on religious liberty,” January 1778, American Museum, IV (December, 1788), 492–93.