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Jedidiah Morse and the Illuminati Affair: A Re-Reading

Richard J. Moss

The Illuminati Controversy that broke out in New England and spread throughout the nation in the late 1790s is a case study in reading history backwards. At the heart of the controversy lay a handful of sermons by conservative New England clergymen. These sermons, with their announcement that there existed an extensive conspiracy against government and religion, spawned an intensive debate in the nation's newspapers on the nature of the conspiracy itself and the clergy's sources for making the claim that such a diabolical plot existed. By 1800, when the issue had all but disappeared, the sermons that had started the affair were already the "Illuminati sermons;" they were no longer read for what they actually said but were seen through the filter of the debate that had followed them. Historians in the twentieth century have operated essentially the same way, using the sermons as evidence that some clergy turned to conspiracy theories to explain the events of the 1790s. Most influential perhaps was Richard Hofstadter, who employed the Illuminati Controversy as a "point of departure" in his famous essay "The Paranoid Style in American Politics."¹

In order to obtain a more accurate picture, it is necessary to go back to the sermons of Jedidiah Morse, who precipitated the controversy, place them in the context of his life, and examine what

1. Richard Hofstadter, The Paranoid Style in American Politics and Other Essays (New York, 1933). The standard account of the Illuminati affair is Vernon Stauffer, New England and the Bavarian Illuminati (New York, 1918).

they actually say. By doing this we can gain a somewhat more accurate picture of Morse in 1798 and 1799. While he certainly intended to announce the existence of a vast and insidious conspiracy, this was not his fundamental purpose. He did not argue that recent events were understandable solely as the product of a diabolic plot; he sought to put those events in a much larger context. Furthermore, the sermons were the expressions of an anxious and divided man, a fact that has been obscured by placing the emphasis solely on Morse's interest in conspiracies.

In 1798, when Jedidiah Morse delivered the first of the sermons that dealt with the so-called Illuminati threat, he had been pastor at the First Church of Charlestown for almost a decade. The son of a small Connecticut farmer, he had attended Yale where he was influenced by Ezra Stiles. After graduation he stayed on to study theology and teach school in the New Haven area. In 1784 he published a small geography text for use in schools. The success of this book led him to further efforts in the field. In 1789, the year he accepted the pulpit at Charlestown, he finished *The American Geography*, a book that evolved over the years and which served as the basis for much of Morse's national reputation.² The three sermons that Morse gave in 1798 and 1799 grew out of these circumstances and are only fully comprehensible when we understand the influences and forces that shaped him in the 1790s.³

To begin with, Morse was failing as a minister. When he came to Charlestown his church contained 135 members. In 1800, the membership stood at only 143. The composition of the membership had changed as well. In 1789, there were 43 male and 92 female members; by 1800, the number of females had increased to 115, but the numbers of males had dropped to 28. These numbers suggest that Morse was losing heads of households and gaining single women, widows, and wives who joined without their husbands. This lack of growth in his congregation contrasted sharply with a rapid increase in the Charlestown population. In 1789, the population stood at 1,579; it

2. Jedidiah Morse, *The American Geography; or, a View of the Present Situation of United States* (Elizabethtown, N.J., 1789). This book marked the beginning of Morse's rise to national repute. The volume changed in format and title over the years; the last edition, the seventh, appeared in 1819.

3. Jedidiah Morse, *A Sermon, Delivered at the New North Church . . . May 9, 1798; A Sermon Preached at Charlestown, November 29, 1798, on the Anniversary Thanksgiving in Massachusetts* (Charlestown, 1799) and *A Sermon Exhibiting the Present Dangers, and Consequent Duties of Citizens of the United States . . . April 25, 1799* (Charlestown, 1799). Cited hereafter by date.

grew to 2,751 by 1800. Given these figures, the sermons of 1798 and 1799 may well have been an attempt at self-promotion, or an attempt to stir up local interest in a minister and a church that was languishing.⁴

Historians have ignored or misconstrued evidence that Morse's lack of success as a minister was a factor in the Illuminati Controversy. In response to Morse's second sermon, the editor of Boston's *Independent Chronicle* suggested that the Charlestown pastor had neglected his calling. Morse was too "anxious about the geographical description of the City of Washington or the Georgia Land" and paid too little attention to "the *New Jerusalem* or the *Land of Canaan*." The Charlestown parish was short-changed on Sunday because its minister was "busy about many things" during the week. Given this, Morse "must expect that his flock will not increase, and at the year's end, while he is exploring the territory of the United States, and hunting up Robinson's (sic) Stragglings Illuminati, he must not be surprised if some of his *own sheep* have strayed across the river, and [to] the care of a more attentive shepherd." Vernon Stauffer, author of the standard account of the Illuminati, attributed these remarks in the *Chronicle* to "instinctive repugnance" and saw them as "representative only of rabid partisanship." This reflects the tendency to see the controversy in political terms and to ignore important local circumstances.⁵

There is, however, another more complex way to look at the relationship between the sermons and Morse's failings as a minister. As Morse grew more aware of his lack of success as a minister, he began to value his national reputation and his contacts with national figures. Most notable among these contacts was Oliver Wolcott. Morse had been corresponding with Wolcott since the early 1790s. Wolcott had proved very helpful both as a critic of Morse's geographies and also as a source of valuable government data that improved the geographies and gave them a semi-official tone. However, in 1794 and 1795, Wolcott expanded his role in Morse's life and began to plant the seeds that would flower a few years later in the Illuminati sermons. For the most part, Wolcott's views meshed with Morse's innate conservatism and bias for things New England. In

4. The figures cited are from extracts of town and church records reprinted in James F. Hunnewell, *A Century of Town Life: A History of Charlestown, Massachusetts, 1775-1887* (Boston, 1888), pp. 24, 187-188.

5. *Independent Chronicle*, January 7, 1799; Stauffer, *New England and the Bavarian Illuminati*, p. 272.

June of 1794, Wolcott stated that political contention was wrong "in regard to subjects which intimately affect our government, morals, religion and State of Society." He suggested that "a mental epidemic" was "spreading through the world and threatening all Society with destruction" Wolcott was consoled, however, by the knowledge that "the principles and habits of New England" were available to resist this "mental epidemic." In the same letter he made the connection between "the madness and folly of zealots of our own country" and the actions of foreign nations. Again he suggested "the preservation of tranquility" could be attributed only to New Englanders and to "the extraordinary exertions of their representatives in Congress."⁶ Slightly more than a year later, Wolcott was openly claiming the existence of a conspiracy against good order and the interests of the United States. "In our affairs," Wolcott wrote, "there are many relations which separately considered appear unimportant, yet in the aggregate (sic) they possess much influence. No division has complete knowledge." It was clear, Wolcott stated flatly, "that there exists a general combination to involve the U.S. in trouble." Wolcott suggested "that men of reflection . . . are anxious to investigate the real cause of these agitations which exclusively happen in our great towns. It is certain that they do not proceed from public misfortunes, or from a sense of actual oppression. What do these things portend?"⁷

This last suggestion, that something was wrong "in our great towns," must have struck a responsive chord in Morse. His experience in Charlestown and Boston was leading him to the same conclusion. In August of 1795, he wrote his father that while Charlestown was prospering, this prosperity was bringing in its wake "infidelity, uncleanness, Sabbath breaking." The problem, Morse believed, rested in part with dishonorable leaders who "wish to overthrow our government for having nothing to lose they have some chance to be gainers in the general scramble." In seaport towns there would always be a mob available to such leaders. In contrast, "the yeomanry of this country" were the rock upon which stability and good order rested.⁸

Morse became increasingly concerned with changes in the nature of the population to which he ministered. His church not only failed to grow but it also declined in vigor and righteousness. In his

6. Oliver Wolcott to Jedidiah Morse, June 22, 1794, ms. in Morse Papers, New York Public Library.

7. *Ibid.*, September 26, 1795.

8. Jedidiah Morse to Jedidiah Morse, Sr., September 26, 1795, ms. in Morse Papers.

1799 New Year's sermon, he lamented that only two new members had come forward while five had died. Church discipline, upon which the church's "purity and respectability essentially depend has grown much too lax." Morse characterized the membership as a dwindling band threatened by "the heathen" round about them. He argued that if "God's people" were defeated it would be read as a sign "that there is no such God as they profess to believe in." His view of conditions in the town was equally dark. General prosperity, he claimed, had produced not thankfulness but an outburst of immorality. This moral breakdown was the product of changes in the population, and Morse argued that the town should be particularly concerned about new-comers.

Good policy would encourage the settlement of wholesome persons of industry, good morals and property, but would bar as far as possible the settlement of the idle, the intemperate, the unprincipled and the poor. Of the latter we have already too many and as those of the same disposition and habits naturally associate there is great danger of their increase, till at length they become a serious calamity. Our civil Fathers whose business it is to manage the police of the town, from their known regard to its moral, religious as well as temporal welfare will it is hoped pay all needful attention to this important business.⁹

Morse was responding to a very real situation. Since the early 1780s, Charlestown had experienced a great rush of immigration. Between 1782 and 1789, when Morse came to Charlestown, the town recorded 425 new arrivals. At the end of each year, in the church records, Morse tallied up the births, deaths, and the natural increase; he added for nearly every year in the 1790s, "Increase by immigration considerable."¹⁰ By 1798, Morse confronted a very uncomfortable reality; his town was growing rapidly but his church was not. Political divisions that appeared in Charlestown made this reality all the more uncomfortable. During the Jay Treaty agitation, Morse learned that these divisions had real importance for him. When he

9. Ms. sermon, January 6, 1799, in Morse Family Papers, Yale University.

10. Hunnewell, A Century of Town life, pp. 22-23, 255.

heard a Charlestown mob burning an effigy of Jay, he rushed out to stop them; his reward was a brickbat to the head. He was not seriously injured, but after this event he could no longer expect to be treated as a respected figure by everyone in a town so fundamentally split.¹¹

Thus, by 1798, Morse was deeply troubled by his problems in Charlestown. His church's membership rolls offered him a daily reminder that he was far from a popular minister. The town was apparently full of strangers who either ignored him or openly scorned him. In his psychological state, he increasingly found personal satisfaction and worth not on the local stage, but as a national figure serving national interests. On the local level he could appear as a national figure who possessed the truth based on inside information denied his listeners. Indeed that was the case; the printed versions of his sermons bristled with facts and excerpts of letters from Federalist leaders such as Wolcott, George Cabot, Timothy Pickering, and Stephen Higginson.¹² Furthermore, Wolcott's vaguely conspiratorial view of recent events gave Morse an explanation of his own troubles in Charlestown that deflected attention away from Morse's own shortcomings and projected it on to shadowy demagogues and conspiracies.

Morse clearly hoped that his sermon would improve his position within the Federalist leadership. Referring to his first 1798 sermon, he told Wolcott: "I hope it has done some good and that it may have a chance of doing more, however small, I have permitted its publication . . ." He noted that the citizens of Charlestown, many of whom "have been violently opposed to the measures of Govt . . ." have received the sermon with "approbation." Morse's desire to appear as a spokesman of the Federalist Party was more clearly expressed in a letter to Timothy Pickering in January of 1799. Morse included a copy of the sermon and asked that "it may be communicated to the President." Morse claimed that he published the sermons and the large appendix because, as he said, "I live among a people many of whom err in Sentiment and Conduct through their want of information. It was especially for their benefit that the Appendix was compiled."¹³ Thus Morse presented himself to the

11. William B. Sprague, *The Life of Jedidah Morse* (New York, 1874), pp. 230-231.

12. See particularly the appendix to *Nov. 29, 1798*.

13. Quoted in Stauffer, *New England and Bavarian Illuminati*, pp. 240-270.

government as a soldier in the front lines, fighting to correct the opinions of misinformed and misguided people.

The connection between the local and national stages took one more interesting twist. During the period that Morse was most deeply embroiled in the Illuminati Controversy, he was asking Wolcott for several favors that involved Charlestown. First of all, Morse lobbied Wolcott to help bring the National Dock to Charlestown. In November of 1799, he wrote Wolcott and suggested that Aaron Putnam, who owed Morse a great deal of money, be named superintendent if the dock was built in Charlestown. About a year later, Morse again solicited Wolcott's help. Morse had become involved with Timothy Dwight and others in founding *The New England Palladium*. Morse asked Wolcott to help the paper become the government's "medium of . . . communication with the people" and "to secure for it as far as possible the patronage of the government."¹⁴ All of this evidence points to the conclusion that one can view Morse's Illuminati sermons in 1798 and 1799, at least in part, as attempts to curry favor with Wolcott and other Federalists while at the same time bolstering his local reputation. Whatever else the sermons were, they abound with injunctions to support the existing government and clergy.

This notion that the sermons were in part a defense of the clergy opens another avenue to understanding them in the context of Morse's life. He urged his listeners to see the clergy as a noble group doing, in 1798, what patriotic ministers had done in 1776. He suggested that the average minister's

little all of property stands on the same basis with that of their people, and the same events affect them equally. Could they not subsist in as much ease and affluence as they now do, by other professions? Are their stipends or their prospects of promotion enviable or alluring? Can *they* then be your friends who are continually declaiming against the Clergy, and endeavoring by all means -- by falsehood and misrepresentation, to asperse their characters, and to bring them and their profession in to disrepute.¹⁵

 14. Jedidiah Morse to Oliver Wolcott, November 8, 1799 and December 10, 1800, ms. in Wolcott Papers, Connecticut Historical Society, Hartford.

15. May 9, 1798, p. 19.

Morse presented himself as a self-sacrificing clergyman who condemned "a selfish spirit, and insatiable ardor to get rich." This spirit has "engendered speculation, fraud, embarrassments and bankruptcy." "An avaricious man," Morse claimed, "will always sacrifice the public good to private interest."¹⁶

Morse sought to conjure up an image of a ministerial class, barely getting by, battling the growth of capitalist individualism. In Morse's case this was hardly true. By 1798 Morse had become wealthy, in the context of Charlestown society, and was investing and speculating heavily. One index of wealth in Charlestown was servants in the home. In 1798, there were 454 families in the town and only sixty-seven had servants. Morse had two; Nancy Shepard was a fixture in the Morse household from the beginning of their stay in Charlestown, and sometime in the 1790s the family also took on Prince, who apparently took care of the horses and performed other similar duties.¹⁷ Morse's investments were substantial: \$431 for a Massachusetts State Bond in 1791, \$375 for shares in the Piscataque Bridge, and approximately \$291 for ten shares in the Massachusetts Turnpike. Morse's correspondence during the 1790s hints at other investments; in 1799, for example, he was in Philadelphia arranging the sale of some "insurance shares." His records do, however, clearly indicate that his most substantial speculations were in land and a mortgage. In the summer of 1799, Morse paid Samuel Goodwin twelve hundred dollars for three 200-acre lots in Kennebec County, Maine. In June of 1798, Morse lent his friend and member of his church, Aaron Putnam, twelve hundred dollars and took Putnam's Charlestown estate as security for the loan.¹⁸ This brought Morse's total investments between 1790 and 1799 to nearly \$14,200, an impressive total for a man whose yearly salary was less than six hundred dollars. Apparently, Morse took in substantial sums from the

 16. November 29, 1798, p.12.

17. Figures on servants in Charlestown are from Hunnewell, A Century of Town Life, p. 23. A discussion of the Morse household in the 1790s appears in Carlton Mabee, The American Leonardo: A Life of Samuel F. B. Morse (New York, 1943).

18. This portrait of Morse's investments was gleaned from his correspondence and business papers at Yale. See for example, Thomas Martin to Jedidiah Morse, June 29, 1794, and Israel Evans to Jedidiah Morse, November 17, 1797. The documents related to Morse's land purchases in Maine are in Deed Record, vol. I, pp. 176-178, in Kennebec County Court House, Augusta, Maine. The loan to Putnam is recorded in Land Records, vol. 129, p. 137, Middlesex County Court House.

sale of his geographies and he invested them in very speculative ventures.

All this points to a fundamental identity conflict in Morse. Was he a minister getting by on his inadequate stipend or was he a writer and seller of books who speculated with the proceeds? By portraying the clergy and himself as much like the common people getting by with "their little all of property," and lashing out at speculation and greed, Morse was attempting to affirm for his audience and his own conscience the image of himself as a self-sacrificing clergyman. For Morse's analysis of the national and international situation to have any weight, he had to maintain the image of a minister who denied himself in order to serve the larger purposes of the community. At the same time, he responded to the growing spirit of self-assertion and individualism by seeking fame and fortune producing books and investing the proceeds. Morse was caught in a tension common to the times. Raised in the very traditional community of Woodstock, Connecticut, he passed through Yale and on to Charlestown. There he found himself in a very different and more modern world. The injunction to serve the community as a minister and the opportunity to pursue individual gain and a widespread reputation were in clear conflict.

The conflict in Morse between individualism and community duty had roots that went back at least to the early 1790s. Morse's father saw that his minister son was too interested in publishing books and in the attendant business matters. The son evaded the issue but admitted: "I must confess I have a greater itch for publishing books now than I ever had." The constant efforts to juggle a ministerial and a literary career kept the son too busy to visit his father's home. The old man admitted that "I long to see the time when you will have more time and Leisure to make the proper visits at home and abroad." Furthermore, the father warned, "I will just remind you that amidst all your worry and hurry of Business you don't do that which we are all to apt to do: (Viz.) forget that which is the Conclusion, which is the whole duty of man."¹⁹ Morse's congregation, as well as his father, objected to the time their pastor spent writing and publishing geography. This issue did not burst into the open until 1802, but it was simmering in the 1790s. During the decade after he came to Charlestown, Morse produced four new editions of *Geography Made Easy*; he revised and enlarged the *American Universal Geography* twice

19. Jedidiah Morse, Jr. to Jedidiah Morse, Sr., January 30, 1790; Jedidiah Morse, Sr. to Jedidiah Morse, Jr., October 20, 1792, in Morse Family Papers, Yale University.

(1793 and 1796); he produced the massive *American Gazetteer* in 1797 and a year later published both a second edition and an abridgment of the gazetteer.²⁰ By 1798, Morse was a man caught between two strong forces, the desire to make a name and a fortune for himself and the guilt that resulted when his drive for fame clashed with his strong desire to please his father and serve his church and community.

If this conflict is in fact crucial to understanding Morse, then the text of the sermons from 1798 to 1799 begin to make more sense. While on one level they were attempts to serve Wolcott and the Federalist Party, they were also attempts to defend Christian notions of self-abnegation and beat back the concept of an efficacious, autonomous, and greedy self. In what amounts to the conclusion of the May 1798 sermon, Morse asked "let us then search for Achans, the accused things among us, and let them be taken away and destroyed."²¹ During the assault on Jericho, Achan violated the ban on looting and took gold, silver, and clothing for himself. When his crime was discovered, Achan, his family, and possessions were all destroyed. In reaching for this Biblical image, Morse evoked a story that struck painfully close to home. By calling for the destruction of the modern Achans, he covertly called for his own punishment.

By placing the Illuminati sermons in the full context of Morse's life, thus far we have ignored their actual content. If we turn to the sermons themselves, we quickly realize they are vastly more complex than a simple presentation of a conspiratorial view of recent events in France and the United States. While Morse used John Robison's book, *Proofs of Conspiracy*, as a basis for claiming that there existed a diabolical plot against good government and religion, this intention was subordinate to other more central purposes.²²

In the first place the conspiracy, as it was presented by Morse, changed shape constantly throughout the three sermons. At times, it was very specific and very much the product of the Illuminati. At other points in the sermons, the conspiracy was vague

20. The best account of Morse's labors as a geographer is Ralph H. Brown, "The American Geographies of Jedidiah Morse," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, LXI (1941).

21. May 9, 1798, p. 28.

22. There is some evidence that the mention of Robison in the first sermon (May 1798) was not the product of long deep thought. Morse admitted (*Independent Chronicle*, January 14, 1798) that he did not obtain a copy of Robison's work until late April of 1798, about two weeks before he delivered the first sermon.

and general and the product of both pre- and post-revolutionary France. Robison's secret society was very concrete and limited. Morse endorsed this vision, but also a larger vision of a long-term conspiracy. What did remain constant was the target of the conspiracy. It sought to create a contempt for the past and "those civil and religious institutions founded by our venerable forefathers and to prostrate those principles and habits formed under them" All three sermons were built on the idea that Americans should cling to the traditions of the past. Morse used lists as a rhetorical device to make this crucial point. For example, Morse declared, following Robison, that the Illuminati sought to create a world in which suicide was justified; in which the idea of heaven, hell, and punishment after death was banished by declaring "death an eternal sleep," and in which sensual pleasures are approved "agreeable to Epicurean philosophy." This world, according to the Illuminati, would feature "liberty and equality, as inalienable rights," the destruction of patriotism and loyalty, a ban on marriage, and widespread promiscuity.²³ Time after time, Morse asked his readers and listeners to reverse this and similar lists and to affirm each item as a way of turning aside the conspiracy. The items have a certain unity; they are all checks on the individual and they are for the most part standard moral rules that Christian cultures imposed as law. Morse asked his audience to reject what the Devil had always wanted for mankind, unchecked freedom.

Morse's audience, if it responded to his words, would surely have seen the conspiracy as less important than Morse's insistence that the targets of the conspiracy be defended. Indeed, he argued that the Illuminati were relatively unimportant. The conspirators were not free agents who chose evil ways; they were the agents of God "accomplishing his promises, and fulfilling the prophecies." The Illuminati were bringing on the millennium; the last days were at hand. The conspiratorial forces at work in the world were mere specks in the grand Providential plan. In what amounts to the most interesting parts of Morse's sermons, he asserted that the very idea of a Providential plan was under attack, and that Americans had to rally to support this timeless concept. "This doctrine of a Divine superintending Providence" which had comforted "the people of GOD in every age" was, Morse argued, "falling into discredit and neglect before the impious principles of the *new philosophy*." "Our pious ancestors" had understood history and natural events as solely the

23. May 9, 1798, pp. 20-21.

work of God. This tradition was being challenged by the fashionable tendency "to ascribe these things to the uncontrolled operations of *natural causes*, and to keep out of view the Divine agency."²⁴

A philosophy that sees events as the product of a Providential plan and one that sees them as the product of free individuals conspiring to achieve a certain end are fundamentally at odds. By making Providence the primary cause of events, Morse reduced the significance of conspiracies to virtually nothing. They became just another tool in God's arsenal, just another way in which He achieved his purposes. Indeed, to give up on the idea of Providence was, for Morse, to court disaster. He argued, for example, that Rome fell because its citizens gave up their faith that a Divine hand controlled all history. All was well until the Romans came under the influence of "the *Atheistical* doctrine of Epicureans" and gradually lost their simplicity, their public virtue, their regard for chastity and marriage, and their fear of punishments after death. Morse concluded his April 25, 1799 sermon with a lesson from Roman history; he lamented that this same Epicurean philosophy "which ruined Rome has been revived in the present age, and is now widely spreading its desolations over the world." From this lesson, Morse drew the moral that dominated all three sermons: "live in all due subjection to our rulers, and meddle not with them that are given to change."²⁵

The importance Morse attached to Providence also appeared in his discussion of the epidemics that ravaged the United States in the 1790s. He was caught between two modes of explanation for the outbreaks; he wanted science to attend to the "*natural causes*" and to remove them, but he insisted that "we have no good reason to expect that his calamity will not cease from among us, till the *moral causes* be removed, till we acknowledge the righteous hand of GOD in it, and are truly humble for our sins and reform our lives." Morse was caught in an epistemological thicket of immense proportions. The epidemics were, at the same time, events open to investigation and calamities "brought upon us in *judgement* by the special hand of Providence" Man was both a rational animal capable of controlling the epidemics and a criminal suffering the will of an omnipotent deity. To view the epidemics as natural events beyond the control of God's hand deprived them of their moral significance

24. April 25, 1799, pp. 24-28.

25. *Ibid.*, pp. 30-31.

and left man alone in the world face to face with Nature. Death, without Providence to explain it, was a cruel riddle as modern man had discovered. Anxious, uncertain, and psychologically divided, Morse clung to the notion of a Providential plan because, as he put it, "the history of divine Providence proves its consistency and uniformity. What has been, will take place again in like circumstances. With God there is no variableness or partiality."²⁶

In the final analysis, Morse's sermons in 1798 and 1799 do not argue that Americans could understand the chaotic times in which they lived as the product of conspiracies. Certainly Morse's pronouncements on the Illuminati were dramatic and served as the stuff for great journalism, but it would be wrong to claim that Morse, as a Federalist spokesman, asked his listeners to cling to their government and religion because there existed a plot against them. While the three texts in question were poorly written and organized, at their center is an attempt to defend the role of Providence in human and natural events. To believe that such complex events such as the French Revolution could be understood as the product of a conspiracy was, in the 1790s, a very modern and enlightened notion. It suggested that human investigations could unearth the real reasons behind events. Ironically, Morse both accepted and rejected this emphasis on conspiracies. The sermons spoke with two contradictory voices. The first announced with great drama Jedidiah Morse's conspiratorial view of the French Revolution and most of American history for the preceding two decades. By speaking with this voice, Morse clearly assumed that man had the ability to see through events to their true causes. The second voice assumed that mankind could know only what God had revealed of His plan. Mankind, humbled by an inability to truly know, must cling to the Christian religion and the guidance of moral leaders. Might it not be fair to suggest in conclusion that these two voices corresponded to the impulses of self-assertion and acquiescence to community demands that divided Morse in the decade before he delivered the sermons?

26. *Ibid.*, pp. 28-29; November 28, 1798, pp. 5-6.