

BENJAMIN FRANKLIN

Signer of the Declaration of Independence and U.S. Constitution

Excerpted from, *The Truth about the Founding Fathers of the American Republic*,

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“Venerated for benevolence; admired for talents; esteemed for patriotism; beloved for philanthropy.”

— George Washington

What Curriculum did Benjamin Franklin use for his Academy and College of Philadelphia?

Benjamin Franklin’s “*Sketch of an English School: For the Consideration of the Trustees of the Philadelphia Academy*,” reads as follows:

“The 4th Class

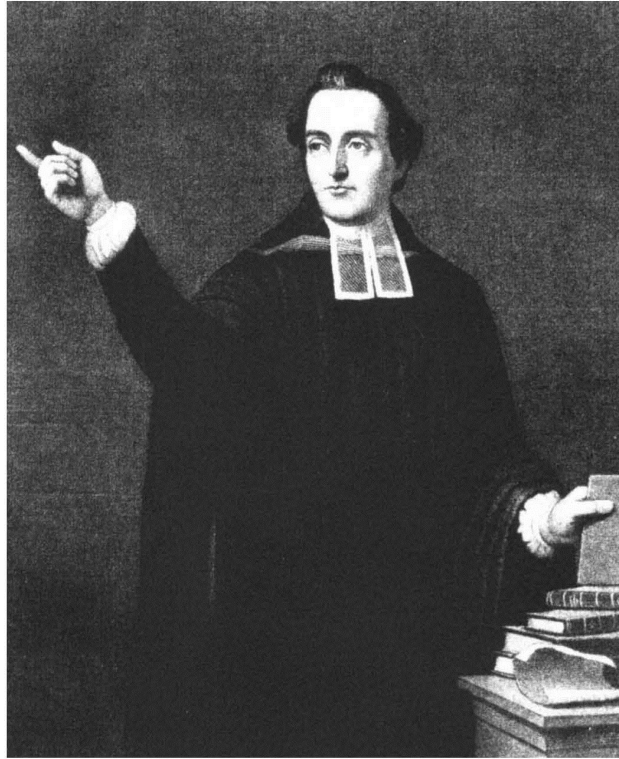
To be taught composition. Writing one’s own language well, is the next necessary accomplishment after good speaking...

Dr. Johnson’s* *Ethices Elementa*, or *First Principles of Morality*, may now be read to the scholars, and explained by the master, *to lay a solid foundation of virtue and piety in their minds*. And as this class continues the reading of history, let them now, at proper hours, receive some further instruction in chronology, and in that part of geography (from the mathematical master) which is necessary to understand the maps and globes. They should also be acquainted with the modern names of the places they find mentioned in ancient writers. The exercise of good reading, and proper speaking, still continued at suitable times...

In this class, besides continuing the studies of the preceding in history, rhetoric, logic, moral and natural philosophy, the best English authors may be read and explained; as *Tillotson, Milton, Locke, Addison, Pope and Swift*, the best translations of Homer, Virgil and Horace, Travels of Cyrus, etc.

Once a year let there be public exercises in the hall; the trustees and citizens present. Then let fine gilt books be given as prizes to such boys as distinguish themselves, and excel the others in any branch of learning, making three degrees of comparison: giving the best prize to him that performs best; a less valuable one to him that comes up next to the best; and another to the third. Commendations, encouragement, and advice to the rest; keeping up the hopes, that, by industry, they may excel another time...

Thus instructed, youth will come out of this school fitted for learning any business, calling or profession, except such wherein languages are required; and though unacquainted with any ancient or foreign tongue, they will be masters of their own, which is of more immediate and general use; and withal will have attained many



Rev. William Smith, D.D., chosen by Benjamin Franklin to be the first Provost of his college in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, founded in 1749. From the painting by Benjamin West. Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

other valuable accomplishments: the time usually spent in acquiring those languages, often without success, being here employed in laying such a foundation of knowledge and ability, as, properly improved, may qualify them to pass through and execute the several offices of civil life, with advantage and reputation to themselves and country.

BENJAMIN FRANKLIN.

The specific Curriculum of the *Philosophy Schools* of the College of Philadelphia included the following:

“Holy Bible, to be read daily from the beginning, and now to supply the deficiencies of the whole; Isaac Watt’s Logic; Locke on Humane Understanding; Watt’s Ontology and Essays; Johnson’s Elementary Philosophy; Sir Isaac Newton’s Philosophy; Locke on government; The Religious Philosopher...”

Thus we understand, from Benjamin Franklin’s curriculum of studies for students at his *College of Philadelphia* (now the University of Pennsylvania), that his purpose was “*to instruct youth* in the above-cited authors, in order *to lay a foundation* to prepare them for any business, calling or profession, except such wherein languages are required.”

Could you explain these authors’ writings, which the founding fathers studied – forming their ideas, principles and moral conduct?

All the above-cited authors in Benjamin Franklin’s curriculum of studies were great Christian writers and thinkers. Following are excerpts from their writings:

I. Rev. Dr. John Tillotson’s work:

“The Indispensable Necessity of the Knowledge of the Holy Scripture. In order to Man’s Eternal Salvation and – Ignorance therein; The Mother Of Idolatry and Superstition, asserted in a Sermon preached by JOHN TILLOTSON, D.D., Dean of Canterbury, 1685. Printed for the Benefit of the Poor. 1709.

* Rev. Dr. Samuel Johnson, father and first President of King’s College (now Columbia).

“Woe unto you Scribes and Pharisees, Hypocrites; for ye shut up the Kingdom of Heaven against Men; for ye neither go in yourselves, neither suffer ye them that are entering to go in.”

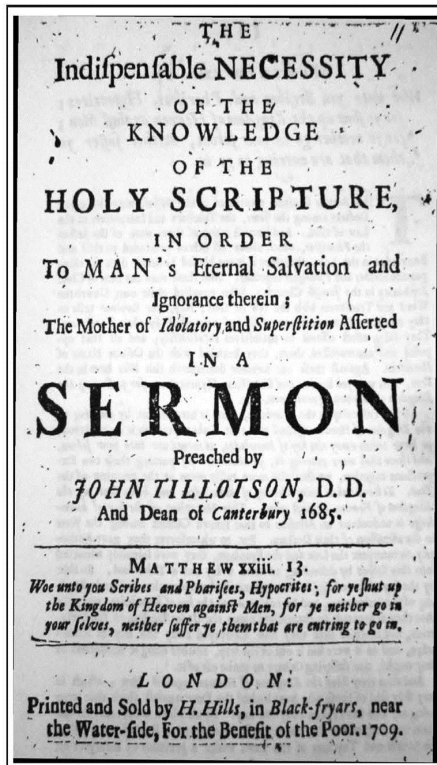
The *Scribes* so often mentioned in the *Gospel*, were the great Doctors among the Jews, the Teachers and Interpreters of the Law of God. And because many of them were of the sect of the *Pharisees*, which above all others pretended to skill and knowledge in the Law, therefore it is our blessed *Saviour* does so often put the Scribes and Pharisees together. And these were the men of chief authority in the Jewish Church; Who equaled their own unwritten word and traditions with the law of God: Nay, our Saviour tells us *they made the Commandments of God of none effect by their traditions*. They did in effect assume to themselves infallibility; and all that opposed and contradicted them, they branded with the odious name of *Heretics*. Against these our Saviour denounceth this Woe here in the text, Woe unto you Scribes and Pharisees, Hypocrites, for *ye shut up the Kingdom of Heaven against men*, etc....

II. The Works of **Mr. John Milton**
 Printed in the Year 1697. “**Of True Religion, Heresie, Schism, Toleration, And what best means may be used against this Growth of POPERY.**” The Author J. Milton.

It is unknown to no man, who knows ought of concernment among us, that the increase of **Popery** is at this day no small trouble and offense to the greatest part of the nation: and the rejoicing of all good men that it is so; the more their rejoicing, that God hath given a heart to the people to remember still their great and happy deliverance from **Popish Thraldom**, and to esteem so highly the precious benefit of His Gospel, so freely and so peaceably enjoyed among them. Since therefore some have already in public with many considerable arguments, exhorted the people to beware the growth of this Romish Weed; I thought it no less than a common duty to lend my hand, how unable soever, to so good a purpose. I will not now enter into the Labyrinth of Councils and Fathers, an entangled wood which the Papists love to fight in, not with hope of victory, but to obscure the shame of an open overthrow: which yet in that kind of combat, many theretofore, and one of late, hath eminently given them. And such manner of dispute with them, to learned men is useful and very commendable: But I shall insist now on what is plainer to common apprehension, and what I have to say, without longer introduction.

True Religion is the true worship and service of God, learned and believed from the Word of God only. No man or angel can know how God would be worshipped and served, unless God reveal it. *He hath revealed and taught it us in the Holy Scriptures by inspired Ministers, and in the Gospels by His own Son and His Apostles, with strictest commands to reject all other traditions or*

additions whatsoever. According to that of St. Paul, “*Though we or an angel from Heaven preach any other Gospel unto you, than that which we have preached unto you, let him be Anathema or accursed.*” (Galatians 1:8). And Deuteronomy 4:2: “*Ye shall not add to the Word which I command you, neither shall you diminish ought from it.*” Revelation 22: 18, 19: “*If any man shall add, etc. If any man shall take away from the Words, etc.*” With good and religious reason therefore all Protestant churches with one consent and particularly the Church of England in her 39 Articles, Article 6th, 19th, 20th, 21st and elsewhere, maintain these two points, as the main principles of true Religion: **That the rule of true Religion is the Word of God only:** And that their Faith ought not to be an implicit Faith, i.e., to believe though as the Church believes against or without express authority of Scripture...



1709 Sermon by Rev. Dr. John Tillotson, Dean of Canterbury.

I will now as briefly show what is false Religion or Heresy, which will be done as easily: For of contraries the definitions must needs be contrary. Heresy therefore is a Religion taken up and believed from the traditions of men and additions to the Word of God. Whence also it follows clearly, that of all known Sects or pretended Religions at this day in Christendom, **Popery is the only or the greatest heresy:** And he who is so forward to brand all others for heretics, the obstinate Papist, the only Heretic. Hence one of their own famous writers found just cause to stile the **Romish Church, Mother of Error, School of Heresie.** And whereas the Papist boasts himself to be a Roman Catholic, it is mere contradiction, one of the Pope's Bulls, as if he should say, Universal Particular a Catholic Schismatic. For Catholic in the Greek signifies Universal: And the Christian Church was so called as consisting of all nations to whom the Gospel was to be preached, in contradiction to the Jewish Church, which consisted, for the most part of Jews only.

Sects may be in a true Church as well as in a false, when men follow the doctrine too much for the Teacher's sake, whom they think almost infallible; and this becomes through infirmity, implicit faith, and the name Sectary pertains to such a discipline...

Let us now inquire whether Popery be tolerable or no. **Popery is a double thing to deal with, and claims a twofold power, Ecclesiastical and Political, both usurped, and the one supporting the other.**

But Ecclesiastical is ever pretended Political. The **Pope** by this mixed faculty pretends right to **Kingdoms and States, and especially to this of England, thrones and unthrones Kings,** and absolves the people from their obedience to them; sometimes interdicts to whole nations the public worship of God, shutting up their Churches: And was wont to drain away the greatest part of the

wealth of this then miserable land, as part of his patrimony, to maintain the pride and luxury of his court and Prelates: And now since, through the infinite mercy and favour of God, we have shaken off his Babylonish yoke, hath not ceased by his spies and agents, Bulls and Emissaries, once to destroy both King and Parliament (Guy Fawkes and the Jesuits' Gunpowder Plot), perpetually to seduce, corrupt and pervert as many as they can of the people. Whether therefore it be fit or reasonable to tolerate men thus principled in Religion towards the State, I submit it to the consideration of all Magistrates, who are best able to provide for their own and public safety...

**III. MISCELLANEOUS THOUGHTS
in Prose and Verse on *NATURAL,
MORAL and DIVINE SUBJECTS:*
By ISAAC WATTS, D.D.**

An EPITAPH on BIGOTRY

Here lies, and may it here forever lie, The carcass of dead piety,
Shadow of grace, substantial sin, Religion's mask and gaudy dress,
The form and foe of holiness, The image and the plague of zeal
divine, Its dwelling was the church; in double shape, Half was a
murdering wolf, and half a mimic ape.

A monster horrid to the sight, Hideous, deformed and void of
light; 'Twas born at Rome, 'Twas nursed at home, In the dark clois-
ters of the Vatican; Its lungs inspired with heaving lies, Its bulk well
fastened to prodigious size, With gunpowder and blood of man.

Ancient inhabitant of Spain, And long in France a welcome
guest; Over the continent and main, Over the old world and the new,
Mankind and money to pursue, On dragon's wings the harpy flew,
and gave its feet no rest...

Under the name and habit of the church, Under the countenance
and clothing of a sheep, It became the most savage and rampant
Plunderer and waster of human society, Made fearful inroads on all
civil commerce, And left religious liberty expiring.

A warrior well furnished with all arts politic and polite, With the
knotty embarrassments of criticism, The hampering chains and sub-
tilties of logic, And the javelins of pen and tongue, With the roaring
ordinance of councils and canons, And all the artillery of the schools
and gown...

Fury, hatred and mischief, Love of this world, pride and disdain,
With perjuries, falsehoods, and pious frauds, And raging party-zeal,
Were its necessary and everlasting attendants. High encomiums and
endless applause of guides infallible, and faith implicit, Of heredi-
tary and divine right, Of unlimited power and passive obedience to
tyrant priests and kings, With the immortal praise and merit of stupid
ignorance, and bland submission, Were heralds to prepare its way.

Trifles, and tricks, and solemn fooleries, Legends and silly tales,
Old almanacs, and mouldy, musty reliques, Sweepings of ancient
tombs, Vows, pilgrimages, charms and consecrations, Rites obsolete
and novel ceremonies, Both decent and indecent, Monkish vows and
superstitious austerities, with words of sacerdotal absolution, And

sacerdotal vengeance, Squibs, crackers, excommunications, curses,
Roaring bulls, and vain thunders, Mixed up with priestly choler, bit-
ter and black, Were its delicious food...

At what dark hour soever, The cursed divan at Rome were met,
Catholic faith to propagate, This monster filled the chair. The con-
clave dressed in bonnets red, With three-crowned tyrant at their
head, Made it their privy-counselor. The inquisition court (a bloody
crew, Artful to set the solemn trap that lets no heretic escape), Owns
it her president and founder too.

Oft as the church in east or western lands, Rising against herself
in arms, In her own blood imbrued her hands, This chief led on the
unnatural war, Or did the bloody standards bear, Or sound the fierce
alarms; Victorious still (And what can more be said of all the living
warriors, or the heroes dead?)

Britain, a land well stored with every good, That nature, law,
religion give; A land where sacred freedom thrives; Blest isle! If her
own weal she understood! Her sons, immured with guardian ocean,
sleep, And castles floating on the deep, Fenced from all foreign foes,
O shame! O sin! Her sons had let this baleful mischief in; This hell-
ish fury, who with flattering breath did first divide, and then devour,
And made wild waste wherever she spread her power, Behold she
meets her fatal hour and lies enchained in death.

Shout at the grave, O traveler! Triumphant joys that reach the
skies, Are here the justest obsequies: Shout thrice – then flee afar,
The poisonous steams and stench of the sepulchre. Go, turn thy
face to Heaven, and pray, That such a hateful monster never may
obtain a resurrection-day.

IV. Jonathan Swift's works:

**Miscellaneous in Prose and Verse by
Jonathan Swift. The First Volume.
London: Printed for Benjamin
Motte, at the Middle Temple Gate in
Fleet Street. M.DCC.XXVII**

**An Argument to Prove that the Abolishing of Christianity
in England, may, as things now stand, be attended with some
inconveniences, and perhaps not produce those many good
effects proposed thereby, Written in the year 1708.**

I am very sensible what a weakness and presumption it is, to
reason against the general humour and disposition of the world. I
remember it was with great Justice and a due regard to the Freedom
both of the Publick and the Press, forbidden upon several penalties
to write, or discourse, or lay wagers against the _____ even before
it was confirmed by Parliament, because that was looked upon as a
design to oppose the current of the People, which, besides the folly
of it, is a manifest breach of the fundamental Law, that makes this
majority of opinion the *Voice of God*

In like manner, and for the very same reasons, it may perhaps
be neither safe nor prudent to argue against the abolishing of
Christianity, at a juncture when all parties seem so unanimously
determined upon the point, as we cannot but allow from their

actions, their discourses, and their writings. However, I know not how, whether from the perverseness of human nature, but so it unhappily falls out, that I cannot be entirely of this opinion. Nay, tho' I were sure an Order were issued out for my immediate prosecution by the Attorney-General, I should still confess, that in the present posture of our affairs at home or abroad, I do not yet see the absolute necessity of extirpating *the Christian Religion* from among us...And yet the curious may please to observe, how much the genius of a Nation is liable to alter in half an age: I have heard it affirmed for certain by some very old people, that the contrary opinion was even in their memories as much in vogue as the other is now; and that a project for the abolishing of *Christianity* would then have appeared as singular, and been thought as absurd, as it would be at this time to write or discourse in its defense...I hope no reader imagines me so weak to stand up in *the Defense of real Christianity*, such as used in primitive times (if we may believe the Authors of those ages) to have an influence upon Men's belief and actions: To offer at the restoring of that, would indeed be a wild project; it would be to dig up foundations; to destroy at one blow all the wit, and half the learning of the Kingdom; to break the entire frame and constitution of things; to ruin trade, extinguish arts and sciences, with the Professors of them; in short, to turn our Courts, Exchanges and Shops into Deserts; and would be as absurd as the proposal of Horace, where he advises the Romans, all in a body, to leave their city, and seek a new seat in some remote part of the world, by way of a cure for the corruption of their manners...

One great advantage proposed by the abolishing of *Christianity* is, that it would very much enlarge and establish *Liberty of Conscience*, that great bulwark of our Nation, and of the *Protestant Religion*, which is still too much limited by priest-craft, notwithstanding all the good intentions of the legislature, as we have lately found by a severe instance. *For it is confidently reported, that two young gentlemen of real hopes, bright wit, and profound judgment, who, upon a thorough examination of causes and effects, and by the mere force of natural abilities, without the least tincture of Learning, having made a discovery, that there was no GOD, and generously communicating their thoughts for the good of the public, were some time ago, by an unparallell'd severity, and upon I know not what obsolete Law, broke for Blasphemy.* And as it hath been wisely observed, if persecution once begins, no man alive knows how far it may reach, or where it will end...

Upon the whole, if it shall still be thought for the *benefit of Church and State*, that *Christianity* be abolished, I conceive however, it may be more convenient to defer the execution to a time of peace, and not venture in this conjecture to disoblige *our Allies, who, as it falls out, are all Christians*, and many of them, by the prejudices of their Education so bigoted, as to place a sort of pride in the appellation. If upon being rejected by them, we are to trust to an alliance with the Turk, we shall find ourselves much deceived: For, as he is too remote, and generally engaged in war with the Persian Emperor, so his people would be most scandalized at our infidelity, than our *Christian neighbours*. For they are not only strict observers of religious worship, but what is worse, believe a God, which is more than is required of us, even while we preserve the name of Christians.

To conclude: Whatever some may think of the great advantages to Trade by this favourite Scheme, *I do very much apprehend, that in six months' time after that Act is past for the extirpation of the Gospel, the Bank of East-India stock, may fall at least one percent.* And since that is fifty times more than ever the wisdom of our age thought fit to venture for the preservation of Christianity, there is no reason we should be at so great a loss merely for the sake of destroying it.

V. The Religious Philosopher: or the Right USE OF Contemplating the Works of the CREATOR in Three Volumes. by that Learned Mathematician, Dr. NIEUWENTYT. Translated from the Original, by JOHN CHAMBERLAYNE, ESQ. To which is Prefixed a Letter to the Translator by the Rev. J.T. Desaguliers, L.L.D. Printed in London. 1721.

Sir,

I have read your translation of Dr. Nieuwentyt's excellent Treatise; and highly approve your design of publishing it, as it will be of great service to Religion and Philosophy.

The Doctor's reason that he gives for writing his book in Dutch (namely, that a great many atheistical books having been written in that language, he chose to confute the opposers of a Providence in the same), will be as powerful a motive for the translating it into English; since we have not been behind-hand with our neighbours in publishing the impious conceptions and blasphemous raillery of our scoffers at Religion. If such of them as had been able, had published their CRUDE notions in any of the Learned languages, their books would have needed no answer, their readers would have despised them: but their proselytes are gained among the weak and ignorant, or such conceited debauches as are glad to be supplied with means of defending their immoralities, by attacking Religion with a show of wit and argument.

When an Atheist has the impudence to call himself a PHILOSOPHER, some well-meaning persons that have not much looked into nature, are apt to be prejudiced against the study of it; as if the Philosophy and vain deceit, against which the Apostle has warned us, had been the contemplation of the works of the Creation: Whereas it was only **the sophistry of the schools, contrived to disguise ERROR, and defend the System of the superstitious heathen divinity.**

He that reads Nieuwentyt will easily see that a **Philosopher cannot be an Atheist**; and if it were true, that a smattering in Physics will give a proud man a tincture of Atheism, a deep search into nature will certainly bring him back to a Religious sense of God's WISDOM and Providence.

Tho' we have lately had several very good books upon this subject, this will not be less acceptable, because it contains several fine observations and experiments, which are altogether new, as is also his manner of treating the most common phenomena; from

which he deduces admirable consequences in favour of a Religious life.

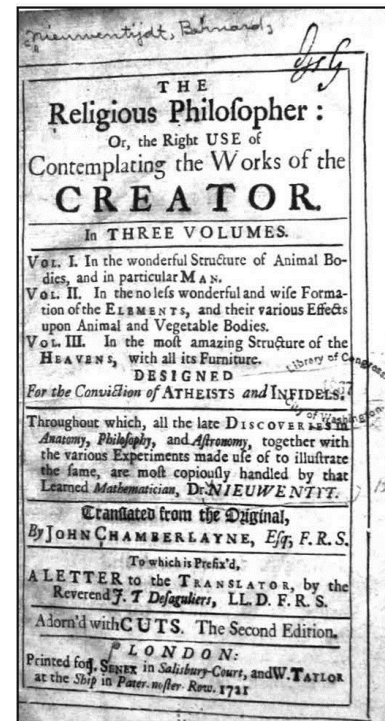
If I can be of any service in helping you to look over the sheets, you may readily command, Sir,

Your most humble
And obedient servant,

J.T.D.
Channel-Row,
Westminster,
February 2, 1717

Section III. The same proved from Romans 1:20.

After the same manner we see the Apostle Paul proving God's Eternal Power, whereby He exists of Himself from all ages, and His Divinity, whereby He is distinguished from all creatures that have a beginning: And thus speaking in his epistle to the Romans, Chapter 1, verse 20. *The invisible things of him from the Creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His Eternal Power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse:* And showing likewise that in naming the Creatures in general, He excepts nothing out of them, how small soever it may be, which by its existence is not capable of convincing, with the utmost certainty, everyone that has not quite lost the use of his reason, of God's Eternal Power and Divinity, that is, among other things, of His Eternal Existence... (Excerpted from, *The Truth about the Founding Fathers of the American Republic*, copyright 2013 by Dr. Catherine Millard).



Title page of Dr. Nieuwentijt's "The Religious Philosopher," 1721.
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