

# Bonds *of* Affection

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CIVIC CHARITY *and the* MAKING of AMERICA—  
WINTHROP, JEFFERSON, AND LINCOLN

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## “*Bonds of Affection*”— *Three Founding Moments*

### I

**L**ike no other figure of founding importance for America, we remember his words but not his name. In the spring of 1630, John Winthrop, newly elected governor of the Massachusetts Bay Company, gave a lay sermon to those sailing with him on the *Arbella*, flagship of what would become a massive, decade-long exodus of English Puritans to this country. His audience listened intently, their reflexive reverence heightened by their anxiety over the perilous journey ahead. They were to live with each other, Winthrop insisted, “in the bond of brotherly affection.” Among other things, he explained that this meant

We must uphold a familiar commerce together in all meekness, gentleness, patience, and liberality. We must delight in each other, make each others' conditions our own, rejoice together, mourn together, labor and suffer together, always having before our eyes our commission and community in the work.

This was more than mere rhetoric. As Winthrop saw it, only by becoming “A Model of Christian Charity” (the common title of his remarks) could this company be sure to avoid the all too real possibilities of destruction at sea or extinction in the harsh wilderness of the New World. Moreover, by successfully grounding their personal character and communal practices on ideals of biblical love, they were destined to rise up a prosperous, powerful, and widely admired “City Upon a Hill.”<sup>1</sup>

Today, prominent scholars across a range of disciplines praise Winthrop’s address as the “most famous text in 17th century American history,” the “Ur-text of American literature,” and a distinctive and

sophisticated piece of political philosophy from someone who “stands at the beginning of our consciousness.” In a 1999 special “millennial” issue of the *New York Times Magazine*, Peter Gomes of Harvard’s Memorial Church called it the greatest sermon of the past thousand years, a stirring vision for America that “still lives.” That major political leaders from John Adams to Bill Clinton—including almost every president and presidential aspirant since John Kennedy—have explicitly appropriated Winthrop’s name and speech to chart national aspirations and identity only underscores the point.<sup>2</sup>

Despite such a contribution, the name John Winthrop rings familiar for relatively few Americans. This is perhaps best explained by the efforts of brilliant nineteenth- and early twentieth-century critics—from Nathaniel Hawthorne to H. L. Mencken and beyond—who accepted American Puritanism’s lasting influence but emphasized, in differing degrees, how bad it was for the country. This prominent effort to repudiate the whole Puritan legacy and everything connected with it has broadly diminished Winthrop’s prominence in the national pantheon, making him “America’s Forgotten Founding Father.”<sup>3</sup> But Winthrop’s current fate may stem from more than just guilt by association with a rejected era. Lurking within his soaring rhetoric of empathetic care, democratic principle, and high public purpose—all found in the “Model” speech—rests theoretical support for a punishing intolerance, rigid exclusion, and self-righteous judgmentalism without sense of proportion. Of course, this too affirms Winthrop’s significance for American politics. Arguably, he is at once a significant founding father of some of America’s best and worst impulses.

## II

In the predawn dark of March 4, 1801, John Adams petulantly rode out of Washington, D.C., for Quincy, Massachusetts. At noon that day, Thomas Jefferson would succeed him as president of the United States. The discourteousness of Adams’s early departure was symptomatic of the times.

The presidential election of 1800 was possibly the most important and most brutally fought in American history. With the country divided like it never had been since the ratification debates of the Constitution, this was the first real test of whether democratic power could be transferred

peacefully. To Jefferson’s Republican followers, an Adams victory threatened nothing less than a return of English monarchism, sectarian tyranny, and a morally corrupting commercial excess. To Adams’s Federalist followers, a Jefferson victory betokened a rush to French anarchy, radical secularity, economic weakness, and international vulnerability. In short, each side saw the other as certain to abolish the gains of the grand and unifying Revolution of 1776. With so much at stake, tactics were ruthless on all sides. Though certain cultural conventions and perhaps even the smoldering embers of the once bright friendship between Adams and Jefferson meant that neither executed, let alone directly approved, much campaign activity, neither stands guiltless of the atmosphere of slander and machination that prevailed.

Thus many of Jefferson’s most implacable Federalist foes sat through his inaugural address fairly riveted by his message. “We are all republicans, we are all federalists,” Jefferson famously exclaimed. More significantly, he declared that fostering “affection” between citizens of all parties was nearly as important as securing the safe exercise of natural, individual rights—the lifelong, bedrock aim of his political philosophy. Not only that, Jefferson, whose election prompted some New Englanders to hide their Bibles for fear of confiscation, made it clear that the wide practice of “benign religion,” defined as a variety of theological persuasions all of which encouraged “the love of man” and an “adoring [of] an overruling Providence,” was among America’s greatest blessings.<sup>4</sup> Unbeknownst to virtually all his closest friends and family, and still overlooked by most scholars today, Jefferson’s First Inaugural was uttered in the midst of an intense reconsideration of the New Testament—a text Jefferson had roundly rejected in his youth. While he remained steadfastly opposed to certain core elements of traditional Christianity and steadfastly committed to philosophical liberalism as the ground of his politics, he developed around this time a powerful appreciation for a rationalized version of Christ’s teachings on love. Jefferson’s First Inaugural—which along with his Declaration of Independence essentially brackets the era we consider the traditional founding of America—is the first and best glimpse of how he thought such teachings should be brought to bear on America’s fledgling democracy.

### III

Washington, D.C., was awash in mud from several days of rain, and the skies remained grimly overcast as dignitaries shuffled onto the dais in

front of the U.S. Capitol. It was March 4, 1865, the start of Lincoln's tragically short-lived second administration. With storm clouds threatening to break open again at any moment on an already bedraggled audience, Lincoln stepped forward clutching a copy of his Second Inaugural Address. As he did so, a broad ray of sunlight punched through the cloud line. Chief Justice Chase saw it as "an auspicious omen of the dispersion of the clouds of war and the restoration of the clear sun light of prosperous peace."<sup>5</sup>

It was a day to celebrate. Lee and his forces were trapped near Richmond, Virginia, between Grant's dug-in troops and long-range guns just to the west and Sherman's unopposed march of destruction up from the south. The downfall of the Confederacy's capital city, largest army, and best general was imminent. Yet here, as triumph in America's bloodiest and bitterest conflict appeared certain, Lincoln—whose leadership had so often been publicly savaged (even by members of his own administration) and whose prospects for reelection got so dim that he prepared an executive memo on transferring power to his opponent—offered a most unusual address.

No soothing prediction of the end of military action. No cathartic attack on Southern secessionists. No cheering vindication of his long-embattled presidency. No promising plan for the future. With respect to the future, all that was offered was a single-sentence paragraph urging the North, among other things, to "finish the work" of the war—a war that began as an effort to save the Union, but that by Gettysburg had been transformed into an effort to give a "new birth" of democratic liberty to "all men." In this same sentence, as Lincoln rallied the North to press ahead in the waning moments of conflict with "firmness in the right," he simultaneously appealed for "malice toward none" and "charity for all." Even before the war ended, Lincoln was already at work to restore the "bonds of affection" between North and South that he so memorably extolled four years earlier in the peroration of his First Inaugural. It is also clear that the Second Inaugural's awe-inspiring sense of love for *all* "who shall have borne the battle" is connected in some way to the watchful eye and intervening hand of God, referred to in explicitly biblical terms more than a dozen times in an address of only 703 words—one of the shortest yet most celebrated inaugural addresses in American history.

Winthrop, Jefferson, and Lincoln were all uniquely philosophical statesmen who exercised an enduring influence at decisive junctures in the rise and establishment of American democracy. At the height of their influence, all three figures delivered a seminal speech appealing to certain communal “bonds of affection” which they argued were essential to a stable, flourishing polity. In attempting to draw out and sustain these bonds of affection, each leader consciously worked to channel some understanding of Christian love—what the New Testament calls “charity” (1 Cor. 13:13)—into a central *civic*, rather than strictly *religious*, virtue. In doing so, they helped establish a unique and important strain in the American political tradition, one more often appealed to by political leaders than studied by scholars.

Long gone—and rightly so—are the days of believing that nations are built on the words and deeds of great leaders alone. We have also come to recognize that America’s early development was grounded on a rich mosaic of ideas and forces rather than any single historiographical category or intellectual, cultural tradition. However, these particular speeches, and a smattering of related political and literary classics, do reveal that broadly shared ideals of biblical love, artfully refashioned into a guiding public principle by these and other figures, played a distinct role in the genesis and trajectory of America’s peculiar form of liberal democracy. By telling such a story, this book seeks to call greater attention to, and further fill, this modest gap in our historical consciousness.<sup>6</sup>

Moreover, this book seeks normative insight for our troubled times. The debate in this country over the appropriate role of religion in American public life is as old as the country itself—and as heated as ever. Arguably, Winthrop, Jefferson, and Lincoln did as much as any three to establish the general contours of this debate. Beyond the fact that all three wielded immense political power at foundational moments in American history, their continuing relevance to this debate is rooted in their sheer sophistication of thought on the matter—a sophistication leavened with careful attention to concrete reality and delivered with a poetry that reaches across the ages. Such gifts make their words almost as relevant to our day as their own. Thus, this project is part intellectual history (detailing the development and nature of several thematically related texts from the canon of American political thought) and part political philosophy (bringing these texts into conversation with one another as a way to ruminate on fundamental issues concerning wise



and legitimate rule). As such, the book takes advantage of space recently pried open in both political science and history where a solid understanding of our past is considered not just useful but perhaps “necessary” to sound moral reflection and choice in the present.<sup>7</sup>

Precisely what we can learn about our past, and for our present, from the three episodes described above is embodied in a concept I call “civic charity,” which finds its most compelling expression in the mature thought of Abraham Lincoln—his Second Inaugural especially. At a minimum, some such concept appears vital to past, and possibly present, attempts to forge the “bonds of affection” that Winthrop, Jefferson, and Lincoln considered an integral component of ongoing political health. However, before we can understand what is meant by civic charity, its meaningful role in helping to establish and sustain American self-rule, and the resources it still may offer our day, we must first consider its animating source and the deeply problematic relationship between that source and modern political life.

### Charity and Modernity

Civic charity draws upon and is closely connected to (in Winthrop’s case was virtually indistinguishable from) charity as a Christian virtue. But these days, the charity of New Testament texts has “acquired connotations that make it unsuitable for modern readers as the bearer of the biblical writers’ meaning.”<sup>8</sup> This challenge is compounded by the inherent difficulty of providing a clear sense of what is meant by Christian charity, a morally complex concept (like justice, freedom, forgiveness, etc.) that wholly resists full and indisputable definition. Numerous contemporary scholars have written long essays and long books in an effort simply to explain and define the concept.<sup>9</sup> Jesus himself, when asked for greater clarity concerning the love he was preaching, avoided elaborate definitional specificity in favor of broadly illustrative parables like that of the Good Samaritan in Luke 10. Nevertheless, a fairly concise statement by Jonathan Edwards—considered America’s greatest theologian by many—and a quick gloss on a few key biblical passages might well suffice here.

In the first of a series of sermons delivered on the topic of charity in 1738 (sermons later published as a book, *Charity and its Fruits*), Edwards writes

What persons often mean by “charity,” in their ordinary conversation, is a disposition to hope and think the best of others, and to put a good construction on their words and behavior; and sometimes the word is used for a disposition to give to the poor. But these things are only certain particular branches, or fruits of that great virtue of charity which is so much insisted on throughout the New Testament. The word properly signifies *love*, or *that disposition or affection whereby one is dear to another*; and the original (agape), which is here translated “charity,” might better have been rendered “love,” for that is the proper English of it: so that by charity in the New Testament, is meant the very same thing as Christian love; and though it be more frequently used for love to men, yet sometimes it is used to signify not only love to men, but love to God.<sup>10</sup>

What Edwards said in the eighteenth century concerning different usages of the term “charity” remains largely true today. More often than not, charity is currently employed to describe a spirit of good will (being charitable) or an act of material generosity (giving charity). But charity as Christian love, *agape* in New Testament Greek and *caritas* in the Vulgate, entails those things and more.<sup>11</sup> Here, we can profitably turn to the Bible.

In the book of Matthew (22:35–40), in response to a lawyer’s question about which scriptural command is greatest, Jesus says

Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.

Charity, it has often been remarked, is the one-word summation of this demanding double commandment of love. Charity is a single principle with a dual dimension: a clear *vertical* axis—humans in loving relationship to God—and a clear *horizontal* axis—humans in loving relationship to other humans. As Edwards puts it, charity simultaneously embodies a deep “affection” or “love” for God and man, whereby both God and man are “dear” to oneself.<sup>12</sup> In postmodern parlance, charity centrally entails a “theocentric otherness” and a “social otherness.”

With respect to the love of God, the account in Matthew 22 makes clear that this is not only the “first” of all scriptural commandments (the starting point of both Jewish and Christian religious life), but something to be done with all of one’s heart, soul, and mind. Elsewhere in the New

Testament, John repeatedly establishes: “For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments” (1 John 5:3; also see 2:5 and John 14:15, 21). Thus, the vertical axis of *agape* is understood by many to call for a devout, monotheistic piety—a constantly worshipful acknowledgement of, reverence for, and obedience to the “one Lord” (Deut. 6:4).

With respect to the love of others, the New Testament emphasizes that *agape* demands a deeply benevolent care and active compassion for our neighbors. This remains true even when our “neighbors” are total strangers, as Christ emphasized with the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10), or still yet when our neighbors are outright enemies, as Christ emphasized in the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5:44). Together, the parable of the Good Samaritan and the Sermon on the Mount not only suggest the vast range of who might be considered a neighbor, but also the scope of how we are to love that neighbor. In the story of the Good Samaritan, charity attends to our stranger-neighbor’s most pressing physical needs. In the Sermon on the Mount, charity’s concern stretches beyond the merely physical, commanding us to “pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you” (Matt. 5:44). Christian eschatology dictates that charity’s horizontal axis not be limited to care for another’s corporeal comfort alone but must also include care for their spiritual standing before God, even when those others mean us harm.

At this point, it should be apparent why *agapic* love is typically distinguished from erotic love or romantic desire (*eros*) and fraternal love or friendship (*philia*). Unlike these other concepts, charity requires a devotion to God and care for other human beings whether or not those human beings reciprocate that care or provide some personal gratification. This leaves unaddressed for now what if any relationship may exist between charity and other forms of love, as well as other virtues, such as justice. These issues will be addressed in chapter 1, where Winthrop’s treatment of charity as a primary and sweeping social ideal is examined in detail.

That such an understanding only begins to give us a faint outline of the concept is found in the fact that Jesus’ response to the lawyer in the book of Matthew repeats, verbatim, critical Old Testament teachings.<sup>13</sup> Though New Testament *agape* clearly grows out of and retains distinct affinities with Old Testament *ahab*, Christian love is not a simple carbon copy of Jewish antecedents. A more detailed understanding of what *agape* might mean in practice, and how it might be acquired, will have to come in the chapters that follow. Because this study is not, strictly

speaking, a theological account and ethical analysis of the concept of charity itself—in the long tradition of Christian ethics running from Augustine and Aquinas to Paul Tillich and Paul Ramsey—but rather a study of how such a concept has been variously understood by and influenced a discrete set of figures central to the genesis of the American republic, our remaining definitional work is best provided by these figures themselves.

That noted, if this brief discussion of charity in its older biblical sense partially closes a cognitive gap with respect to the meaning of the term, it likely only opens a larger one with respect to how charity relates to politics. Both the intellectual freight and tangible appeal of the modern world stack the deck against accepting *agape* as a concept of political merit and relevance. With the dawning of modernity, and all it has meant for individual freedom and the humane mastering of nature, has come a diminution of Christian ideals of love as pertinent to political reality. An increasingly potent theme in the last five centuries of Western civilization is that charity should remain largely removed from the logic of civic life. A handful of classic texts and paradigmatic thinkers emphasize different aspects of this larger point.

In *The Prince*, arguably the most famous book on politics ever written and ground zero of political modernity, Niccolò Machiavelli argues that it must be understood that a prince “cannot observe all those things for which men are held good, since he is often under a necessity, to maintain his state, of acting against faith, against *charity*, against *humanity*, against *religion*.”<sup>14</sup> The problem with a leader determined to exercise Christian love and goodness “in all regards” is that such a figure (and the state he or she rules) is doomed to “come to ruin among so many who are not good.” Thus, for Machiavelli, *the* defining characteristic of a successful modern leader is knowing “how to enter into evil, when forced by necessity.”<sup>15</sup> This remains one of the earliest and most devastating arguments against the powerful medieval aspiration for a “reign of charity” on earth.<sup>16</sup>

A less ruthless, more democratic version of Machiavelli’s position is found in Max Weber’s classic lecture “Politics as Vocation.” Weber argues that the “genius or demon of politics” stands in direct tension with the “ethic of the Sermon on the Mount,” or what he calls elsewhere the “ethic of the gospel” or “acosmic ethic of love.” For Weber, this tension stems from his observation that violence is central to all forms of political rule, whereas the “ethic of the gospel” demands that one must

live like Jesus—being “saintly in everything”—and Jesus never “operated with the political means of violence.”<sup>17</sup> This puts political leaders aspiring to the virtue of *agape* in a double bind. If even nonaggressive, modern democracies must—to establish internal order and external security—be led by those who are prepared to engage in acts of violence and perfidy, then saintly, uncompromising commitments to Christian love are bound to make one unfit to rule. Correlatively, enthusiastic endeavors in modern political rule are bound to make leaders seeking salvation unfit to inherit the Kingdom of God. In sum, the practice of charity may be as dangerous to the state as the practice of politics is to the soul.

Francis Bacon, instrumental in establishing the methodological principles of modern science, understood that his *scientific* aim embodied a significant *political* challenge—how to harness the immense new power of modern science for human good instead of human misery. In several of his works, he repeatedly claims that the answer to this challenge is the encouragement and practice of Christian charity. However, Bacon’s *New Atlantis* fully repudiates the sincerity of such claims. In this novella, Bacon’s vision of scientific utopia on the fictitious island of Bensalem, traditional Christian charity is replaced by a heterodox, even non-Christian concept of compassion, but one completely subordinate to scientific reasoning and political necessity.<sup>18</sup>

If early moderns like Machiavelli and Bacon seek to dramatically diminish charity’s civic role in the name of executive strength and a materially comfortable citizenry, John Locke launches modern pluralism and secular liberal democracy in the name of charity itself. In “A Letter Concerning Toleration,” Locke explains that far too often under the “Principle of Charity,” humans express their love and concern for the salvation of others by confiscating their property, punishing their bodies, and even taking their lives. To render impotent this patently “unchristian Cruelty” masquerading as *agape*, Locke esteems it above all things necessary “to distinguish exactly the Business of Civil Government from that of Religion, and to settle the Bounds that lie between the one and the other.” In the world of Lockean politics, the duty of the magistrate is limited to preserving the “civil interests” of its citizens—meaning the impartial execution of laws protecting citizens equally in their natural rights to life and liberty and legal possessions such as “money, lands, houses, furniture, and the like.”<sup>19</sup> There are other passages in the *Letter on Toleration* and the *First Treatise of Government* that suggest Locke

actually sees the situation as a bit more complicated than all this. But in general, Locke, like so many quarters of the liberal tradition that follow in his wake, strives to separate church and state and replace charity with justice as the “first virtue of social institutions,” where justice is largely considered embodied in a set of secular decision procedures, political institutions, and economic arrangements predicated on inherent human freedom and equality.<sup>20</sup>

What Locke argued for government specifically, Sigmund Freud later argued for human psychology more broadly.<sup>21</sup> “Justice” is the “first requisite of civilization,” he claimed in his most widely read book, *Civilization and Its Discontents*. For Freud, man’s natural, instinctive, and happiest state is individualistic, erotic, and aggressive.<sup>22</sup> But the joy of wolfish acquisition and sexual activity will largely go unrealized for all but a few characters of exceptional strength and ability. Thus, man’s best hope is to band together and try to impose a culture of justice that channels the human libido into long-term monogamy and nonsexual affection for loyal family, friends, and community members in return for some security and other physical and emotional goods.<sup>23</sup>

In light of this position, Freud finds the world-renowned standard of “thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself” utterly incomprehensible—a “*Credo quia absurdum*.”<sup>24</sup> The problem with *agape* is that its command to love everyone just like we love ourselves stipulates obligations no one could possibly ever keep and which would often be repaid by others with violent harm. Thus charity, more often than not, leaves people neurotic and vulnerable. It also makes them unjust. To treat all human beings, even enemies, with the same level of care we have for a spouse, child, or friend is to be, Freud holds, grossly unfair to those with whom we have special ties and obligations because of the good they do for us. And as for actually channeling man’s aggressiveness against others, Freud paints historical Christianity as no more effective than the old Roman paganism or new German Nazism.<sup>25</sup>

Freud’s attitudes toward the ideals of *caritas* are different from but were influenced in no small part by one of his near contemporaries, Nietzsche—modernity’s first antimodern whose arguments forcefully attack all traditional claims of moral truth. As he notes in his early work *The Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche’s philosophical project is “purely artistic” and explicitly “anti-Christian.” Looking to reveal the truly free and admirable being—the creative “overman”—Nietzsche posits and defends a universal “will to power” over and against a Christian inspired “will to

decline.” Perhaps even more so than Machiavelli, Nietzsche sees *agape* making people too weak for the demands of individual liberation and cultural greatness found only through an aesthetic life of power ever seeking more power. We must move beyond the morality of love of God and others, Nietzsche argues, because the God who authored such commandments “is dead.” A more sweeping claim even than God simply does not exist or has met some kind of divine demise, Nietzsche is announcing—as Martin Heidegger later observed—“the impotence not only of the Christian God but of every transcendent element under which men might want to shelter themselves.”<sup>26</sup>

Machiavelli’s political realism, Bacon’s scientific materialism, Locke’s philosophical liberalism, Freud’s therapeutic justice, and Nietzsche’s radical skepticism of any traditionally understood moral norms all remain exceptionally strong influences in our post-Christian present. Together they form—whatever their differences—a most imposing barrier for charity to play any meaningful part in the formation of an important civic ideal. But it is this very fact that makes the study at hand all the more necessary and interesting. Despite such powerful forces, various notions of *agape* remain both religiously central and politically salient throughout American life. In more recent times, the most obvious example of this is found in the hymnal rhetoric of Martin Luther King Jr.’s civil rights push. An even more recent if less sustained and less successful manifestation is found in George W. Bush’s idiom of “compassionate conservatism” on particular display during his gubernatorial years and first presidential campaign.

### Civic Charity

To begin to understand how *Christian* charity got so firmly implanted in the soil of the American political tradition, flowering into a *civic* charity of broad influence, and to adequately reflect on how well such a phenomenon comports with reasonable accounts of political necessity and justice, we must turn first to John Winthrop. The reasons for this have already been indicated. He is not only the first to introduce charity as an ideal of more than solely religious significance, but he does so in a way that is both memorable and alarming. It is in Winthrop and his Model of Christian Charity speech—examined in detail in part 1 of this book—that one most clearly sees both the sunlit uplands and the dark narrows

that stand as possible outcomes for the polity anxious to be formally ruled by the imperatives of Christian love. For the reader still sure at this point that in Winthrop only negative lessons can be learned, part 1 begins by showing that Nathaniel Hawthorne, this most famous of all critics of the Puritans, seemed to recognize distinctly redeeming qualities in Winthrop and his charity-oriented leadership, namely a sense of genuine human compassion and noble purpose that made him the most attractive of his Puritan peers.

Part 2 of this book details a monumental shift in thinking about charity and politics by highlighting Jefferson’s radical break with the ancient religious norms of *agape* so central to Winthrop. We do see here, however, that even Jefferson’s devout commitment to a largely secular model of liberal democracy is suffused with an attention to securing a fraternal affection between citizens, an attention increasingly colored for him by New Testament teachings. We also see that the impact of Jefferson’s position is modulated in its break from certain Winthropian positions by the influence of more traditionally religious figures of influence in the revolutionary-constitutional generation.

It is not until Lincoln, considered in part 3, that we see a full-bodied model of civic charity that harnesses many of the respective benefits of both Winthrop’s and Jefferson’s positions without eviscerating the essential claims of either. While it will take the rest of this book to explain adequately what is meant by civic charity, how it came into existence, and how it reaches its apotheosis in the thought and rhetoric of Lincoln, one might at this point anticipate its vague contours. Civic charity, like its theological parent Christian charity, has both a vertical (pious) and horizontal (compassionate) dimension which play off each other in dynamic interaction. Furthermore, both dimensions are simultaneously and acutely attuned to the traditions of liberal democracy and Judeo-Christianity. To be more specific, civic charity’s vertical dimension calls for a public recognition of and gratitude for a God of judgment and providence even as it respects and helps establish a constitutionally robust pluralism, including a substantial degree of separation of church and state. As for the horizontal dimension, civic charity calls for a generous and forgiving affection among citizens at the same time that it recognizes and vigorously protects the individual as an inherently free being. And, while civic charity is explicitly grounded in claims of revelatory and self-evident truth, it strikes a very cautious stand in fathoming God’s



work and will in the world and in embracing normatively charged certitudes of political policy and consequence given its poignant awareness of inherent human weakness and limitation.

As previously noted, fusions of philosophical liberalism and Christian *agapism* still seem very much with us in American civic life, even if not perfectly faithful to the rudimentary formulation just described. Certainly the continuing influence of Winthrop, Jefferson, and Lincoln helps to explain the unique and enduring status of biblical notions of love at work in our national politics despite the strictures of so much modern and postmodern political theory. Yet it has been observed that we often only name a concept, like civic charity, when we recognize that it is something we have had all around us for a long time but now sense we are losing. One cannot help but wonder if the constant drumbeat of various intellectual forces of the post-Christian West, forces which see themselves in purely secular terms and which have dominated scholarly debate and inquiry for decades, is not drowning out aspirations to blend important religious concepts of love with genuine commitments to human freedom—a blending that has long been a critical part of our political heritage. Civic charity, while by definition respectful and caring of all citizens as free beings, is not a principle that will, or needs to, speak to everyone. But given the continuing political and religious convictions of vast numbers of Americans today, it is a concept that may be well worth identifying and reviving. To do so—even to see if we should do so—we must first return to the past to elucidate the concept's origins and comprehend its most profound articulations.

### Notes

1. The definitive edition of the speech is found in *Winthrop Papers*, Vol. II: 282–295. Selections here are taken from Appendix A of this book—my own transliteration of this speech into modern English (a move explained in chapter 1).

2. Dawson, “Rite of Passage,” 219; Delbanco, *The Puritan Ordeal*, 72. For Winthrop as a sophisticated political philosopher whose influence is still felt, primarily through the “Model” speech, see Miller, *New England Mind*, 422; Miller, *Nature's Nation*, 6; McWilliams, *Fraternity in America*, 133; Schaar, “Liberty/Authority/Community,” 493–518; and Baritz, *City on a Hill*, 13–14. Gomes, “Pilgrim's Progress,” 102–3. Presidential uses of Winthrop detailed in Holland, *Remembering John Winthrop*.

3. In addition to Hawthorne's classic treatment of Puritanism in *The Scarlet Letter* (discussed at length in the introduction to part 1), see Brooks Adams, *The Emancipation of Massachusetts*; Charles F. Adams, *Three Episodes of Massachusetts*

*History*; Mencken, *A Mencken Chrestomathy*, 624; Brooks, *Van Wyck Brooks: The Early Years*, 194. The line “America’s Forgotten Founding Father” is from the subtitle of Bremer, *John Winthrop: America’s Forgotten Founding Father*. Also see Bremer’s “Remembering—and Forgetting—John Winthrop and the Puritan Founders.”

4. For a pithy description of events, see Ellis, *American Sphinx*, 182–83, with excellent larger treatments in Ferling, *Adams v. Jefferson*, and Weisberger, *America Afire*; discussion of Bible hiding in Dreisbach, *Wall of Separation*, 18.

5. Quoted in Donald, *Lincoln*, 566.

6. The topic of Christianity’s general influence on the American founding has, of course, received considerable scholarly treatment. For notable recent contributions that together provide an excellent survey of the relevant scholarship, see Frank Lambert’s *The Founding Fathers and the Place of Religion in America* (Princeton University Press, 2003) and the various essays in *Protestantism and the American Founding*, edited by Thomas S. Engemen and Michael Zuckert (Notre Dame Press, 2004). For an older and less historical but uniquely Catholic treatment, John Courtney Murray’s *We Hold These Truths: Catholic Reflections on the American Proposition* (Sheed and Ward, 1960) remains a standard classic. Mark Noll’s work *America’s God* highlights the previously underappreciated fact that not only did American religion influence American politics, but American politics influenced American religion. None of these works, though, treat in any depth the specific issue of Christian charity as a civic virtue. There are few books by major historians and political scientists that touch directly on Christian charity and closely related themes as important to the early development of American political life. James A. Morone, in *Hellfire Nation: The Politics of Sin in American History*, acknowledges, as I do, that some understandings of *caritas*—especially those with Puritan connections—can separate the political world into manifestations of a self-righteous “us” versus a wicked “them.” I nevertheless challenge his argument that only something like the nineteenth and twentieth century’s “social gospel” movement is religion’s most legitimate and useful American political legacy. In *The Lost Soul of American Politics*, Patrick Diggins comes to a positive appraisal of Lincoln’s fusion of liberalism and Christian love. However, Diggins is less sanguine about the continuing political purchase of any virtuous ideal, Christian or otherwise. He leans instead toward a strong economic determinism and thus pays more attention to class interests whereas I focus on statesmanship. Though ostensibly a book on a separate topic, Wilson Carey McWilliams’s *The Idea of Fraternity in America* stands as a highly related and vital, if now too often overlooked, gem. Given that fraternity is something of a conceptual cousin to, and in some cases (as I will argue) dependent upon the sustaining influence of, Christian love, the central topics of McWilliams’s work and mine are complementary but not the same. There are also conscious differences in scope and method. My work probes fewer thinkers and texts but probes them more extensively. Not surprisingly then, it is the work of one of McWilliams’s students, Patrick Deneen, which tracks closest to my own. Deneen closes his book *Democratic Faith* with a concept he calls “democratic charity.” While there is considerable overlap here with what I am calling “civic charity,” including a grounding of the concept in Lincoln’s Second Inaugural with a nod to Winthrop’s “Model of Christian Charity” speech, Patrick and I arrived independently at our most basic conclusions at roughly

the same time and hold some differences in our understanding and use of the concept. Much the same could be said of the work of theologian Timothy Jackson, whose *Priority of Love* advances a notion of “civic *agape*” (p. 67), though not as a canonical ideal in the American political tradition. To both Deneen and Jackson, I am very grateful for how their work helped define my own.

7. See the statement in David Hackett Fischer’s seminal work on American cultural history, *Albion’s Seed*, xi. For a more detailed exposition, see James T. Kloppenburg’s chapter “Why History Matters to Political Theory” in *The Virtues of Liberalism*, 155–78. Kloppenburg’s thesis is foreshadowed in the claim of political theorist Isaiah Berlin in *Four Essays*, 4, that “the historical approach is inescapable: the very sense of contrast and dissimilarity with which the past affects us provides the only relevant background against which the features peculiar to our own experience stand out in sufficient relief to be adequately discerned and described.” A related though ultimately different kind of claim comes from those (political theorists, primarily) influenced by Leo Strauss. These scholars argue in different ways and often toward different conclusions that a continuing wisdom can be found in the words and deeds of America’s most philosophical statesmen as such words and deeds, while necessarily reflective of the particular time and place in which they were offered, are also reflective of a deep engagement with the transpolitical ideals of right, good, and justice that are not contingent but true “everywhere and always.” See the preface material in Jaffa, *Crisis of the House Divided*, iii–vi, and Frisch and Stevens, *American Political Thought*, vii–viii. For more recent discussions, one from an intellectual historian and the other from a political scientist, both of which blur the distinctions between a historicist and nonhistoricist point of view concerning the relevance of classic expressions of American political thought by political leaders, see Banning, *Jefferson and Madison*, xi, and Yarbrough, *American Virtues*, xvii.

8. Achtemeier, *Harper’s Bible Dictionary*, 160.

9. For a sampling of some of the more recent notable treatments, see Nygren, *Agape and Eros*; Outka, *Agape: An Ethical Analysis*; Jackson, *Love Disconsoled*; Hallett, *Christian Neighbor Love*; Hauerwas, “The Politics of Charity.”

10. Edwards, *Charity and Its Fruits*, 1–2; emphasis in original. Edwards’s full treatment of charity is not controlling for this study, but this precise passage nicely lays out the common usages of the term that cloud its larger biblical meaning, and it highlights all the key aspects of the term that will be developed as Winthrop, Jefferson, and Lincoln are pursued in more detail.

11. Where some scholars, notably Nygren, make strict distinctions between *agape* and *caritas*, I follow Edwards, Jackson, and others who tend to use Christian love, charity, *agape*, and *caritas* interchangeably; see Jackson, *Love Disconsoled*, 11n25.

12. For the dual dimensions of charity, see Jackson, *Love Disconsoled*, 1–2. Also, the *Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd edition, designates “charity” as “Christian love” and notes that it is often applied as “Man’s love of God and his neighbor, commanded as the fulfilling of the law, Matt. xxii. 37, 39.” Kierkegaard, *Works of Love*, 17.

13. In response to the question of what is the first commandment, Christ’s answer followed Deut. 6:5 and 11:13—passages which figure prominently in the *Shema*, a

short collection of Old Testament verses that still serves as the first and most important Jewish declaration of faith and basic tenets. In the case of the second commandment, Christ was quoting verbatim Leviticus 19:18 and echoing—perhaps knowingly—the teachings of Hillel, the great first-century CE Jewish scholar who taught that all of Judaism could be summed up in the love commandment of Leviticus 19:18; see Grayzel, *A History of the Jews*, 123. The second verse of the Pirké Avot, one of the best-known and best-loved portions of the Talmud, reads, “Upon three things the world is based (literally, the world stands): upon the Torah, upon Temple Service, and upon the practice of charity.” See Stern, *Pirké Avot*, vii; Schatz, *Ethics of the Fathers*, 36.

14. Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Prince*, vii, 70 (emphasis added). Nearly thirty years ago, Isaiah Berlin identified more than a “score of leading theories” and a “cloud of subsidiary views” related to how one ought to interpret Machiavelli (Berlin, *Proper Study of Mankind*, 269). Consciously avoiding this interpretive tar pit, all that is suggested here is that even with those interpreters inclined to see something humane lurking behind the dark conclusions of *The Prince* (like Clifford Orwin’s “Machiavelli’s Unchristian Charity”), it is generally agreed that the full demands of traditional Christian charity are directly at odds with the full demands of effective, lasting political rule.

15. Machiavelli, *The Prince*, 61, 70.

16. Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine*, 93.

17. Weber, *Essays in Sociology*, 119, 120, 126.

18. Bacon, *The New Organon*, 90; Innes, “Bacon’s New Atlantis,” 100; Bacon, *New Atlantis*, 32.

19. John Locke, *A Letter Concerning Toleration*, 24, 26.

20. For explicit civic overlap of the virtues of justice and charity, see Locke, *Two Treatises on Government*, 205–6; Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, 3; Richardson, *Democratic Autonomy*, 37; Dworkin, *A Matter of Principle*.

21. Though much of Freud’s original work has now been superseded if not widely repudiated by contemporary psychoanalysis, in the 1980s Ernest Wallwork plausibly posited that Freud’s critique of the Christian neighbor-love commandment was “more familiar to educated persons” than any other (“The Freudian Critique,” 264). Even more recently, Timothy Jackson convincingly argues the towering “shadow” of Freud’s influence over modern attitudes toward *agape* (*Love Disconsolated*, 56).

22. Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents*, 68–69.

23. *Ibid.*, 32, 57, 73.

24. *Ibid.*, 68.

25. *Ibid.*, 73.

26. Nietzsche, *Basic Writings of Nietzsche*, 24, 23, 455, 171, 853. See Romand Cole’s *Rethinking Generosity* for at least one very fine treatment of, and response to, the problems that postmodern critical theory raises for *caritas*.