

Faculti Summary

<https://faculti.net/american-freethinker-elihu-palmer-and-the-struggle-for-religious-freedom-in-the-new-nation/>

This video reflects on the author's journey to explore the ideas of Elihu Palmer, a little-known figure in early American history, who challenged prevailing religious beliefs. It begins with the author recounting their initial interest in a public debate during George W. Bush's administration about whether the United States was founded as a Christian nation, which led them to study the founding era's religious beliefs.

The author attended a public meeting in 2003 where it was suggested that Thomas Jefferson was divinely inspired in the creation of the Declaration of Independence. Alarmed by distortions of historical facts, the author set out to write about religion during the founding period. They discovered Palmer's book, "Principles of Nature," which expressed radical views on matter and the divine. Palmer argued against the transcendent God, believing everything was composed of matter infused with a divine life force. This video perspective, influenced by earlier thinkers like Spinoza, suggested a shared fate among all living things based on material interdependence.

At one point, Palmer faced significant backlash for publicly denying the divinity of Jesus, finding himself at odds with the norms of his time and the backlash from religious authorities. Despite challenges, including personal tragedies like losing his wife to yellow fever, Palmer continued to promote free thought and deism, ultimately leading a society of free thinkers in New York City.

The author notes that the overarching questions Palmer raised about morality and democracy without a shared religion are still relevant today, reflecting on the challenges of achieving social justice and ecological responsibility without shared religious foundations. This video concludes with the idea that although Palmer's specific views may have been disproven, his thoughts can inspire ongoing discussions about the interconnectedness of life and the possibility of shared human ethics.