



Thomas Paine's The Age of Reason - Part Three (The Modern Works of Thomas Paine) (Volume 1)

Robert Shear

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What would Tom Paine think now, if he knew the events of the past two hundred years? Would he still be a Deist if he knew about Evolution, the Big Bang and discoveries in geology and the neurosciences? What would he think of the Book of Mormon, New Age spirituality and the rise of religious fundamentalism? How would he view our current conflicts over birth control, abortion, gay marriage and events in the Middle East?

Thomas Paine's The Age of Reason – Part Three has won praise from Paine experts both for its authentic voice and for answers to these questions that are logical extensions of Paine's past works. This imagined update to the classic work is presented from Paine's perspective and in his familiar style. He reviews two centuries of progress in science and human rights and the evolving role of religion in American society, reflecting on the implications of these changes for his own views about God and Nature. His critical commentary on current affairs will be stimulating and thought-provoking to those who know his prior works as well as to those having their first encounter with America's original critic of organized religion.

Concluding with his current advice to the American people, Paine issues a call to action urging us to enter a new Age of Enlightenment with sweeping changes to the role of religion in our public and private affairs.

Thomas Paine and The Age of Reason “All national institutions of churches, whether Jewish, Christian or Turkish, appear to me no other than human inventions set up to terrify and enslave mankind, and monopolize power and profit.” These words are still shocking to even the most committed of religious critics in the 21st century. The more so they were written by one of America's most visionary Founders - the man whose *Common Sense* inspired his countrymen to accept that separation from England was inevitable, that the time for Revolution was upon them. Paine's pamphlets on *The Crisis* so bolstered spirits that General Washington ordered them read to the troops. Their opening words: “These are the times that try men's souls” became a battle cry of the American Revolution, inspiring the outnumbered patriots to victory over superior British forces. It was later said that Independence had been achieved equally by the sword of Washington and the pen of Paine. When the French Revolution came under attack, it was Thomas Paine whose spirited defense, *Rights of Man*, was most widely embraced - and condemned. His new manifesto labeled seditious in England, Paine received a hero's welcome in France and was given a seat in the National Convention called to write a democratic constitution for that country. But not for long. Under pressure from royalists across Europe, the French Revolution faltered, its leaders turning against one another. Fearing his own end was near, Paine prepared what he had planned to be his final work: *The Age of Reason*. In this pamphlet he attacked the foundation of the churches with a detailed assault on the credibility and morality of the Bible, offering instead a simple moral code based on belief in a benevolent God who reveals himself not in dreams, visions or holy books but in the intricate designs of Nature. The book was attacked from all sides, its author labeled Infidel. One of America's most famous writers, he could never again find a publisher for his work. Thomas Paine died in 1809 with none of the honors appropriate to his contributions to our modern world. Denied a place in a Quaker cemetery, only six persons attended the burial on his farm in New Rochelle, NY. There stands no monument to him in Washington, DC. His unpublished autobiography and collected works, including the original manuscript for Part Three of *The Age of Reason* were lost in a fire, along with the rest of his papers. Of his surviving works, *The Age of Reason* remains the most controversial, and the most widely quoted.

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