

The Founding Fathers on Education and Morality

It is a pity that American children are not being taught more about the Founding Fathers of America and what their vision of America was. Even when I was going to public school back in the 1930's and '40's, very little was taught about our Founding Fathers concerning their religious and moral beliefs. We learned about George Washington as a great soldier and a great leader, but virtually nothing about his religious convictions. The same was true of all the other noted Founding Fathers: Jefferson, Adams, Hancock, Franklin, Hamilton. They were great revolutionary leaders who crafted the Declaration of Independence, fought a six-year war against Great Britain, crafted the Articles of Confederation and then the Constitution which is the basis of our political system. Surprisingly you can teach a great deal about all of that with virtually no mention of religion.

In fact, we were taught more about the atheist Tom Paine than about any of the great American religious and intellectual leaders, such as Jonathan Edwards, Timothy Dwight, George Whitefield, John Witherspoon, John Dickinson, George Mason, Jonathan Mayhew, Nathanael Emmons, Jedidiah Morse, Noah Webster, and others.

Why was this the case? Because by the 1930's the progressives had already made sure that religion was removed from American public schools. Yet, in those days it was still possible for a school principal to read a psalm from the Bible at assembly. Of course, that is no longer the case. In fact, the schools have become so anti-Christian that it is forbidden to even mention the word Christmas.

in some schools

John Leo in U.S. News & World Report (Jan. 6, 97) wrote that in Fayette County, Kentucky, school bus drivers were warned not to say Merry Christmas to any of the children, and in West Orange, N.J. a student was reprimanded by the high school dean for singing "God Rest Ye Merry, Gentlemen" on school property. And the principal of Loudoun High School in Virginia told student editors to keep the newspaper as secular as possible and "to be careful that they don't associate the upcoming holiday with any particular religion." One wonders how they were supposed to do that inasmuch as the upcoming holiday celebrated the birth of Jesus Christ! Talk about censorship. I wonder what the ACLU or People for the American Way are going to do about that.

Some schools now only allow instrumental versions of traditional carols. The words are too controversial and violate the sacred separation of church and state.

And that's why the religious convictions of our founding fathers cannot be taught to American children in our public schools. These poor children no doubt get the impression -- if they are taught at all about the founding fathers -- that they were men with no religious convictions at all and that religion simply did not exist as a vital spiritual force in America when in reality it was the very force that made America possible. If they are taught anything at all about religion in early America it is usually about those mean, bigoted Puritans who hounded the poor witches of Salem.

And yet, what the Founding Fathers had to say about God is so inspiring that I wish there were a way that American children could be made aware of this. It's easy enough for homeschoolers to get this knowledge. David Barton has written books which deal with this subject, and an excellent book by William J. Federer, titled *America's God and Country, Encyclopedia of Quotations*, is filled with wonderful quotations from Columbus to the present day, proving that Belief in God and doing work to fulfill God's promises is the most important theme in the entire American enterprise. Christopher Columbus wrote in his Book of Prophecies:

It was the Lord who put into my mind (I could feel His hand upon me) the fact that it would be possible to sail from here to the Indies. . . .
There was no question that the inspiration was from the Holy Spirit, because he comforted me with rays of marvelous illumination from the Holy Scriptures . . . encouraging me continually to press forward, and without ceasing for a moment they now encourage me to make haste.

In a letter written in 1493 to Spain's General Treasurer Gabriel Sanchez, Columbus wrote:

That which the unaided intellect of man could not compass, the spirit of God has granted to human exertions, for God is wont to hear the prayers of His servants who love His precepts even to the performance of apparent impossibilities. Therefore, let the king and queen, our princes and thier most happy kingdoms, and all the other provinces of Christendom, render thanks to our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

In June of 1630, ten years after the Pilgrims founded the Plymouth Colony, Gov. John Winthrop landed in Massachusetts Bay with 700 people in 11 ships, thus beginning the Great Migration, which lasted 16 years and saw more than 20,000 Puritans embark for New England. In a sermon aboard the ship Arbella before disembarking on the shores of New England, Winthrop said:

We are a Company, professing ourselves fellow members of Christ, and thus we ought to account ourselves knit together by this bond of love. . . .
Thus stands the cause between God and us: we are entered into covenant with HIm for this work. We have taken out a Commission, the Lord hath given us leave to draw our own articles. . . .
We must hold a familiar commerce together in each other in all meekness, gentleness, patience, and liberality. We must delight in each other, make one another's condition our own, rejoice together, mourn together, labor and suffer together, always having before our eyes our Commission and Community in this work, as members of the same body. . . .
We shall find that the God of Israel is among us, when ten of us shall be able to resist a thousand of our enemies, when He shall make us a praise and glory, that men of succeeding plantations shall say, "The Lord make it like that of New England."
For we must Consider that we shall be as a City upon a Hill, the eyes of all people are upon us.

That's the kind of religious fervor and covenantal love that permitted the Puritans to create a Christian civilization in the wilderness of the new world. And from that community came some of the most learned men of God that Christendom has ever known. Harvard College was founded in 1636 for the purpose of training up a learned clergy. And indeed it did. Increase Mather, who became President of Harvard, was

one of the first to criticize the British monarch, Charles II, for demanding in 1684 the return of the charter which had given the colonists the right to govern themselves. He wrote:

To submit and resign their charter would be inconsistent with the main end of their fathers' coming to New England. . . . [Although resistance would provoke] great sufferings, [it was] better to suffer than sin. Let them trust in the God of their fathers, which is better than to put confidences in princes. And if they suffer, because they dare not comply with the wills of men against the will of God, they suffer in a good cause.

Already you can see the seed of the War for Independence being planted in the soil of New England.

Jonathan Edwards, the great theologian whose preaching began the revival known as the Great Awakening, was the third President of Princeton University. Concerning the Great Awakening, he wrote:

And then it was, in the latter part of December, that the Spirit of God began extraordinarily to . . . work amongst us. . . . In every place, God brought His saving blessings with Him, and His Word, attended with Spirit . . . returned not void.

George Whitefield, the famous dynamic evangelist of the Great Awakening, preached up and down the Eastern seaboard of America. Benjamin Franklin wrote that he was able to hear Whitefield's voice nearly a mile away. Whitefield wrote:

Those who live godly in Christ, may not so much be said to live, as Christ to live in them. . . . They are led by the Spirit as a child is led by the hand of its father. . . . They hear, know, and obey his voice. . . . Being born again in God they habitually live to, and daily walk with God.

Sarah Edwards, wife of Jonathan Edwards, wrote of Whitefield:

It is wonderful to see what a spell he casts over an audience by proclaiming the simplest truths of the Bible. . . . Our mechanics shut up their shops, and the day laborers throw down their tools to go and hear him preach, and few return unaffected.

Franklin wrote:

It was wonderful to see the change soon made in the manners of our inhabitants. From being thoughtless or indifferent about religion, it seemed as if all the world were growing religious, so that one could not walk thro' the town in an evening without hearing psalms sung in different families of every street.

On matters of education, in 1750 Franklin wrote to Dr. Samuel Johnson, the first president of King's College (now Columbia University):

I think with you, that nothing is of more importance for the public weal, than to form and train up youth in wisdom and virtue. . . . I think also, general virtue is more probably to be expected and obtained from the education of youth, than from the exhortation of adult persons; bad habits and vices of the mind being, like diseases of the body, more easily prevented than cured.

I think, moreover, that talents for the education of youth are the gift of God; and that he on whom they are bestowed, whenever a way is opened for the use of them, is as strongly called as if heard a voice from

heaven.

Franklin wrote in his Autobiography this prayer that he prayed every day:

O powerful goodness! Bountiful Father! Merciful Guide! Increase in me that wisdom which discovers my truest interest. Strengthen my resolution to perform what that wisdom dictates. Accept my kind offices to thy other children as the only return in my power for thy continual favours to me.

Wouldn't that be a wonderful nonsectarian prayer for school children to recite each day? It is said that Franklin was a Deist. He had been brought up and educated as a Presbyterian, but he rejected many of the doctrines of the Presbyterian faith. But he writes in his Autobiography:

I never doubted, for instance, the existence of the Deity; that he made the world, and governed it by his Providence; that the most acceptable service of God was the doing good to man; that our souls are immortal; and that all crime will be punished, and virtue rewarded, either here or hereafter.

In July 1776, Franklin was appointed to a committee to draft a seal for the newly formed United States. He proposed:

Moses lifting up his wand, and dividing the red sea, and pharaoh in his chariot overwhelmed with the waters. This motto: "Rebellion to tyrants is obedience to God."

In 1787 Franklin wrote in a letter:

Only a virtuous people are capable of freedom. As nations become corrupt and vicious, they have more need of masters.

At the Constitutional Convention in 1787, Franklin, disturbed by the bitter debates among the delegates, said in a speech to the convention:

I have live, Sir, a long time, and the longer I live, the more cxonvincing proofs I see of this truth--that God Governs in the affairs of men.

We have been assured, Sir, in the Sacred Writings, that "except the Lord build the House, they labor in vain that build it."

I therefore beg leave to move--that henceforth prayers imploring the assistance of Heaven, and its blessing on our deliberations, be held in this Assembly every morning before we proceed to business, and that one or more of the clergy of this city be requested to officiate in that service.

It should be noted that prayers have opened both houses of Congress ever since.

It would take a full day to talk of the religious character of George Washington who was so deeply conscious of his Christian faith. He believed that he was miraculously saved from death after a battle in 1755. He wrote to his brother:

But by the all-powerful dispensations of Providence, I have been protected beyond all human probability or expectation; for I had four bullets through my coat, and two horses shot under me, yet escaped unhurt, although death was leveling my companions on every side of me!

As Commander-in-Chief of the Continental Army Washington often prayed and fasted,

invoking God's protection and providence during the entire War of Independence. He appointed chaplains for every regiment. In 1789, at his inauguration as the first President of the United States, Washington said:

Such being the impressions under which I have, in obedience to the public summons, repaired to the present station, it would be peculiarly improper to omit, in this first official act, my fervent supplications to the Almighty Being who rules over the universe, who presides in the councils of nations and whose providential aids can supply every human defect.

that his benediction may consecrate to the liberties and happiness of the people of the United States a Government instituted by themselves for these essential purposes;

No people can be bound to acknowledge and adore the Invisible Hand which conducts the affairs of men more than the people of the United States.

Every step by which they have advanced to the character of an independent nation seems to have been distinguished by some token of providential agency

Washington's inaugural address should be required reading in every American public school. But, of course, all of Washington's references to God would send the ACLU and People for the American Way screaming to the Supreme Court that such an act would be a violation of the separation of church and state. That's how far we've come.

On Oct. 3, 1789, Washington issued a *National Day of Thanksgiving Proclamation* in which he stated:

Whereas it is the duty of all nations to acknowledge the providence of Almighty God, to obey His will, to be grateful for His benefits, and humbly to implore His protection and favor

Now, therefore, I do recommend and assign Thursday, the twenty-sixth day of November next, to be devoted by the people of these United States . . . that we then may all unite unto Him our sincere and humble thanks for His kind care and protection of the people of this country previous to their becoming a nation, for the signal and manifold mercies and the favorable interpositions of His providence in the course and conclusion of the late war;

for the great degree of tranquility, union, and plenty which we have since enjoyed; for the peaceable and rational manner in which we have been enabled to establish constitutions of government for our safety and happiness, and particularly the national one now lately instituted; for the civil and religious liberty with which we are blessed

The proclamation goes on for another long paragraph. But it is obvious where the hearts of the American people turned to for their blessings. Today, our school children think that the Pilgrims thanked the Indians on Thanksgiving Day. Our children are being lied to by our educators, and I ask you, what good can come from such lies?

One merely has to read the prayers that Washington wrote in his own personal prayer book to understand how deeply he was imbued with the Holy Spirit and how deeply he relied on God for all matters of importance in his life. And it is this aspect of Washington's character that is rarely if ever referred to in history textbooks. Even so great a man as Washington could fall to his knees and pray for forgiveness. In one prayer, he wrote:

I have sinned and done very wickedly, be merciful to me, O God, and pardon me for Jesus Christ sake. . . . Thou gavest Thy Son to die for me; and has given me assurance of salvation, upon my repentance and sincerely endeavoring to conform my life to His holy precepts and example.

Praise God for such a man as George Washington, the father of our country. Isn't it a tragedy that American children are no longer taught about this tower of a man who should be their hero. I remember when I was in first grade, there was a portrait of George Washington in our classroom. That portrait looked down upon us children and we revered him. It was the Stuart portrait, in which the bottom part was unfinished. But to me it looked as if George Washington were in heaven.

Americans revered George Washington with good reason. But today he is just a figure on a one dollar bill.

Another great American whose godly influence was felt by millions of children was Noah Webster, whose blue-backed speller taught millions to read and spell. In 1828, Webster completed his *American Dictionary of the English Language*. In this dictionary are constant references to God and the Bible, for Webster was an orthodox Christian. He stated:

Education is useless without the Bible.

God's Word, contained in the Bible, has furnished all necessary rules to direct our conduct.

He also wrote:

In my view, the Christian religion is the most important and one of the first things in which all children, under a free government ought to be instructed. . . . No truth is more evident to my mind than that the Christian religion must be the basis of any government intended to secure the rights and privileges of a free people.

This strong American adherence to Biblical religion impressed the French historian Alexis de Tocqueville who traveled throughout America in the early 1830's and wrote a marvelous book about his observations. He wrote:

In the United States the sovereign authority is religious, . . . there is no country in the world where the Christian religion retains a greater influence over the souls of men than in America, and there can be no greater proof of its utility and of its conformity to human nature than that its influence is powerfully felt over the most enlightened and free nation of the earth. . . .

America is great because America is good, and if America ever ceases to be good, America will cease to be great.

The safeguard of morality is religion, and morality is the best security of law as well as the surest pledge of freedom.

The Americans combine the notions of Christianity and of liberty so intimately in their minds, that it is impossible to make them conceive the one without the other.

It is hard for us to believe that thirty years later this Christian nation would be torn asunder and plunged into a civil war that took a half million American lives. Men prayed to the same God on both sides of the conflict. In his second inaugural address after the defeat of the Confederacy, Lincoln said:

The prayers of both [sides] could not be answered. That of neither has been answered fully. The Almighty has His own purposes. "Woe unto the world because of offenses; for it must needs be that offenses come, but woe to that man by whom the offense cometh."

And then Lincoln concluded with these famous words:

With malice toward none, with charity for all, with firmness in the right, as God gives us to see the right, let us strive on to finish the work we are in, to bind up the nation's wounds, to care for him who shall have borne the battle, and for his widow, and his orphan--to do all which may achieve and cherish a just and lasting peace among ourselves and with all nations.

Indeed, only Christian charity could restore the United States as one nation, under God, with liberty and justice for all.

America's Christian heritage is so rich, so powerful, so sustaining, that even President Clinton felt compelled to end his second inaugural address, stating:

May God strengthen our hands for the good work ahead, and always, always bless our America.