

# **The Establishment of the United States of America**

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***The United States of America was established by Founders who believed that God endows all people with equal rights and is the Supreme Judge of the world.***

All citizens of the United States must understand that our basic national documents--the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution, and the Bill of Rights--established a new order of the ages based on belief of the Founding Fathers that God has endowed all people with equal rights to life, liberty, and religious freedom.

## **God-Given Freedoms in Key Historical Documents of the United States**

The Declaration of Independence and the Constitution outline the rights of the people which the Founding Fathers viewed as inherent and God-given. In the Old Order, kings had complete control over all their people, including power to give land to aristocrats for whom common people had to work as serfs and to establish a church that they supported and controlled. The Declaration of Independence of 1776 refers to nature's God, the Creator who endows all people with unalienable rights, especially life and liberty, the Supreme Judge of the world, and the protection of Divine Providence. It states that governments derive their just powers from consent of the governed to protect the equal rights with which people are endowed by their Creator. Our Constitution provides that no title of nobility may be granted and that no religious test shall be required for public office although all government officials must agree to support the Constitution by oath or by affirmation. The faith in God expressed by those elected as presidents of the United States led Congress to add the words "So help me God" to that oath of office in 1862.

The Constitution was established by the people to form a more perfect union of the thirteen states and to assure justice and the blessings of liberty and to themselves and their posterity. It defines the very limited powers of the national government and guarantees every state a republican form of government in which its officials have only the powers granted in a Constitution approved by its citizens. Some states approved the Constitution only after their leaders promised that the first Congress would submit a Bill of Rights reserving all powers not delegated to the national government to the states and the people. The First Amendment of the Bill of Rights states that Congress shall make no law establishing a religion or prohibiting the free exercise thereof. At that time the states included people of different denominations--including Anglicans, Baptists, Catholics, Puritans, and Quakers--and nine states had established churches which they supported. The states did not want the national government to establish one church to be supported by all the people. Some state-supported churches were not terminated until several decades after the Constitution.

## **Faith in God of the Founding Fathers of the United States**

Many of the key Founding Fathers of this nation held a strong belief in God and His precepts. Belief in God of the Founding Fathers is reported in the book *In God We Trust* by well-known author Norman Cousins. That book begins with chapters on what Benjamin Franklin and the first four presidents of the United States had to say about God. These men had important roles in the formation of the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution. Their views about liberty had been expressed by God's word and inscribed on the Liberty Bell installed at Philadelphia in 1753: "Proclaim liberty throughout all the land to all the inhabitants thereof" (Leviticus 25:10).

Franklin's interpretation of the Lord's Prayer was that the laws of our heavenly Father be obeyed on earth as perfectly as they are in heaven. At the Constitutional Convention, Franklin proposed that their meetings start every morning with prayers "imploing the assistance of Heaven and its blessings on our deliberation." He also said, "The longer I live, the more convincing proof I see of this truth--that God governs in the affairs of men." Franklin wrote that the soul of man is immortal and that God will certainly reward virtue and punish vice either here or hereafter. A few weeks before he died at age 84, Franklin wrote his creed: "I believe in one God, creator of the Universe. That He governs it by His providence. That He ought to be worshipped. That the most acceptable service we render Him is doing good to His other children."

George Washington expressed "fervent supplication to that Almighty Being who rules over the Universe" in his 1789 Inaugural Address. He also said that the people of the United States are bound to acknowledge and adore the invisible hand which conducts the affairs of men. In his 1789 Thanksgiving Proclamation, Washington said, "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." In his 1796 Farewell Address, he said that "reason and experience both forbid us to expect that national morality can prevail in exclusion of religious principles."

John Adams, the first Vice President and second President of the United States, wrote in 1791 that as God has produced all of us we should be friendly to each other. He wrote: "Let the rich and the poor unite in the bands of mutual affection, be mutually sensible to each other's ignorance, weakness and error, and united in concerting measures for their mutual defense against each other's vices and follies." In 1796, he wrote in his diary that "one great advantage of the Christian religion is that it brings the great principle of the law of nature and nations--love your neighbor as yourself and do unto others as you would that others should do to you--to the knowledge, belief, and veneration of the whole people." In a letter written in 1811, Adams agreed that "religion and virtue are the only foundations, not only of republicanism and of all free government, but of social felicity under all governments and in all the combinations of human society."

Thomas Jefferson, the principal author of the Declaration of Independence, was the third president of the United States. He had written in 1774 that "the God who gave us life gave us liberty at the same time." His 1786 Virginia Act of Religious Freedom states that "Almighty God, Holy author of our religion, being Lord of both body and mind chose not to propagate our religion by coercion on people, as was His

Almighty power to do.” In 1802 Jefferson told the Danbury Baptist Association that the First Amendment providing that Congress could not establish a religion or prohibit the free exercise thereof built “a wall of separation between Church and State.” Correct meaning of his statement about separation of church and state is that the United States cannot establish and support one religion, as was done in England and other countries and in nine of the States in 1787. Jefferson wrote in 1809 that he was convinced that the interests of society require keeping the moral precepts on which all religions agree, “for all forbid us to murder, steal, plunder, or bear false witness.” Jefferson wrote in 1816 that the material he had arranged of statements in the Bible by Jesus, which he called the Philosophy of Jesus, proved that he was a real Christian, “a disciple of the doctrines of Jesus.” Congress had Jefferson’s material about Christ published for its members in 1904. It is now available as the Jefferson Bible at libraries. Jefferson’s statements about God include the following: “Can the liberties of a nation be thought secure when we have removed their only firm basis, a conviction in the minds of the people that these liberties are the gift of God?” “My God, how little do my countrymen know what precious blessing they are in possession of and which no other people on earth enjoy, but will they keep it, or will they in the enjoyment of plenty lose the memory of freedom. Material abundance without character is the surest way to destruction.”

James Madison, the fourth president of the United States, had written a full account of the 1787 Constitutional Convention of which he was a member. Many historians regard him as the father of the Constitution. He sponsored Jefferson’s Act of Religious Freedom in Virginia and the Bill of Rights in Congress. The ten amendments of the Bill of Rights were added to the Constitution on December 15, 1791, when approval by the Virginia legislature raised the number of ratifying states to three-fourths, as required by the Constitution. Madison wrote several of the Federalist papers published while the states were considering approval of the Constitution that had been authorized on September 17, 1787, by delegates from 12 states. In Federalist Paper 51, Madison wrote that “if men were angels, no government would be necessary.” Madison’s reference to angels means messengers of God, as defined in the dictionary. In a statement to the Virginia Assembly in 1785, Madison said that “the duty which we owe to our Creator and the manner of discharging it can be directed only by reason and conviction, not by force or violence.” He added, “What is here a right towards men is a duty towards the Creator, an exercise of his religion according to the dictates of his conscience.” In a letter he wrote in 1825, Madison said, “Belief in a God all powerful, wise and good is essential to the moral order of the world and to the happiness of man.”

### **Importance of God and Religion Recognized by the Continental Congress**

The Great Seal of the United States approved in 1782 by the Congress of the Articles of Confederation also demonstrates the faith upon which the nation was founded. It displays an unfinished pyramid with the eye of God at its top. That design expresses the statement in Psalm 33:18 that “the eye of God is upon them that fear Him, upon them that hope in His mercy.” The Latin motto “ANNUIT COEPTIS” at the top of the Great Seal means that “he favors our undertakings,” which must refer to God as supporting creation of a new form of government. The Latin words “NOVUS ORDO SECLORUM” at the bottom of the Great Seal mean “New Order of the Ages” in which government has only the just powers granted to it by its people. The new order denies government power to deprive citizens of life and

liberty, as some dictatorial rulers have done even in this century. Latin numbers at the bottom of the pyramid stand for 1776, year of the Declaration of Independence, stating that our Creator endows us with equal rights to life and liberty.

The other side of the Great Seal shows an eagle holding an olive branch in one talon and arrows in the other, related to peace and common defense. The Latin words on the scroll by the eagle's head, "E PLURIBUS UNUM," mean "From many, one." This phrase refers to the thirteen states and the many different people of the United States. The thirteen states are represented by the stars above the eagle's head and by the bars and stripes on the escutcheon that covers the eagle's breast.

The Congress of the Confederation passed the Northwest Ordinance in 1787 concerning moral issues for the land west of the thirteen states granted to them by the peace treaty with Great Britain. Article III of the Ordinance states that "Religion, morality, and knowledge being necessary for good government and the happiness of mankind, schools and the means of education shall forever be encouraged." Article VI states that there should be no slavery or involuntary servitude in the Northwest Territory except as punishment of crimes for which a person was convicted. This decision against slavery and earlier abolition of slavery north of the Ohio River reflected opposition to slavery by several great leaders. At the 1787 Constitutional Convention, Washington, Madison, and many other members favored abolishing slavery in the United States but had to allow continuation of slavery in Southern states in order to secure approval of the Constitution by at least nine of the thirteen states. Many probably hoped that the Southern states would also act to abolish slavery as had been done in Northern states. Unfortunately, slavery continued until the Southern states lost the Civil War in 1865 after they had seceded from the United States in their effort to continue slavery.

### **Education About God and Religion in the Nineteenth Century**

The 122 million copies of McGuffey school books published in 1836-57 had good influence on Americans in the first century of the United States. These books included the following statements about God and religion:

"It was God, my child, who made the sun, moon, and stars." --Primer, p. 57.

"Oh my God! Do not allow me to sin. Help me to do as I am told. Let me do unto others as I would have them do unto me. God can see all we do. Do not sin, for God can see you." --Pictorial Primer, p. 54.

"God makes the sun shine and sends rain upon the earth that we may have food." --First Reader, p. 17.

"I hope you have said your prayers and thanked your Father in Heaven for all His goodness. Never forget to thank God for His goodness." --Second Reader, p. 3.

"Next to the fear of God implanted in the heart, nothing is a better safeguard to character than the love of good books. They are handmaids of virtue and religion." --Third Reader, p. 171.

“What will become of the West if her prosperity rushes up to such a majesty of power, while those great institutions linger which are necessary to form the mind, conscience and heart of that vast world. The mighty resources of the West are worse than useless without the supervening influence of the government of God. To balance the temptation of such unrivalled abundance, the capacity of the West for self-destruction without religious and moral culture will be as terrific as her capacity for self-preservation with it will be glorious.” --Fourth Reader, p. 60.

Horace Mann, a well-known educator, made the following statement in a 1845 Report on Education: “Knowing as we do that the foundation of national greatness can be laid only in the industry, the integrity, and the spiritual elevation of the people, are we equally sure that schools are forming the character of the rising generation upon the everlasting principles of duty and humanity? Are children so educated that when they grow up they will make better philanthropists and Christians, or only grandeur savages? However loftily the intellect of man may have been gifted, however skillfully it may have been trained, if it be not guided by a sense of justice, a love of mankind, and devotion to duty, its possessor is only a more splendid, more dangerous barbarian.”

### **Statements About God and Religion by Well-Known Leaders in the United States**

President Lincoln said at the close of his 1863 Gettysburg Address that “this Nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom; and that government of the people, by the people, for the people shall not perish from the earth.” In his Second Inaugural Address in 1865, Lincoln said that slavery is an offense in the providence of God that He now wills to remove.

President Franklin Roosevelt said that the right of every person to worship God in his own way is an essential freedom. In 1939, Roosevelt named three institutions indispensable to Americans: “The first is religion. It is the source of the other two--democracy and international goodwill.”

President Eisenhower said, “Recognition of the Supreme Being is the first, most basic expression of Americanism. Without God, there could be no American form of government nor any American way of life.” He also said, “Men grow in stature only as they daily rededicate themselves to a noble faith. The spirit of man is more important than physical strength, and the spiritual fiber of the nation than its wealth.”

President Kennedy said at the close of his 1961 Inaugural Address: “Let us go forth to lead the land we love, asking His blessing and help, but knowing that here on earth God’s work must truly be our own.”

Martin Luther King, Jr., said, “I still believe that standing up for the truth of God is the greatest thing in the world. The end of life is to do the will of God, come what may.”

Members of the Supreme Court have made the following statements about religion and education. Justice Douglas in 1952 in *Zorach v. Clauson* said: “We are a religious people whose institutions presuppose a Supreme Being. When the state encourages religious instruction it follows the best of our tradition.” In *Abington v. Schemp* in 1964, Justice Clark said, “Education is not complete without a study of the history of religion and its relationship to the advancement of civilization.” Justice Goldberg said,

“The Court would recognize the propriety of teaching about religion, as distinguished from the teaching of religion in the public schools.”

In a 1981 book, *Freedom and Federalism*, about powers reserved to the states by the Bill of Rights, Felix Morley said that the Constitution reflects the fundamental natural law of enduring moral values without which civilization would be impossible. He considers maintenance of our Federal Republic a moral issue which depends as much on churches and synagogues as on legislatures and law courts.