

CHAPTER 10

A WELCOME PIETY

“We have become accustomed to writing nobly of American ideals without either the historical accuracy or the common candor of recognizing that these ideals grew largely out of a mind and conscience that believed in God and in some eternal standards.” (President Howard Lowry, College of Wooster, Ohio, as quoted by William F. Buckley in *God and Man at Yale*.)

Despite denials by some modern academics of the role of religion in the lives and political philosophies of our national patriarchs, the documented history of that era clearly suggests that religious faith was, indeed, an essential, constructive and welcome component of their collective new model of freedom.

Some viewed faith as a spiritual agent responsible for personal moral strength, courage and selfless community life. Others valued religion for its practical contributions to a stable and prosperous society.

The Judeo-Christian faith was rightly regarded by most founding fathers as a key architect of social liberties and governmental constraints based on universally respected religious teachings. Love, humility, patience, peace, mutual respect, hard work, empathy for the less fortunate, loyalty, sacrificial sharing—these and many other humane qualities were preached and promoted by ancient practitioners of the faith our forefathers inherited and largely embraced.

While they may have differed with one another on particular biblical doctrines, theoretical nuances or even key theological distinctions, the founders undoubtedly shared in common a steadfast belief in religious faith as a key element of their American vision and a welcome deterrent to civil and political anarchy.

The following words suggest convincing evidence of that reality.

DAY 108

JOHN ADAMS

"The second day of July, 1776, will be the most memorable epoch in the history of America. I am apt to believe that it will be celebrated by succeeding generations as the great Anniversary Festival. It ought to be commemorated, as the Day of Deliverance, by solemn acts of devotion to God Almighty.

To Abigail Adams, July 3, 1776 (The Declaration of Independence was approved on July 2 and ratified on July 4, 1776)

Today Mr. Adams might write:

July 2, 1776 will be regarded as the most exceptional date in America's history. I fully expect that our descendants will celebrate America's birthday party on this date. It should be commemorated as America's "Day of Freedom," with sincere acts of worship to Almighty God.

DAY 109

BENJAMIN RUSH

"[T]he only foundation for a useful education in a republic is to be laid in religion. Without this there can be no virtue, and without virtue there can be no liberty, and liberty is the object and life of all republican governments."

Essay, "On the Mode of Education Proper in a Republic," 1806

Today Dr. Rush might write:

Only religious faith can form the basis of an effective education system in a democratic republic. If you don't have religion, virtue can't grow; if virtue doesn't grow you can't have freedom—and freedom is the whole point and purpose of every republican government.

DAY 110

THOMAS JEFFERSON

"God, who gave us life, gave us liberty. Can the liberties of a nation be secure when we have removed a conviction that these liberties are the gift of God? God is just, but His justice cannot sleep forever."

To George Washington, 1786

Today Ambassador Jefferson might write:

The same God that gave us life also gave us freedom. But, how can a nation's freedom remain safe when we've taken away the certainty that our freedom is a gift to us from God? God's justice is fair but we can't expect His justice to stay asleep for long.

DAY 111

GEORGE WASHINGTON

"While we are zealously performing the duties of good citizens and soldiers we certainly ought not to be inattentive to the higher duties of religion. To the distinguished character of 'Patriot,' it should be our highest glory to add the more distinguished character of 'Christian.'"

General Orders to troops at Valley Forge, May 2, 1778

Today General Washington might write:

While we enthusiastically work to meet our obligations as good citizens and soldiers we can't ignore our even more sacred responsibilities as men of faith. To be known as patriots is an honor; to be known as Christians is noble.

DAY 112

BENJAMIN FRANKLIN

"If men are so wicked with religion as we now see them, what would they be if without it."

To an unknown correspondent, December 13, 1757

Today Mr. Franklin might write:

If human beings are so obviously corrupt with the benefit of religion, what would they be like without it?

DAY 113

GEORGE WASHINGTON

"Let it simply be asked where is the security for property, for reputation, for life, if the sense of religious obligation desert the oaths, which are the instruments of investigation in Courts of Justice? And let us with caution indulge the supposition, that morality can be maintained without religion."

Farewell Address, Fraunces Tavern, New York, September 17, 1796

Today President Washington might say:

Just ask yourselves where we could find any trustworthy guarantee of property, reputation and life if those who swear an oath no longer sensed a sacred duty before God to tell the truth?

After all, a witness's oath is the only way that Courts of Justice can get at the facts. And let's not kid ourselves—we need to be skeptical of any suggestion that we can maintain honesty without religious faith.