

America's Choice: A Nation Under God or Without God

It is wonderful to be with fellow patriots tonight.

On this memorable day of gratitude, I would like to speak about a critical choice currently facing our country. Will we choose to be a nation under God or without God? This raises a fundamental question, "Did the Founding Fathers coincidentally and conveniently appear on the scene at the same time, or were they raised up by God to establish a nation under God?"

Historian Barbara Tuchman, referring to the Founding Fathers, noted: "It would be invaluable if we could know what produced this burst of talent from a base of only two and a half million inhabitants."

But we do know what produced this burst of talent. It was not a series of random births or genetic aberrations. Rather, it was pursuant to God's master plan for America. The Bible tells us that God "hath determined the times before appointed [meaning when we would come to the earth] and the bounds of their habitation [meaning where we would be born]" (Acts 17:26). And so it was with the Founding Fathers. God sent them forth at a specified time and place to fulfill their divinely appointed mission. And what was that mission? It was to form a government that would establish our God-given rights, including freedom of speech and religion, so we would become a nation under God, not a nation without God.

On this day we honor the Declaration of Independence which sets forth those God-given rights. But in and of itself this Declaration was not sufficient. We needed a document that would not just define these rights but also protect them—hence the Constitution.

William Gladstone, a former British Prime Minister observed, "The American Constitution is the most wonderful work ever struck off at a given time by the brain and purpose of man." James Madison, the Father of the Constitution, reflected upon the hand of God in such a document: "It is impossible for the man of pious reflection not to perceive in it a finger of that Almighty hand which has been so frequently and signally extended to our relief in the critical stages of the revolution."

The Constitution was not just a patchwork of ideas from other nation's charter documents. James Madison spoke of the uniqueness of this document in

the entirety of history: “[The Founding Fathers] reared the fabrics of government which have *no model on the face of the globe.*”

Who then were these Founding Fathers that produced such a remarkable document? Were they heroes or, as some claim, villains? Ted Stewart, a federal judge and author, put this question in its proper light:

“Today, it is common to criticize the founders of America. Judging them by today’s standards of equality and justice they do fail. Some owned slaves, none fought to give women equal rights. Most were wealthy white men. Yes, judging the founders by today’s standards of equality and justice they fail. But there is just one problem with judging them by today’s standards and it is this: but for those imperfect founders and the sacrifices that they made and the instruments of government which they created, there would *be* no current, enlightened standards of equality and justice by which to judge them.”

Judge Stewart is so right. The reason the critics can freely criticize, protest, vote for change, run for office, and exercise freedom of religion or irreligion as they choose is for one reason and one reason only—because the Founding Fathers made it so. We are part of the greatest democracy the world has ever known.

If unwilling to acknowledge the Founding Fathers’ inspired and timely experiment, one must wonder, “Do the critics believe our liberties came about by chance or that they were spawned by evil men?” If so, how do they reconcile such a position with the unerring logic of the Savior, who said, “A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit.” It seems somewhat hypocritical to partake of and enjoy the fruits of liberty today while at the same time criticizing the very tree that produced such fruit—namely, the Founding Fathers.

Some might argue that even without our Founding Fathers, our democracy would have eventually evolved, and therefore they did nothing special. But history would not be kind to such a proposition. At the time of our Founders’ noble experiment, there was nothing like it in the world. For centuries, even millennia of recorded history, there was no comparable democracy that had the breadth of liberties and lasting power of what they created. Theirs was a bold

and ingenious initiative, from which many other countries would subsequently pattern their governments. If nothing else, the burden of proof has shifted to the critics—that the Founders established our democracy is a certainty. That there would have been a similar democracy without them, as claimed by some naysayers, is no more than a speculative possibility *without any historical precedent whatsoever*.

As inspired as the Constitution is, the Founding Fathers repeatedly declared that it could not exist as a viable document unless first and foremost there existed a moral people. John Adams summarized their feelings in these words: *“Our Constitution was made only for a moral and religious People. It is wholly inadequate to the government of any other.”*

Why his reference to religion? Because the Founding Fathers knew that religion was the best catalyst for establishing a moral people. They knew it was a counterbalance to man’s natural selfish interests and desire for power.

Some years ago, Harvard professor Clayton Christensen had a profoundly insightful conversation with a Marxist economist from China who was in Boston on a Fulbright Scholarship. He asked him if he had learned anything that was surprising or unexpected while in the U.S. Without hesitation he replied, “Yes, I had no idea how critical religion is to the functioning of democracy ... democracy works because most people, most of the time, voluntarily choose to obey the law.”

He then added that “Americans followed [the] rules because they had come to believe that they weren’t just accountable to society, they were accountable to God.”

Professor Christensen then expressed concern over what would happen to our democracy if religion were diminished in America and people no longer voluntarily chose to obey the law. He then offered this tragic conclusion, “if you take away religion, you cannot hire enough police.” The Founding Fathers understood this principle—the more the morality and religion, the less the need for government intervention and compulsory enforcement, and thus the greater our liberties.

If God's moral law and religion are not the foundation for our society, then secularism will rapidly and radically replace the void. Since religion is indeed the best vehicle to encourage living God's moral laws, the Founding Fathers demonstrated by their words and actions that religion in general should be encouraged in the public as well as private sector without ever fostering a national religion.

Based on the rationale in the Supreme Court Case—*Town of Greece vs. Galloway*—the Court ruled that freedom of religion can best be determined under the Constitution if we can discover the original intent of the Founding Fathers on the subject, as evidenced by their “historical practices and understandings.” This seems reasonable, as who would know better the intent of the First Amendment than the very men who debated and drafted its language? What then were their feelings and practices concerning the need for religion in the public sector?

First: Religion in Public Education. The Northwest Ordinance, which regulated the western expansion of the United States, was ratified in 1789 by the same Congress that adopted the Constitution. It stated, “*Religion, morality, and knowledge being necessary to good government and the happiness of mankind, schools and the means of education, shall forever be encouraged.*” What did the Founding Fathers say should be encouraged in schools?—religion and morality.

Second: Religion in Government. John Jay, a Founding Father and first chief justice of the Supreme Court, noted, “[It is] the duty of all wise, free, and virtuous governments [to do what?] to countenance and *encourage* virtue and religion.”

Third: Religion in Public Monuments. Numerous public monuments, sanctioned and paid for by the government, make reference to God. For example, Lincoln's Second Inaugural Address, engraved on the wall of the Lincoln Memorial, mentions God fourteen times and references the Bible four times. Does that sound like a government that wanted to remove references to God and the Bible from the public domain?

Fourth: Religious Prayer in the Public Sector. Prayer has been the focus of presidential prayer breakfasts and the traditional beginning of each Congressional session by a clergyman, initiated and sanctioned by whom?—the Founding Fathers.

Fifth: Religion in Government pronouncements and activities. Our currency contains the words “In God We Trust.” Our national anthem makes reference to God. Our pledge of allegiance acknowledges that we are “one nation under God.” All of these evidence government’s encouragement of religion in the public sector.

Sixth: Religion as practiced by Thomas Jefferson in the Public Sector. Thomas Jefferson is often quoted by the secularists for his statement about a “wall of separation between Church and State”—a statement often taken out of context. Jefferson was responding to a letter from the Danbury Baptists, who were concerned that the “free exercise of religion” clause might be interpreted as a government-granted right (and thus subject to change or compromise) rather than a God-given right that could not be changed or compromised under any circumstance.

Based on this concern, Jefferson replied that the free exercise of religion clause was a restoration of man’s “natural rights”—meaning, a right that preexisted government, namely, a God-given right. Accordingly, Jefferson assured the concerned Baptists that there was a wall preventing government from intruding into the free expression of religion, but likewise a wall that prevented the establishment of a national religion. In other words, government was not to prohibit the free exercise of religion in the public sector (except for the establishment of a national religion)—the exact opposite of how many have interpreted the phrase.

Furthermore, if actions speak louder than words, then Jefferson’s actions should evidence his true opinion on the role of religion in the public sector. In his second inaugural address, he invited the audience to “join with [him] in supplications [to God]” for the nation’s well-being. With Franklin, Jefferson proposed a national seal with these words: “God, or Providence, has favored our undertakings,” knowing that such seal would become a public symbol. In addition, Jefferson, as well as James Madison, attended church services—where? Of all places—in the Capitol building—one of the most visible of government buildings.

These actions clearly condoned religious worship in public settings. No wonder Supreme Court Justice William Rehnquist opined: “The ‘wall of separation between church and state’ is *a metaphor based on bad history*, a metaphor which has proved useless as a guide to judging. It should be frankly and explicitly abandoned.”

The history of the Founding Fathers is clear and unmistakable—they encouraged religion in the public sector because it was the best means to promote morality, and

without a moral people they knew that the Constitution could not survive as a viable instrument.

I love America. I honor and respect our Founding Fathers who made incredible sacrifices to establish and preserve the liberties we so abundantly enjoy. I revere the American flag and the ideals for which it stands. I cherish the times I can pledge allegiance or sing the “Star-Spangled Banner.” There is a sacred spirit that accompanies these symbols and activities—Why? because they are divinely inspired. I acknowledge and express gratitude to God for his merciful hand in the origin and destiny of our nation.

It is now our choice and America’s choice to continue the legacy of our Founding Fathers or to cast it aside—to be a nation under God or without God. Hopefully each of us might declare, “As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord” (Joshua 24:15). Then we will be entitled to the promise of the psalmist: “Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord” (Ps. 33:12). In His Holy name, Amen.