

George Washington and Religion

Kerby Anderson presents a compelling argument for the view that George Washington was a devoted Christian rather than a deist. He points to Washington's insistence on the importance of services for his soldiers, his personal church attendance, his prayer life and his commitment to the spiritual upbringing of his godchildren.

Background

What was George Washington's view of religion and in particular of Christianity? The historical perspective used to be that Washington was a Christian and orthodox in most of his beliefs. But the modern view has been that he was either a lukewarm Anglican or more likely a Deist.



I want to look at some new research that argues for the traditional view and against the modern view of George Washington's religion. One book is *Washington's God: Religion, Liberty, and the Father of our Country*.^[1] It is written by Michael Novak (American Enterprise Institute and winner of the Templeton Award) and Jana Novak. Another book, written by Peter Lillback with Jerry Newcombe, is *George Washington's Sacred Fire*.^[2]

George Washington was born into a Virginia family of moderate wealth and was exposed to various religious activities: lessons in religion, regular prayer, Sunday school attendance, and reverence for God. His mother had a daily ritual of retiring with a book of religious readings.

By the time he was a teenager, Washington had already assumed serious responsibilities as a professional surveyor and then

as a major in the Virginia militia. His adventures in the wild lands gave him invaluable lessons about the military, Indians, and the British. Years later in a speech to the Delaware chiefs, Washington said, "You do well to wish to learn our arts and ways of life, and above all, the religion of Jesus Christ. These will make you a greater and happier people than you are."[\[3\]](#)

He studied the Bible as well as the writings of ancient heroes. The busts and portraits at Mount Vernon demonstrate this. There are busts of Alexander the Great, Julius Caesar, Charles XII of Sweden, and Frederick II of Prussia. In the dining room are portraits of the Virgin Mary and St. John.

Washington's own stepgranddaughter "Nelly" Custis saw him as a religious man. She wrote this to one of Washington's early biographers:

It was his custom to retire to his library at nine or ten o'clock, where he remained an hour before he went to his chamber. He always rose before the sun, and remained in his library until called to breakfast. I never witnessed his private devotions. I never inquired about them. I should have thought it the greatest heresy to doubt his firm belief in Christianity. His life, his writings, prove that he was a Christian. He was not one of those who act or pray, "that they may be seen of men." He communed with his God in secret.[\[4\]](#)

In what follows we will look at the evidence for George Washington's faith as it surfaced in his letters and actions as general and president.

Deism vs. Christianity

Pick up a book about George Washington written during the nineteenth century, and you will probably see that he is described as being a Christian. However, if you pick up a book

written in the last seventy years, it will describe him as a Deist. Why the change?

The turning point seems to be a study by historian Paul F. Boller, Jr. entitled *George Washington and Religion*. His conclusion can be summarized in a single sentence: To the “unbiased observer” George Washington appears as a Deist, not a devout Christian.^{5} Most historians since Boller accepted this idea and were less likely to assert that Washington was a Christian.

What do we mean by “Deism”? Deism is the belief that God is merely a watchmaker God who started the universe but is not involved in the affairs of humans and human history. One definition of Deism is that “There is no special providence; no miracles or other divine interventions intrude upon the lawful natural order.”^{6}

Was George Washington a Deist? He was not. It is worth noting that even historian Paul Boller admitted that religion was important to Washington as a leader. Boller writes, “he saw to it that divine services were performed by the chaplains as regularly as possible on the Sabbath for the soldiers under his command.”^{7} We might reasonably ask, Why would chaplains be important to a Deist?

Boller even admits there are testimonials of Washington’s church attendance. This is important since many historians even go further than Boller and assert that Washington did not even attend church as a mature adult.

Michael Novak admits that some of the names Washington often used for God *sound* Deist, but that does not mean that he was a Deist. In fact, his prayers for God’s action were just the opposite of what you might hear from a Deist. Washington believed God favored the cause of liberty and should be beseeched to “interpose” his action on behalf of the Americans. He called for public thanksgiving for the many ways

in which Americans experienced God's hand in key events in our history.

Washington used more than eighty terms to refer to God, among them: Almighty God, Creator, Divine Goodness, Father of all mercies, and Lord of Hosts. The most common term he used in his writings and speeches was "Providence." When he did so, he used the masculine personal pronoun "he." Washington never refers directly to God as an "it," as he does occasionally with Providence. God is personal.[{8}](#)

If we look at the history of the eighteenth century, there were many with orthodox religious beliefs who sometimes used the philosophical language of the enlightenment. Washington was a Christian, even though he often used terms for God associated with Deists.

A Religious Nation Goes to War

There has been some dispute about how religious America was during the Revolutionary War. There was a shortage of churches and clergy (especially along the paths of westward migration). But we should also remember that this War of Independence followed the First Great Awakening.

At the first meeting of the Continental Congress in Philadelphia (September 1774), the first motion from the floor was for prayer to seek guidance from God. But there was resistance, not because of the prayer, but because of the theological disagreements among the members (Anabaptist, Quakers, Congregationalists, Episcopalians, Presbyterians). Sam Adams settled the dispute by saying he was no bigot and could pray along with any minister as long as he was a patriot.[{9}](#) I have in my office a picture of a painting showing George Washington praying with men like Patrick Henry, John Jay, and Richard Henry Lee.

At the second meeting, they proposed that Washington be

appointed commander in chief of the Continental Army. He did not think he was equal to the command but accepted it. He wrote his wife, "I shall rely, therefore, confidently on that Providence, which has heretofore preserved and been bountiful to me, not doubting but that I shall return safe to you in the fall."[{10}](#) At the time, Washington was the only man on the continent in uniform since no Continental Army yet existed. To the British, he was the supreme traitor, in open rebellion to the King. His neck was at risk, and the American independence depended on him.

One event that George Washington believed showed God's providence was the Battle of Long Island in 1776. Washington and his men were trapped on Brooklyn Heights, Long Island. The British were poised to crush the American army the next day and that would have been the end of the rebellion. Washington planned a bold move and began evacuating his troops under the cover of darkness using everything from fishing vessels to rowboats. But there was not enough time to accomplish the task. When morning came, the fog of night remained and only lifted in time for the British to see the last American boat crossing the East River beyond the reach of their guns. You can read more about this miraculous event in Michael Novak's book, *On Two Wings: Humble Faith and Common Sense at the American Founding*.[{11}](#)

Washington also required chaplains for the Continental Army, and personally took time for prayer. He forbade his troops under pain of death from uttering blasphemies, even profanity. He called upon them to conduct themselves as Christian soldiers because the people demanded it.[{12}](#)

Washington's actions during the Revolutionary War demonstrate his Christian character.

First in War and First in Peace

In his eulogy for George Washington, Henry Lee said he was "First in war, first in peace, and first in the hearts of his countrymen." We could also say the Washington demonstrated Christian character both in war and in peace.

While fulfilling his duties as general, he came to be known as a "nursing father." This is a biblical phrase (Num. 11:12, Is. 49:23 KJV) that appears in many of the tributes to Washington after his death. He brought together very diverse groups to fight the Revolutionary War by bridging ethnic and social divisions. This ranged from the regiment from Marblehead, Massachusetts (that included men of mixed race, blacks, and Indians), to the Virginian and southern aristocrats to the yeomen in hunting shirts from western Virginia.

One of his orders stated that "All chaplains are to perform divine service tomorrow, and on every succeeding Sunday. . . . The commander in chief expects an exact compliance with this order, and that it be observed in future as an invariable rule of practice—and every neglect will be consider not only a breach of orders, but a disregard to decency, virtue and religion."[13](#)

Washington grew even more explicit as the war dragged on: "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 a Christian."[14](#)

Washington lost a great deal of money during the war by paying for things out of his own pocket and by refusing a salary. He happily returned to Mount Vernon and spent happy years with his wife. But the constitutional convention in 1787 brought him to elective office. He was elected as president by unanimous vote in 1789.

In his inaugural address, Washington said, "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."

He issued a thanksgiving proclamation in 1789 in which he asserted "the duty of all nations" in regard to God. His thanksgiving proclamation of 1795 proclaims there are signs of "Divine beneficence" in the world. And in his farewell address, he reminded Americans that "Of all the dispositions and habits which lead to political prosperity, Religion and Morality are indispensable supports."

Washington demonstrated Christian character in war and in peace.

Washington as Christian: Pro and Con

Let's summarize the arguments historians make about Washington's religious faith. Those who believe that George Washington was a Deist and not a Christian usually make the following observations.

First, Washington never took communion at Sunday services. Second, he refused to declare his specific beliefs in public. Third, he rarely used the name of Jesus Christ in private correspondence and in public utterances. Finally, while he believed in God and had an awareness of Providence in his life, it all seems more like a Greek or Roman view of fate.

Michael Novak's response to these observations is helpful. "All these objections have a grain of truth in them. Still, they are consistent with Washington's being a serious Christian who believed that he had a public vocation that required some tact regarding his private confessional life."[\[15\]](#) Novak adds:

It is not at all unusual for public men in pluralistic American life to maintain a notable reserve about their private convictions. They do not burden the public with declarations of their deepest beliefs, whose general force they trust their actions will sufficiently reveal. In the public forum, they happily give to Caesar what is Caesar's and in the private forum, to God what is God's. [\[16\]](#)

What are some of the reasons to believe Washington was a Christian? First, he religiously observed the Sabbath as a day of rest and frequently attended church services on that day. Second, many report that Washington reserved time for private prayer. Third, Washington saved many of the dozens of sermons sent to him by clergymen, and read some of them aloud to his wife.

Fourth, Washington hung paintings of the Virgin Mary and St. John in places of honor in his dining room in Mount Vernon. Fifth, the chaplains who served under him during the long years of the Revolutionary War believed Washington was a Christian. Sixth, Washington (unlike Thomas Jefferson) was never accused by the press or his opponents of not being a Christian.

It is also worth noting that, unlike Jefferson, Washington agreed to be a godparent for at least eight children. This was far from a casual commitment since it required the godparents to agree to help insure that a child was raised in the Christian faith. Washington not only agreed to be a godparent, but presented his godsons and goddaughters with Bibles and prayer books.

George Washington was not a Deist who believed in a "watchmaker God." He was a Christian and demonstrated that Christian character throughout his life.

Notes

1. Michael Novak and Jana Novak, *Washington's God: Religion,*

- Liberty, and the Father of our Country* (NY: Basic Books, 2006).
2. Peter Lillback, with Jerry Newcombe, *George Washington's Sacred Fire* (Bryn Mawr, PA: Providence Forum Press, 2006).
 3. Novak, *Washington's God*, 93.
 4. Ibid., 136.
 5. Lillback, *Sacred Fire*, 28.
 6. Novak, *Washington's God*, 110.
 7. Lillback, *Sacred Fire*, 28.
 8. Ibid., 577.
 9. Novak, *Washington's God*, 123.
 10. Ibid, 64.
 11. Michael Novak, *On Two Wings: Humble Faith and Common Sense at the American Founding* (San Francisco: Encounter, 2002).
 12. Novak, *Washington's God*, 30-31.
 13. Ibid., 90.
 14. Ibid.
 15. Ibid., 219.
 16. Ibid., 219-220.

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“There is No Proof Your Pathetic Manmade God Ever Lived”

There is not one proof that Jesus ever lived. Everything you quoted on your stupid page was all hearsay that was passed along by g*dd*mn fools. Yeshu was real and lived one hundred years before your concocted fake savior. There was jesus of gamala who was another savior. There was jesus bar kocba, yet

another savior. Josephus never wrote that passage about jesus and only a f***ing fool would believe it was anything other than another 'christian' lie and forgery. Josephus was a Jew and would have been stoned to death for such a statement. You people lie like dogs and couldn't tell the truth if your lives depended on it. There were at least 50 well known authors/historians during the era that your pathetic manmade god was said to have lived yet not one of them bothered to write one word about him. Hell, man don't you think with all his miracles and dead people popping out of graves during his crucifixion that someone might sit up and take notice? There are no people on this planet meaner or more insane than Christians. Also, our Founders did not found this nation on your sickening repulsive deadly religion and most of them hated it. History is completely silent on all the major bible characters, including the child raping killer Moses and the pimp Abraham. Thank goodness, for you couldn't find a more disgusting and perverted bunch if you spent your life looking. Yahweh was a real b*stard that I wouldn't allow in my neighborhood. Why don't you try the truth for a change?

I am sorry that our material has caused you to respond with such negative emotion.

But if I may, I'd like to engage some of your points.

There is not one proof that jesus ever lived. Everything you quoted on your stupid page was all hearsay that was passed along by g*dd*mn fools.

This is a fairly broad generalization. Could you refer to something specific so we can get a better idea of what you object to most?

Yeshu was real and lived one hundred years before your concocted fake savior. There was jesus of gamala who was another savior. There was jesus bar kocba, yet another savior.

Do you have some documentation for these various Jesus characters so we can research ourselves? This is a commonly held notion but the documentation we often see is not reliable.

Josephus never wrote that passage about Jesus and only a fing fool would believe it was anything other than another 'christian' lie and forgery. Josephus was a Jew and would have been stoned to death for such a statement.***

Concerning Josephus, Michael [Gleghorn] clearly indicates that the second passage he refers to by Josephus was likely edited by a Christian scholar to include the references to Jesus as the Christ and other messianic phrases. Most scholars regard the rest of the passage as genuine. www.probe.org/ancient-evidence-for-jesus-from-non-christian-sources/.

You people lie like dogs and couldn't tell the truth if your lives depended on it. There were at least 50 well known authors/historians during the era that your pathetic manmade god was said to have lived yet not one of them bothered to write one word about him.

Can you provide us a list of a few of these authors/historians? You have to consider that any news did not travel very far or very fast in that era. Many of Jesus' miracles would be beyond belief for many and would have just been dismissed. It makes sense therefore, that Jesus was noted a few decades later when the number of his followers continued to grow despite severe persecution.

Hell, man don't you think with all his miracles and dead people popping out of graves during his crucifixion that someone might sit up and take notice? There are no people on this planet meaner or more insane than Christians. Also, our Founders did not found this nation on your sickening repulsive deadly religion and most of them hated it.

I agree with you to a degree. Jefferson and Franklin were likely [deists](#) who used the Bible when it suited them. [George Washington](#) however, seems to be a genuine Christian. Do you have sources who indicate otherwise?

History is completely silent on all the major bible characters, including the child raping killer moses and the pimp abraham.

Well, that's not exactly true. Roman and Jewish historians make reference to Jesus and Christians in the first century. Also a stone from around 800BC contained the phrase "House of David." Babylonian records refer to the appropriate kings of Judah in the early years of the Babylonian captivity, both those left in Jerusalem and those taken to Babylon. Nebuchadnezzar is real as are the accounts of various Assyrian kings mentioned in Chronicles and Kings. The Babylonian and Persian kings are accurately reflected in Daniel. It's quite unlikely to find any archeological references to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. They were nomadic herders who didn't keep any history.

Thank goodness, for you couldn't find a more disgusting and perverted bunch if you spent your life looking. Yahweh was a real b*stard that I wouldn't allow in my neighborhood. Why don't you try the truth for a change?

We are looking for the truth and confidently believe we have found it in Jesus Christ of Nazareth. I suspect that something else besides your perceived lack of evidence is driving the strength of your rejection. Whatever that may be, I am truly sorry that some Christian or group of Christians have grievously harmed you in some way in the past. No true Christians ever claim to be perfect or to have exhaustive knowledge. But we have seen and experienced the truth in ways that are quite convincing.

Respectfully,

Raymond G. Bohlin, Ph.D.

<https://sites.google.com/site/yahwehelohiym/sons-of-god/the-boundaries-of-the-nations>

Yahweh was just a hateful petty tribal god and one of the many sons of el elyon, the most high god, and your bible proves it but you people do not understand what the hell you read and keep the lies going.

I'm afraid your source is a bit behind the times. While some of what he says is correct, that some names of God go back to the Ugaritic language, his/her reliance on the Documentary Hypothesis is outdated. www.biblearchaeology.org/post/2010/09/24/the-documentary-hypothesis.aspx#Article

"Sons of God" appears elsewhere in the Old Testament, in Genesis 6:2,4 and Job 38:7. In each case it is either a reference to men who followed God (Genesis 6) or angels (Job 38). Nothing new or damaging here.

If you just look a little further in the Old Testament you find Isaiah saying;

I am the Lord, I have no peer,
there is no God but me.

I arm you for battle, even though you do not recognize me.
I do this so people will recognize from east to west
that there is no God but me;

I am the Lord, I have no peer.

Remember what I accomplished in antiquity!

Truly I am God, I have no peer;

I am God, and there is none like me (45:5-9)

The God of the Bible is a monotheistic God throughout. And we do have a nearly complete Book of Isaiah from the [Dead Sea Scrolls](#) and the only difference with the Masoretic text of AD

900 is a few spelling changes.

One item at a time.

www.stephenjaygould.org/ctrl/buckner_ncn.html

I also advise you to read *Liars for Jesus* and Thomas Paine's *The Age of Reason*. Paine helped word our Constitution and Bill of Rights and named this country The United States of America. Few Christians will speak about his book because it cannot be refuted intelligently. His part 3 proves there are NO OT prophecies of jesus and makes jackasses of anyone who says otherwise. Can you people read? Christians don't follow the doctrine of jesus, they follow the apostate liar paul. Read the *Egyptian Book of the Dead* to find the Lord's Prayer and the so-called ten commandments along with many other items the murdering jews (who are not jews but are liars from the synagogue of satan) stole and created their rotten religion. Much of what they stole was from the ancient Sumerians who lived about 1000 years before the hyksos came to be known as Hebrews. Their epic of creation was used by these maggots to create the most bloody and perverted religion this world has known, until Christians showed up.

Hmmm. I don't recall claiming that the U.S. is a Christian nation. You won't find that anywhere on our website. But do read from George Washington's farewell address:

Of all the dispositions and habits, which lead to political prosperity, Religion and Morality are indispensable supports. In vain would that man claim the tribute of Patriotism, who should labor to subvert these great pillars of human happiness, these firmest props of the duties of Men and Citizens. The mere Politician, equally with the pious man, ought to respect and to cherish them. A volume could not trace all their connexions with private and public felicity. 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. Whatever may be conceded to the influence of refined education on minds of peculiar structure, reason and experience both forbid us to expect, that national morality can prevail in exclusion of religious principle.

Clearly he doesn't say what religion, but there was little else in America at that time except for different forms of Christianity. Even if he only means a loose form of deism, he clearly questions that government can function for long without it.

So you really want to use Thomas Paine as your source for the conviction that there are no OT prophecies about Jesus? There is so much we didn't know in the late 18th century. Archaeology was barely a fledgling science. So many manuscripts were unknown. We have thousands of OT and NT manuscripts today that Paine had no knowledge of whatsoever. Isaiah 52:13 through 53:12 is about as clear a prophecy of Jesus that you will find. And remember we have a complete copy of Isaiah from the Dead Sea Scrolls, well before Jesus lived.

Liars for Jesus looks like an interesting book. I have no doubt there has been sloppy scholarship on the part of many in the religious right. At Probe Ministries we make every effort to research with integrity and write with a biblical reasonableness and respect for those we disagree with.

Two of the foremost and revered Jewish Archaeologists in Israel have proven the OT is a lie but preachers will never tell that. They are greedy dogs and deceivers.
www.hiddenmysteries.org/mysteries/history/jehovah.html

I am familiar with the archaeologists you mention and their conclusions are quite controversial. Archaeology comes with a need for publicity to help donors and foundations continue your funding. Making such an outrageous claim would certainly get headlines and keep the dollars flowing.

I'm not surprised that there are "official" documents declaring that YHWH had Ashterah as a consort. The Jewish histories of the Bible are filled with condemnation for continuing to worship in the high places and using Ashterah poles for fertility. They did indeed worship many gods at times. The Bible doesn't hide that.

But again, this document refers to the Documentary Hypothesis and the P source. This has been debunked for decades but is still used in many secular universities because it fits their predetermined conclusions about biblical texts.

By the way, you can find documentation for the House of David inscription [here:](http://www.reclaimingthemind.org/blog/category/archaeology/)
www.reclaimingthemind.org/blog/category/archaeology/.

Also we do have the oldest form of writing from Tell Mardikh, the Ebla Tablets. These date to between the 26th and 23rd centuries BCE. There are names, of places, people, and customs similar to those found in Genesis. If Genesis was supposedly written in the 7th century BCE as many claim, these names, places and customs could not be known.

evidenceforchristianity.blogspot.com/2008/11/ebla-tablets-ancient-sumerian.html

Elba Tablets?! Ha, your man was long ago discredited. You must keep up.

www.infidels.org/library/modern/james_still/reliability.html

Everything the so-called jews have or ever had was stolen from

other cultures. It is easy to understand why those horrid creatures have been tossed out of every nation they tried to infiltrate with their money making schemes and corruptions. They were the central bankers our founders hated and tried to keep out of this nation. The Presidents who came against them were assassinated. Jackson managed to survive the attempts they made on his life but they still managed to gain the upper hand again and now the swine damn near own this entire nation. The only method used to gain control of Palestine was more lies. Go figure. You don't have a clue what is even happening in this world and who is in control.

I don't think Mr. Still refutes much of anything about the Ebla Tablets. He admits that Pettinato is a Sumerologist and therefore will have skills of translation. The only quibble Mr. Still seems to have with Pettinato is his claim to find the name Yah, similar to Yahweh. OK fine, he just offers another opinion. He says nothing about the names of the cities on the plain. He lost almost all credibility with me in his opening three paragraphs, claiming that Christianity is just a faith and mystery religion according to Paul. Then says Josh McDowell's theology is in tension with this since McDowell wants an inerrant scripture based on facts. Sorry, I don't see any tension at all. Paul refers to actual events in his letters, things that happened to him and things he learned from the apostles. Paul is the one in 1 Corinthians 15 who puts a lot of weight on the historical resurrection. There's no tension. He's making mountains out of ant hills.

His account of how the gospels came about is some shoddy tying together of weird threads. The so-called "Q" document does not exist. It is only supposed to exist because it fits this model. He refers to some of the church fathers to back up some of his points but not to the early tradition among those same church fathers that Mark was written by Mark from Peter's recollections. Luke is indeed an historian. Still's confusion over the middle chapters is not worth responding to. Most

conservative scholars now suggest that all the gospels were written before AD 70 because none of them mention the destruction of Jerusalem and the Jewish temple when Jesus specifically predicts this in all three synoptic gospels. It would be easy to add this as an editorial proof that Jesus got it right. Especially if these gospels were supposedly cobbled together from sayings and other recollections.

Last, I really liked the part about Jesus waving a magic wand over Lazarus in the catacombs indicating they saw him as a magician. I haven't actually seen the picture though I looked for one. Found a few articles stating the same but no documentation. I suspect that it's another Everest out of an ant hill.

I'm still working on the Thomas Paine refutation of messianic prophecies. Not terribly impressed though. As suspected some of his objections no longer hold up. He also assumes away the supernatural so when Isaiah refers to the Persian Cyrus who wasn't even born in Isaiah's time, he uses that to say that obviously Isaiah was written after 500 BCE. It's bad form to assume away what you are trying to discredit.

Funny how you keep claiming that men like Paine just assume things while he at least existed and that is more than you can say about your bible supermen. It would be one thing to have one of these paragons of virtue (not) to disappear but to have the great majority of them to vaporize from all historical records should wake up even the village idiot. I guess when a man makes his living off conning the sheeple he will stand by his deception until the end. Religion is now a trillion dollar a year BUSINESS. That is like waiting for a used car salesman to tell the buyer to be ware, there may be something wrong with his intended purchase. If Christians really claim the bible is the word of god they must really be confused about what the book says since there are over 3000 sects of

Christianity and they disagree on many points. If god is not the author of confusion he sure messed up with his only written word to man. Not only is the bible a mess of contradictions and falsehoods, it is by far the filthiest and bloodiest book ever penned by man. You claim the Creator of this entire world had any part of that filth and to me that is where blasphemy truly is found. You are obviously rooted in lies or you are just taking advantage of brainwashed people to make a living. Either way, you will never open your eyes. Enjoy the holiday of greed and materialism with the rest of the Christian world.

Your hatred blinds you at least as much as you would say my faith blinds me.

I will readily admit that much that passes for Christianity indeed is little more than business. But I would say you are guilty of following the old adage of throwing out the baby with the bathwater. We're not all liars, cheats and frauds.

Jesus did/does exist.

He indeed fulfilled dozens of OT prophecies about the Messiah.

Performed signs and miracles beyond the plain ability of a simple magician, control over nature that frightened even his own disciples, raised a man dead for four days, healed a man blind from birth.

He died for my sins and for yours.

His historical resurrection proved his claims of deity and opened the door for all who call Him Lord and believe that God raised him from the dead, will be saved. Ten of eleven disciples died a martyr's death, believing all that they saw and heard was real.

You are following the imaginations of those who are guilty of seeking to destroy what they simply don't like. Besides, as

the evolutionary biologist J.B.S. Haldane said, "If my brain is simply composed of atoms, and my thoughts are simply the interaction of atoms in my brain, I have no reason to suppose my brain to be composed of atoms" (loose paraphrase). In a fully materialistic universe, there is no truth, no way to truly know what is real; truth is simply what works, for the moment. Truth is indeed relative and ultimately unknowable. So why bother with your crusade? If some choose to believe a benevolent fiction, what do you care? Obviously you do care, you believe some things to be true and false. I only observe that you need to borrow from a Christian worldview to do so.

Pascal's wager is still worth considering; if I am wrong and death is the end and there is no afterlife, I've lost nothing. I've lived a good life, loved my wife and kids, kind to my neighbors, supported an Indian boy, and help give others hope. If you're wrong, you lose everything.

I will enjoy the celebration of the Incarnation that the now secular culture of the USA has turned into a necessary economic ritual. My family will enjoy a very modest Christmas.

I hope you can enjoy some time with friends or family during this end of year.

Respectfully,

Dr. Ray Bohlin

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M.I.T. Dean's Pants on Fire

George Washington, call your agent. America needs your "I cannot tell a lie" message. A national lecture circuit slot just became available.

A popular dean at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology has resigned after admitting resume padding and living a 28-year lie. Ouch. Her sad story is filled with irony—lots of fresh material for your speeches.

Marilee Jones says, "I have resigned as MIT's Dean of Admissions because very regrettably, I misled the Institute about my academic credentials. I misrepresented my academic degrees when I first applied to MIT 28 years ago and did not have the courage to correct my resume when I applied for my current job or at any time since.

"I am deeply sorry for this," she continues, "and for disappointing so many in the MIT community and beyond who supported me, believed in me, and who have given me extraordinary opportunities." [{1}](#)

The Boston Globe reports that her resume claimed degrees from Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute and two other New York institutions, but that she has degrees from none of them. RPI says she attended as a part-time student for about nine months but earned no degree. The other two say they have no record of her attending. [{2}](#)

Ironically, as *The New York Times* notes, Jones was widely admired, almost revered, for her humor, outspokenness and common sense. [{3}](#) She had won prestigious MIT awards [{4}](#) and earned a national reputation as a champion for reducing college admissions pressure on students and parents.

It gets worse. She coauthored the book, *Less Stress, More Success: A New Approach to Guiding Your Teen Through College*

Admissions and Beyond. On integrity, it says, “Holding integrity is sometimes very hard to do because the temptation may be to cheat or cut corners. But just remember that what goes around comes around, meaning that life has a funny way of giving back what you put out.” {5}

Doesn't it.

Lots of people lie. Some get caught. The US military reportedly distorted Pat Tillman's and Jessica Lynch's stories, allegedly to boost war efforts. Enron executives cooked books for personal gain.

Employees falsify expense accounts or call in sick. Kids disavow breaking windows. Adults tell fish stories. Wandering spouses work late at the office.

Distorting the truth can bring esteem, opportunity, money, thrills. One innocent lie can require cover-ups. Soon the web becomes complex.

We've all made mistakes. As a teen, I valued my reputation for honesty but made some poor choices, lied about them, and nearly was expelled from school. My confronters forgave me and offered me another chance. The episode helped point me to personal faith. I learned that Moses, the great Jewish liberator, warned his compatriots against violating divine prescription: “Be sure your sin will find you out.”{6}

Mine found me out. Marilee Jones deceit found her out, as readers from *The Times* of London to *The Times of India* now know.

Jones likely needs privacy—as she has requested—plus good friends, close counsel, and lots of prayers. Perhaps, after recovery, she can help others resist similar temptations.

So, President Washington, what lessons from this episode will your lecture tour emphasize? How about these: Tell the truth.

It may be painful but it's the right thing to do. It's easier to remember. You'll sleep better and enhance society.

Pack your saddle bags, Mr. President. Crank up the PowerPoint. Be sure to include a Pinocchio cartoon and some slides of cherry trees.

Oh, but sir, we understand that the cherry tree story might be mere legend. We suggest you explain that to your audiences and give plenty of real-life illustrations.

Notes

1. Statement by Marilee Jones, MIT News, April 26, 2007, web.mit.edu/newsoffice/2007/admissions-jones.html, accessed April 27, 2007.
2. Marcella Bombardieri and Tracy Jan, MIT dean quits over fabricated credentials, *The Boston Globe*, April 27, 2007, tinyurl.com/3ynyhv, accessed April 27, 2007.
3. Tamar Lewin, "Dean at M.I.T. Resigns, Ending a 28-Year Lie," *The New York Times*, April 27, 2007, www.nytimes.com/2007/04/27/us/27mit.html?hp, accessed April 27, 2007.
4. MIT Admissions Web site profile, www.mitadmissions.org/Marilee.shtml, accessed April 27, 2007.
5. Lewin, loc. cit.
6. Numbers 32:23 NASB.

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American Government and

Christianity – A Biblical Worldview Perspective

Kerby Anderson looks at how a Christian, biblical framework operated as a critical force in establishing our constitution and governmental system. The founders views on the nature of man and the role of government were derived from their biblical foundation.

America's Christian Roots

The founding of this country as well as the framing of the key political documents rests upon a Christian foundation. That doesn't necessarily mean that the United States is a Christian nation, although some framers used that term. But it does mean that the foundations of this republic presuppose a Christian view of human nature and God's providence.

In previous articles we have discussed "The Christian Roots of the Declaration and Constitution" [on the Web as ["The Declaration and the Constitution: Their Christian Roots"](#)] and provided an overview of the books [On Two Wings](#) and [One Nation Under God](#). Our focus in this article will be to pull together many of the themes of these resources and combine them with additional facts and quotes from the founders.

First, what was the perspective of the founders of America? Consider some of these famous quotes.

John Adams was the second president of the United States. He saw the need for religious values to provide the moral base line for society. He stated in a letter to the officers of the First Brigade of the Third Division of the Militia of Massachusetts:

We have no government armed with power capable of contending with human passions unbridled by morality and religion.

Avarice, ambition, revenge, or gallantry, would break the strongest cords of our Constitution as a whale goes through a net. Our Constitution was made only for a moral and religious people. It is wholly inadequate to the government of any other. {1}

In fact, John Adams wasn't the only founding father to talk about the importance of religious values. Consider this statement from George Washington during his Farewell Address:

And let us with caution indulge the supposition, that morality can be maintained without religion. Whatever may be conceded to the influence of refined education on minds of peculiar structure, reason and experience both forbid us to expect that national morality can prevail in exclusion of religious principle. {2}

Two hundred years after the establishment of the Plymouth colony in 1620, Americans gathered at that site to celebrate its bicentennial. Daniel Webster was the speaker at this 1820 celebration. He reminded those in attendance of this nation's origins:

Let us not forget the religious character of our origin. Our fathers were brought hither by their high veneration for the Christian religion. They journeyed by its light, and labored in its hope. They sought to incorporate its principles with the elements of their society, and to diffuse its influence through all their institutions, civil, political, or literary. {3}

Religion, and especially the Christian religion, was an important foundation to this republic.

Christian Character

It is clear that the framers of this new government believed that the people should elect and support leaders with character and integrity. George Washington expressed this in his Farewell Address when he said, "Of all the dispositions and habits which lead to political prosperity, Religion and Morality are indispensable supports."

Benjamin Rush talked about the religious foundation of the republic that demanded virtuous leadership. He said that, "the only foundation for a useful education in a republic is to be laid on the foundation of 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." [\[4\]](#)

He went on to explain that

A Christian cannot fail of being a republican . . . for every precept of the Gospel inculcates those degrees of humility, self-denial, and brotherly kindness which are directly opposed to the pride of monarchy. . . . A Christian cannot fail of being useful to the republic, for his religion teaches him that no man "liveth to himself." And lastly a Christian cannot fail of being wholly inoffensive, for his religion teaches him in all things to do to others what he would wish, in like circumstances, they should do to him. [\[5\]](#)

Daniel Webster understood the importance of religion, and especially the Christian religion, in this form of government. In his famous Plymouth Rock speech of 1820 he said,

Lastly, our ancestors established their system of government on morality and religious sentiment. Moral habits, they believed, cannot safely be trusted on any other foundation than religious principle, nor any government be secure which is not supported by moral habits. . . . Whatever makes men

good Christians, makes them good citizens.{6}

John Jay was one of the authors of the Federalist Papers and became America's first Supreme Court Justice. He also served as the president of the American Bible Society. He understood the relationship between government and Christian values. He said, "Providence has given to our people the choice of their rulers, and it is the duty, as well as the privilege and interest of our Christian nation to select and prefer Christians for their rulers." {7}

William Penn writing the *Frame of Government* for his new colony said, "Government, like clocks, go from the motion men give them; and as governments are made and moved by men, so by them they are ruined too. Wherefore governments rather depend upon men, than men upon governments. Let men be good, and the government cannot be bad." {8}

The founders believed that good character was vital to the health of the nation.

New Man

Historian C. Gregg Singer traces the line of influence from the seventeenth century to the eighteenth century in his book, *A Theological Interpretation of American History*. He says,

Whether we look at the Puritans and their fellow colonists of the seventeenth century, or their descendants of the eighteenth century, or those who framed the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution, we see that their political programs were the rather clear reflection of a consciously held political philosophy, and that the various political philosophies which emerged among the American people were intimately related to the theological developments which were taking place. . . . A Christian world and life view furnished the basis for this early political thought which guided the American people for nearly two

centuries and whose crowning lay in the writing of the Constitution of 1787.[{9}](#)

Actually, the line of influence extends back even further. Historian Arnold Toynbee, for example, has written that the American Revolution was made possible by American Protestantism. Page Smith, writing in the *Religious Origins of the American Revolution*, cites the influence of the Protestant Reformation. He believes that

The Protestant Reformation produced a new kind of consciousness and a new kind of man. The English Colonies in America, in turn, produced a new unique strain of that consciousness. It thus follows that it is impossible to understand the intellectual and moral forces behind the American Revolution without understanding the role that Protestant Christianity played in shaping the ideals, principles and institutions of colonial America.[{10}](#)

Smith argues that the American Revolution “started, in a sense, when Martin Luther nailed his 95 theses to the church door at Wittenburg.” It received “its theological and philosophical underpinnings from John Calvin’s *Institutes of the Christian Religion* and much of its social theory from the Puritan Revolution of 1640-1660.”[{11}](#)

Most people before the Reformation belonged to classes and social groups which set the boundaries of their worlds and established their identities. The Reformation, according to Smith, changed these perceptions. Luther and Calvin, in a sense, created a re-formed individual in a re-formed world.

Key to this is the doctrine of the priesthood of the believer where each person is “responsible directly to God for his or her own spiritual state... The individuals who formed the new congregations established their own churches, chose their own ministers, and managed their own affairs without reference to

an ecclesiastical hierarchy.”[{12}](#)

These re-formed individuals began to change their world including their view of government and authority.

Declaration of Independence

Let’s look at the Christian influence on the Declaration of Independence. Historian Page Smith points out that Thomas Jefferson was not only influenced by secular philosophers, but was also influenced by the Protestant Reformation. He says,

Jefferson and other secular-minded Americans subscribed to certain propositions about law and authority that had their roots in the Protestant Reformation. It is a scholarly common-place to point out how much Jefferson (and his fellow delegates to the Continental Congress) were influenced by Locke. Without disputing this we would simply add that an older and deeper influence – John Calvin – was of more profound importance.[{13}](#)

Another important influence was William Blackstone. Jefferson drew heavily on the writings of this highly respected jurist. In fact, Blackstone’s *Commentaries on the Laws of England* were among Jefferson’s most favorite books.

In his section on the “Nature of Laws in General,” Blackstone wrote, “as man depends absolutely upon his Maker for everything, it is necessary that he should, in all points, conform to his Maker’s will. This will of his Maker is called the law of nature.”[{14}](#)

In addition to the law of nature, the other source of law is from divine revelation. “The doctrines thus delivered we call the revealed or divine law, and they are to be found only in the Holy Scriptures.” According to Blackstone, all human laws depended either upon the law of nature or upon the law of revelation found in the Bible: “Upon these two foundations,

the law of nature and the law of revelation, depend all human laws.”{15}

Samuel Adams argues in “The Rights of the Colonists” that they had certain rights. “Among the natural Rights of the Colonists are these: First, a Right to Life; second, to Liberty; third, to Property; . . . and in the case of intolerable oppression, civil or religious, to leave the society they belong to, and enter into another. When men enter into society, it is by voluntary consent.”{16} This concept of natural rights also found its way into the Declaration of Independence and provided the justification for the American Revolution.

The Declaration was a bold document, but not a radical one. The colonists did not break with England for “light and transient causes.” They were mindful that they should be “in subjection to governing authorities” which “are established by God” (Rom. 13:1). Yet when they suffered from a “long train of abuses and usurpations,” they believed that “it is the right of the people to alter or abolish [the existing government] and to institute a new government.”

Constitution

The Christian influence on the Declaration is clear. What about the Constitution?

James Madison was the chief architect of the Constitution as well as one of the authors of the *Federalist Papers*. It is important to note that as a youth, he studied under a Scottish Presbyterian, Donald Robertson. Madison gave the credit to Robertson for “all that I have been in life.”{17} Later he was trained in theology at Princeton under the Reverend John Witherspoon. Scholars believe that Witherspoon’s Calvinism (which emphasized the fallen nature of man) was an important source for Madison’s political ideas.{18}

The Constitution was a contract between the people and had its

origins in American history a century earlier:

One of the obvious by-products [of the Reformation] was the notion of a contract entered into by two people or by the members of a community amongst themselves that needed no legal sanctions to make it binding. This concept of the Reformers made possible the formation of contractuals or, as the Puritans called them, "covenanted" groups formed by individuals who signed a covenant or agreement to found a community. The most famous of these covenants was the Mayflower Compact. In it the Pilgrims formed a "civil body politic," and promised to obey the laws their own government might pass. In short, the individual Pilgrim invented on the spot a new community, one that would be ruled by laws of its making. [{19}](#)

Historian Page Smith believes, "The Federal Constitution was in this sense a monument to the reformed consciousness. This new sense of time as potentiality was a vital element in the new consciousness that was to make a revolution and, what was a good deal more difficult, form a new nation." [{20}](#)

Preaching and teaching within the churches provided the justification for the revolution and the establishment of a new nation. Alice Baldwin, writing in *The New England Clergy and the American Revolution*, says,

The teachings of the New England ministers provide one line of unbroken descent. For two generations and more New Englanders had . . . been taught that these rights were sacred and came from God and that to preserve them they had a legal right of resistance and, if necessary a right to . . . alter and abolish governments and by common consent establish new ones. [{21}](#)

Christian ideas were important in the founding of this republic and the framing of our American governmental

institutions. And I believe they are equally important in the maintenance of that republic.

Notes

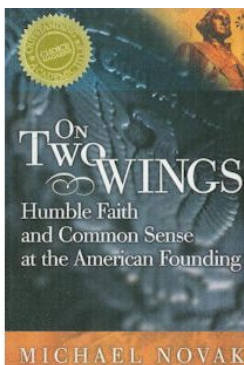
1. John Adams, October 11, 1798, in a letter to the officers of the First Brigade of the Third Division of the Militia of Massachusetts. Charles Francis Adams, ed., *The Works of John Adams – Second President of the United States: with a Life of the Author, Notes, and Illustration* (Boston: Little, Brown, & Co., 1854), Vol. IX, 228-229.
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4. Benjamin Rush, "Thoughts upon the Mode of Education Proper in a Republic," Early American Imprints. *Benjamin Rush, Essays, Literary, Moral and Philosophical* (Philadelphia: Thomas and Samuel F. Bradford, 1798), 8.
5. Ibid.
6. Webster, *The Works of Daniel Webster*, 22ff.
7. John Jay, October 12, 1816, in *The Correspondence and Public Papers of John Jay*, Henry P. Johnston, ed., (New York: G.P Putnam & Sons, 1893; reprinted NY: Burt Franklin, 1970), Vol. IV, 393.
8. William Penn, April 25, 1682, in the preface of his Frame of Government of Pennsylvania. A Collection of Charters and Other Public Acts Relating to the Province of Pennsylvania (Philadelphia: B. Franklin, 1740), 10-12.
9. C. Gregg Singer, *A Theological Interpretation of American History* (Nutley, NJ: The Craig Press, 1964), 284-5.
10. Page Smith, *Religious Origins of the American Revolution* (Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1976), 1.
11. Ibid, 2.

12. Ibid., 3.
13. Ibid, 185.
14. William Blackstone, "Of the Nature of Laws in General," *Commentaries on the Laws of England*, Book 1, Section II.
15. Ibid.
16. Samuel Adams, "The Rights of the Colonists" (Boston, 1772), *The Annals of America*, Vol. II, 217.
17. John Eidsmoe, *Christianity and the Constitution* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1987), 94.
18. James H. Smylie, "Madison and Witherspoon: Theological Roots of American Political Thought," *American Presbyterians*
19. *Smith, Religious Origins*,
20. *Ibid.*, 4
21. Alice M. Baldwin, *The New England Clergy and the American Revolution* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1928), 169.

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On Two Wings

Introduction



Michael Novak has been and continues to be one of the most influential intellectuals of our time. Author of more than thirty books, he has been a professor at Harvard, Stanford, and Notre Dame and was awarded the \$1 million

Templeton Prize for Progress in Religion.

So it is significant that his recent book, *On Two Wings*, documents the Judeo-Christian foundations of this country and disputes the teaching that the American Founders were secular Enlightenment rationalists. Instead, he persuasively argues that they were the creators of a unique American blend of biblical faith, practical reason, and human liberty.

In his preface, Michael Novak says, "Although I have wanted to write this book for some forty years, my own ignorance stood in the way. It took me a long time, time spent searching up many byways and neglected paths, and fighting through a great deal of conventional (but mistaken) wisdom, to learn how many erroneous perceptions I had unconsciously drunk in from public discussion."[1](#)

Novak believes that "most of us grow up these days remarkably ignorant of the hundred men most responsible for leading this country into a War for Independence and writing our nation's Constitution."[2](#)

The way American history has been told for the last century is incomplete. Secular historians have "cut off one of the two wings by which the American eagle flies." The founding generation established a compact with the God of Israel "and relied upon this belief. Their faith is an *indispensable* part of their story."[3](#)

Historical research by a number of scholars documents the significant influence of the Bible on the founders. Two decades ago, Constitutional scholars and political historians (including one of my professors at Georgetown University) assembled 15,000 writings from the Founding Era. They counted 3154 citations in these writings. They found that the two political philosophers most often quoted were Montesquieu and Blackstone. But surprisingly, the reference most quoted was the Bible. It was quoted 34 percent of the time. This was

nearly four times as often as Montesquieu or Blackstone and 12 times more often than John Locke.

While secular historians point to Locke as the source of the ideas embodied in Thomas Jefferson's Declaration of Independence, they usually fail to note the older influence of other authors and the Bible. "Before Locke was even born, the Pilgrims believed in the consent of the governed, social compacts, the dignity of every child of God, and political equality."[{4}](#) By forcing a secular interpretation onto America's founding history, these secular historians ignore the second wing by which the American eagle took flight.

Philosophical Assumptions of the Founders of this Country

First, the Bible was the one book that literate Americans in the 18th century could be expected to know well. Biblical imagery was a central part of American life. For example, Thomas Jefferson suggested as a design for the Seal of the United States a representation of the children of Israel in the wilderness, led by a cloud by day and pillar of fire by night.

Second, the founders believed that time "was created for the *unfolding of human liberty*, for human emancipation. This purpose requires humans to choose for or against building cities worthy of the ideals God sets before them: liberty, justice, equality, self-government, and brotherhood."[{5}](#)

The first paragraph of *The Federalist* describes this important moment with destiny:

It seems to have been reserved to the people of this country, by their conduct and example, to decide the important question, whether societies of men are really capable or not of establishing good government from reflection and choice, or whether they are forever destined to depend for their

political constitutions on accident and force. {6}

The founders believed that they could learn from history and put together piece by piece what they called “an improved science of politics.” History, they believed, was a record of progress (or decline) measured against God’s standards and learned from personal and historical experience.

Third, the founders also held that everything in creation was intelligible and thus discernible through reason and rational evaluation. They also believed that God was The Creator and thus gave us life and liberty. Thomas Jefferson said, “The God Who gave us life gave us liberty at the same time.”

Novak concludes that without this philosophical foundation, “the founding generation of Americans would have had little heart for the War of Independence. They would have had no ground for believing that their seemingly unlawful rebellion actually fulfilled the will of God – and suited the laws of nature and nature’s God. Consider the jeopardy in which their rebellion placed them: When they signed the Declaration, they were committing treason in the King’s eyes. If their frail efforts failed, their flagrant betrayal of the solemn oaths of loyalty they had sworn to their King doomed them to a public hanging. Before future generations, their children would be disgraced. To still their trembling, they pled their case before a greater and wholly undeceivable Judge, appealing to the Supreme Judge of the world for the Rectitude of our Intentions.” {7}

Seven Events in the Founding of this Country

The first event was the first act of the First Continental Congress in September 1774. When the delegates gathered in Philadelphia, their purpose was to remind King George of the rights due them as Englishmen. But as they gathered, news

arrived that Charlestown had been raked by cannon shot while red-coated landing parties surged through its streets.

The first motion of the Congress proposed a public prayer. Some of the delegates spoke against the motion because, they argued, Americans were so divided in religious sentiments (Episcopalians, Quakers, Anabaptists, Presbyterians, Congregationalists). Sam Adams arose to say he was no bigot and could hear the prayer from any gentleman of piety and virtue. He proposed that Reverend Duch had earned that character.

The next day, a white-haired Episcopal clergyman dressed in his pontificals pronounced the first official prayer before the Continental Congress. Before this priest knelt men like Washington, Henry, Randolph, Rutledge, Lee, and Jay. The emotion in the room was palpable. John Adams wrote to his wife Abigail that he "had never heard a better prayer, or one so well pronounced." He went on to say that it was "enough to melt a heart of stone. I saw tears gush into the eyes of the old, grave pacific Quakers of Philadelphia." [\[8\]](#)

The second event was the sermon by John Witherspoon of Princeton on May 17, 1776. In this pivotal sermon, Witherspoon who had opposed the rebellion went over to the side of independence. His influence cannot be overstated. He was James Madison's teacher and he is credited with having taught one vice-president, twelve members of the Continental Congress, five delegates to the Constitutional Convention, forty-nine U.S. representatives, twenty-eight U.S. Senators, three Supreme Court justices, and scores of officers in the Continental Army. His sermons were printed in over 500 Presbyterian churches throughout the colonies.

His message centered on the doctrine of divine providence. He argued that even things that seem harmful and destructive may be turned to the advantage of the patriots. Even the enemies of law and morality cannot escape being the instruments of

Providence. Witherspoon argued that liberty is God's gift and all of creation has been contrived so that out of darkness and despair, freedom will come to fruition.

Michael Novak concludes that, "During the years 1770-1776, the fires of revolution were lit by Protestant divines aflame with the dignity of human conscience. 'To the Pulpit, the Puritan Pulpit,' wrote John Wingate Thornton, 'We owe the moral force which won our independence.'" [{9}](#)

The third event was the writing of the Declaration of Independence. Its very form was that of a traditional American prayer, similar to the Mayflower Compact. In essence, it was only the latest in a long series of local and regional covenants which put all governmental bodies on notice by establishing a national compact.

The fifty-six signers of the Declaration were mostly Christian and represented mostly Christian people. The four names that these signers gave to God were: Lawgiver (as in "Laws of Nature and Nature's God"), Creator ("endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights"), Judge ("appealing to the Supreme Judge of the World for the Rectitude of our Intentions"), and Providence ("with a firm Reliance on the Protection of divine Providence").

Novak points out that "Three of these names (Creator, Judge, Providence) unambiguously derive from Judaism and came to America via Protestant Christianity. The fourth name for God, 'Lawgiver,' could be considered Greek or Roman as well as Hebraic. But Richard Hooker showed that long tradition had put 'Lawgiver,' too, in a Biblical context." [{10}](#)

The fourth event was a national day of prayer. Only five months after the Declaration, "the pinch and suffering of war and a poor harvest seriously imperiled morale." Congress set aside December 11, 1776 as a Day of Fasting and Repentance.

The fifth event occurred when George Washington became

commander of the amateurs who became the Continental Army. He knew he had to prepare them for the adversity to come. "To stand with swollen chests in a straight line, beneath snapping flags, to the music of fife and drums is one thing; to hold your place when the British musketballs roar toward you like a wall of blazing lead, and all around you the flesh of screaming friends and brothers is shredded, is another." [\[11\]](#)

Washington knew there would be bitter winters and hot summers with no pay and little food. Often the soldiers would have to frequently retreat rather than face frontal combat from the enemy. He knew his only hope was to fashion a godly corps whose faith was placed in the Creator not battlefield victories. So Washington gave orders that each day begin with formal prayer, to be led by officers of each unit. He also ordered that officers of every unit "to procure Chaplains according to the decree of the Continental Congress." Washington knew that prayer and spiritual discipline were essential to his army's success.

The sixth event occurred toward the end of the fighting season in late August, 1776. George Washington had assembled 12,000 local militiamen of the Continental Army on Long Island. British Generals Howe, Clinton, Cornwallis, and Percy along with the German Major General von Heister landed a royal detachment twice as large to the rear of the Continental Army. The British took up positions to march swiftly toward the East River to trap Washington's entire army and put an end to the American insurrection.

Seeing that they might lose everything, Washington put out a call for every available vessel so that he might ferry his troops by cover of night back to Manhattan. All night the men scoured for boats, marched in silence, and rowed. But by dawn, only a fraction had made their escape. The Americans prepared for the worst. As if in answer to their prayers, a heavy fog rolled in and lasted until noon.

By the time the fog lifted, the entire Army escaped. Many gave thanks to God. And Washington and many others considered it one of those “signal interventions” by Divine Providence that saved the army and allowed the revolution to continue.

The seventh event was the establishment of Thanksgiving near the end of the third year of the war. Congress had many reasons to express thanksgiving to God and to seek His continued mercy and assistance. John Witherspoon was called upon to draft a Thanksgiving Day recollection of those events. The Congress urged the nation to “humbly approach the throne of Almighty God” to ask “that he would establish the independence of these United States upon the basis of religion and virtue.”

Following the wartime precedent of the Congress, Washington issued his first Thanksgiving Day Proclamation shortly after becoming president in 1789. He reminded the nation of God’s protection and provision in the Battle of Long Island all the way to their victory at Yorktown. Years later Abraham Lincoln, after annual presidential proclamations of Thanksgiving waned, reinstated a national day of Thanksgiving on November 26, 1863 and the tradition has continued ever since.

Conclusion

Michael Novak has provided Americans with a great service in documenting the Christian influence in the founding of this country. This religious influence is the second wing that tapped into the deepest energies of the human spirit and propelled this nation forward through difficult times and great challenges.

It is also fitting that we remember these important religious concepts and their influence on our nation. If we take seriously the words of George Washington in his Farewell Address to the Nation, then our ignorance of our nation’s past may yet be our destruction. That is why we must study our

history and teach it correctly to the next generation so we may keep the torch of freedom alive for generations to come.

Notes

1. Michael Novak, *On Two Wings: Humble Faith and Common Sense at the American Founding* (San Francisco: Encounter, 2002), 1.

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid., 5.

4. Ibid., 6-7.

5. Ibid., 8-9.

6. *The Federalist Papers*, Number 1.

7. Novak, 12.

8. William Federer, ed. *America's God and Country* (Coppell: TX: FAME, 1994), 137.

9. Novak, 17.

10. Ibid., 17-18.

11. Ibid., 19.

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