



IN CONGRESS, JULY 4, 1776.
The unanimous Declaration of the thirteen united States of America,

When in the course of human events, it becomes necessary for one people to dissolve the political bands which have connected them with another, and to assume among the powers of the earth, the separate and equal station to which the Laws of Nature and of Nature's God entitle them; a decent respect to the opinions of mankind requires that they should explain the causes which impel them to the separation.

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness. — That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed. — That whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new Government, laying its foundation on such principles and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their Safety and Happiness. Prudence, indeed, will dictate that Governments long established should not be changed for light and transient causes; and accordingly all experience hath shewn, that mankind are more disposed to suffer, while evils are sufferable, than to right themselves by abolishing the forms to which they are accustomed. But when a long train of abuses and usurpations, pursuing invariably the same Object, evinces a design to reduce them to absolute Tyranny, it is their right, it is their duty, to throw off such Government, and to provide new Guards for their future security. — Such has been the patient sufferance of these Colonies; and such has been the gradual and lengthened train of abuses and usurpations, which have endeavored to bring them to the absolute Tyranny of Great Britain; — that in the last resort, they have been obliged to declare that they are united to Great Britain, and that they are united to Great Britain, and that they are united to Great Britain.

Point of View

A BIBLICAL VIEW ON

The Declaration

By Kerby Anderson



The Declaration

The Declaration of Independence has often been called the nation's birth certificate. Put another way, the Declaration answers the “why” of American government, and the Constitution answers the “how” of American government.

British author G.K. Chesterton explained, “America is the only nation in the world that is founded on a creed. That creed is set forth

with dogmatic and even theological lucidity in the Declaration of Independence.”¹ On June 7, 1776, Richard Henry Lee introduced a resolution to the Continental Congress calling for a formal declaration of independence. Congress recessed for three weeks to allow delegates to return home and discuss the proposition with their constituents. A committee was appointed to express the Congressional sentiments. The task of composing the Declaration fell to Thomas Jefferson and others on the committee (Benjamin Franklin, John Adams, Robert Livingston, and Roger Sherman).

Sources of the Declaration

Thomas Jefferson wrote that he drew his ideas from many sources.² Many of those ideas came from two biblical Christians: John Locke and William Blackstone. He also drew from political documents of the day (Virginia Declaration of Rights) and even a declaration from Presbyterians in North Carolina.

The influence of John Locke and his *Two Treatises on Government* is significant. Legal scholar Gary Amos argues that the document is simply a popularized form of Samuel Rutherford's *Lex Rex*.³ Rutherford wrote his book to refute the idea of the divine right of kings.

Lex Rex established two crucial principles. First, there should be a covenant or constitution between the ruler and the people. Second, since all men are sinners, no man is superior to another. These twin principles of liberty and equality are also found in John Locke's writings.

Jefferson's initial draft left God out of the manuscript entirely except for a vague reference to "the laws of nature and of nature's God." Yet even this phrase makes an implicit reference to the laws of God.

The phrase "laws of nature" had a fixed meaning in 18th century England and Amer-

ica. It was a direct reference to the laws of God in a created order as described by John Locke and in William Blackstone's *Commentaries on the Laws of England*.

God is also implicitly mentioned in the Declaration three other times. First, humans are “endowed by their Creator” with certain rights. This is a reference to the Creator God in the Bible. Second, the colonists were “appealing to the Supreme Judge of the World.” They were appealing to God to make sure their actions were just. Third, they called for “protection of divine Providence.” They were asking God, who oversees the affairs of humans, to protect them in what became the American Revolution.

Another source was the Virginia Declaration of Rights, authored by George Mason and adopted June 12, 1776. Notice the similarity to the Declaration of Rights: “That all men are by nature equally free and independent and have certain inherent rights . . . namely,

the enjoyment of life and liberty, and the means of acquiring and possessing property, and pursuing and obtaining happiness and safety.”⁴

Jefferson also borrowed from state constitutions that already existed at the time. For example, the body of the Declaration consists of twenty-eight abuses they suffered at the hands of the King justifying the break with Britain. All but four are also from these state constitutions.

Jefferson also drew ideas from a group of Scottish-Irish Presbyterians in Mecklenburg, North Carolina. The similarity between the two is unmistakable.

For example, the Mecklenburg Declaration⁵ writes: “We do hereby dissolve the political bonds which have connected us with the mother country.” The Declaration reads: “to dissolve the political bands which have connected them with another.” The Mecklen-

burg Declaration ends with this statement: “we solemnly pledge to each other our mutual cooperation and our lives, our fortunes, and our most sacred honor.” The Declaration ends with “we mutually pledge our lives, our fortunes, and our sacred honor.”

Modifications of the Declaration

Since we have the original draft of the Declaration, including the changes and additions, we can see how Thomas Jefferson and the others on the committee modified the Declaration into what we read today.

Historian Walter Isaacson discusses some of these changes in his book, *The Greatest Sentence Ever Written*. For example, Jefferson wrote: “We hold these truths to be sacred.” But the word “sacred” was changed to “self-evident,” perhaps because of advice from Franklin. Jefferson wrote that men are created equal and “from that equal creation they derive rights.” Instead, he changed

(perhaps because of a suggestion from John Adams) that they are “endowed by their Creator” with rights.

By saying that they were “created equal” he was also rejecting the British system that promoted the idea that there were certain hereditary social classes. In this view, royalty and the aristocracy had more rights than other classes.

We can also see some of the changes from the original draft that match the Mecklenburg Declaration. Jefferson erased certain words and inserted others found in the Mecklenburg Declaration. One historian speculates he likely had the Mecklenburg resolutions with him and used them to modify the draft of the Declaration.

In the original draft of the Declaration, Jefferson included a strong condemnation of the King for promoting the British slave trade.⁶ Unfortunately, this condemnation

of the slave trade was removed from the Declaration because of objections from delegates from South Carolina and Georgia. Instead, it was reduced to a veiled reference against slavery, complaining that King George incited “domestic insurrections among us.”

Biblical Foundation

The biblical foundation of the Declaration can also be found in the writings of the founders of this country and the framers of the Constitution. Two researchers (Donald Lutz and Charles Hyneman) conducted a massive study of 15,000 documents (including books, monographs, pamphlets, and newspaper articles) written during the founding period. They found 3,154 citations or references to other sources.

The most quoted source (34%) was the Bible. In fact, three-fourths of those references were from reprinted sermons given

by preachers during the 18th century.⁷ When they quoted from other writers during this period of the Enlightenment, they quoted from Christian thinkers like Montesquieu, Blackstone, and Locke. They were very different from the Enlightenment of Voltaire and other Europeans.

The religious foundation can also be seen in the tempered nature of the document and the subsequent American Revolution. The Declaration of Independence 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 the governing authorities” which “are established by God” (Romans 13:1). Yet when they suffered from a “long train of abuses and usurpations,” they argued that “it is the right of the people to alter or to abolish it, and to institute a new government.”

British Historian Paul Johnson concluded,

“There is no question that the Declaration of Independence was, to those who signed it, a religious as well as secular act, and that the Revolutionary War had the approbation of divine providence.”⁸



Additional Resources

Gary Amos, *Defending the Declaration*, Brentwood, TN: Wolgemuth and Hyatt, 1989.

Kerby Anderson, *A Biblical View on One Nation Under God*, Point of View Ministries, 2025.

David Gibbs and Jerry Newcombe, *One Nation Under God: Ten Things Every Christian Should Know About the Founding of America*, Seminole, FL Christian Law Association, 2003.

Charles S. Hyneman and Donald Lutz, eds., *American Political Writing During the Founding Era*, Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1983.

Walter Isaacson, *The Greatest Sentence Ever Written*, New York: Simon and Schuster, 2025.

Donald Lutz, *The Origin of American Constitutionalism*, Baton Rouge: LSU Press, 1988.

Endnotes

¹ G.K. Chesterton, *What I Saw in America*, New York: Dodd-Mead, 1922.

² Thomas Jefferson wrote to Henry Lee about the

sources of the Declaration. “Neither aiming at originality of principles of sentiments, nor yet copied from any particular and previous writing, it was intended to be an expression of the American mind.”

³ Gary Amos, *Defending the Declaration*, Brentwood, TN: Wolgemuth and Hyatt, 1989.

⁴ George Mason and others, *Virginia Declaration of Rights*, Section 1, adopted, June 12, 1776.

⁵ Mecklenburg declaration of independence, Charlotte, North Carolina May 20, 1775, Library of Congress, <https://www.loc.gov/resource/rbpe.1350010a/?st=text>.

⁶ “He [King George III] has waged cruel war against human nature itself, violating its most sacred rights of life & liberty in the persons of a distant people who never offended him, captivating & carrying them into slavery in another hemisphere, or to incur miserable death in their transportation thither. This piratical warfare, the opprobrium of infidel powers, is the warfare of the CHRISTIAN king of Great Britain, determined to keep open a market where MEN should be bought & sold, he has prostituted his negative for suppressing every legislative attempt to prohibit or to restrain this execrable commerce.”

⁷ Donald Lutz, *The Origin of American Constitutionalism*, Baton Rouge: LSU Press, 1988. 140-141.

⁸ Paul Johnson, *A History of the American People*, New York: Harper-Collins, 1997, 204.



Point of View

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