



St. Stephen's Traditional Episcopal Church

11856 Mays Chapel Rd., Timonium, MD 21093

Independence Day, being Sunday, Trinity V, July 4th, 2010

✠ In The Name of The Father and of The Son and of The Holy Ghost. Amen. ✠

Much has been said and written about our Founding Fathers and their religious beliefs – whether they were ardent Christians or ardent secularists; whether they intended to base our constitution upon Christian principles or entirely secular ones.

Today, as we mark Independence Day, perhaps we might do them the courtesy of letting them speak for themselves. And who better to start than John Adams who on the day congress approved the Declaration of Independence, wrote to his wife Abigail: “[July 4th] ought to be commemorated as the day of deliverance by solemn acts of devotion to God Almighty.”

“The general principles upon which the Fathers achieved independence were the general principals of Christianity... I will avow that I believed, and now believe, that those general principles of Christianity are as eternal and immutable as the existence and attributes of God.”

In a letter written to Thomas Jefferson 1798, he said: "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."

John Quincy Adams agreed. In a Fourth of July speech in, 1837. he declared: “Is it not that, in the

chain of human events, the birthday of the nation is indissolubly linked with the birthday of the Savior? That it forms a leading event in the progress of the Gospel dispensation? Is it not that the Declaration of Independence first organized the social compact on the foundation of the Redeemer's mission upon earth? That it laid the cornerstone of human government upon the first precepts of Christianity”?

Charles Carroll wrote to James McHenry, November 4 1800: “Without morals a republic cannot subsist any length of time; they therefore who are decrying the Christian religion, whose morality is so sublime and pure...are undermining the solid foundation of morals, the best security for the duration of free governments.”

Alexander Hamilton felt so strongly about the importance of faith in government he founded the Christian Constitutional Society. He explained: “Its object is first: The support of the Christian religion. Second: The support of the United States.”

In 1787 after the Constitutional Convention: "For my own part, I sincerely esteem it [the Constitution] a system which without the finger of God, never could have been suggested and agreed upon by such a diversity of interests."

"I have carefully examined the evidences of the Christian religion, and if I was sitting as a juror upon its authenticity I would unhesitatingly give my

verdict in its favor. I can prove its truth as clearly as any proposition ever submitted to the mind of man." Patrick Henry in his last will and testament declared: "This is all the inheritance I can give my dear family. The religion of Christ can give them one which will make them rich indeed." This had always been his view. In a speech to the Virginia House of Burgesses (May, 1765), for example, he said: "It cannot be emphasized too clearly and too often that this nation was founded, not by religionists, but by Christians; not on religion, but on the gospel of Jesus Christ."

John Jay, on October 12, 1816, observed: "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." Actually, he went further than that: "Whether our religion permits Christians to vote for infidel rulers is a question which merits more consideration than it seems yet to have generally received either from the clergy or the laity. It appears to me that what the prophet said to Jehoshaphat about his attachment to Ahab affords a salutary lesson." *[N.B. II Chronicles 19:2 reads: "Shouldest thou help the ungodly and love them that hate the Lord?"]*

James Madison declared to the General Assembly of the State of Virginia in 1778: "We've staked our future on our ability to follow the Ten Commandments with all of our heart. We have staked the whole future of American civilization, not upon the power of government, far from it. We've staked the future of all our political institutions upon our capacity ... to sustain ourselves according to the Ten Commandments of God."

Benjamin Franklin was not a notable Christians but in his 1749 plan of education for public schools in Pennsylvania, he insisted that schools teach "the excellency of the Christian religion above all others, ancient or modern." And in 1787 when he helped found Benjamin Franklin University, it was dedicated as "a nursery of religion and learning, built on Christ, the Cornerstone."

This was not an aberration. On June 28th, 1787, at the Constitutional Convention, he declared: "God governs in the affairs of man We have been

assured in the Sacred Writings that except the Lord build the house, they labor in vain that build it. I firmly believe this. I also believe that, without His concurring aid, we shall succeed in this political building no better than the builders of Babel"

Like Franklin, Thomas Jefferson is a secularist hero. This, however, is what he had to say: "I am a real Christian, that is to say, a disciple of the doctrines of Jesus...God who gave us life gave us liberty. And can the liberties of a nation be thought secure when we have removed their only firm basis, a conviction in the minds of the people that these liberties are a gift from God? That they are not to be violated but with His wrath? Indeed I tremble for my country when I reflect that God is just, and that His justice cannot sleep forever."

George Washington, in a speech to Delaware Indian chiefs, May 12th, 1779, said: "It is impossible to rightly govern the world without God and Bible.. What students would learn in American schools above all is the religion of Jesus Christ."

At Valley Forge in 1778, he declared: "To the distinguished character of patriot, it should be our highest glory to add the more distinguished character of Christian" During his inauguration, he took the oath as prescribed by the Constitution but added several religious components to the ceremony. Before taking his oath of office, he summoned a Bible on which to take the oath, added the words "So help me God!" to the end of the oath, then leaned over and kissed the Bible.

The last word might fittingly go to the lexicographer Noah Webster. In the preface to his American Dictionary of the English Language, he wrote: "The duties of men are summarily comprised in the Ten Commandments, consisting of two tables; one comprehending the duties which we owe immediately to God – the other, the duties we owe to our fellow men....In my view, the Christian religion is the most important and one of the first things in which all children, under a free government, ought to be instructed ... No truth is more evident to my mind than that the Christian religion must be the basis of any government intended to secure the rights and privileges of a free people." *AMEN.*