
American Prophets

by: Ronald L. Dart

"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 declare 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." Do you recognize those words? Of course. I wish every American child had them committed to memory because they're among the most important words ever committed to writing by the pen of man. This is the opening of the Declaration of Independence of the United States of America.

Declaration of Independence

The thinking behind this document is at the core of the most fundamental liberties of man, and while many of the men who signed this document were slave owners, these same men set in motion the wheels that would bring an end to slavery in the civilized world. They tell us it was in the main, the words of Thomas Jefferson, that the leadership of all the existing states put their signature on it, and it honestly reflected their values and their beliefs. Perhaps the most stunning idea put forward in this declaration is that men, all men are created equal, and that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights. I say stunning, but that is only in the light of modern politics.

Our Founding Fathers Believed in God

To the men who signed this declaration, it was obvious, it was a self-evident fact that men were created equal and were endowed with rights by their Creator. In other words, they believed in God. They considered God to be the guarantor of the liberties of man, including life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.

For these men, to speak of God as the creator, was as natural as breathing for they were all believers. One of the most interesting things about them was that they were not much inclined to sectarian religion, perhaps there had been too much suffering at the hands of the state church for them to feel comfortable in any way with an established church, or with any particular church at all, but the belief in God, now that was another matter. In the minds of the men, by far away the

majority of them, who signed this declaration, the belief in God was beyond question in their minds.

John Adams

John Adams, who became the second president of the United States said this, he said, "A patriot without religion, in my estimation, is as great a paradox as an honest man without the fear of God. Is it possible that he whom no moral obligations bind, can have any real Good Will towards men?" What he is saying simply is that a belief in God, a belief in the law of God, and the fear of God lies at the root of the moral structure of men, and when they don't have that, they don't have anything to fall back on.

Adams saw something that is strangely absent today. He saw religion as the source of man's moral obligations. Our schools now, since they can only advance the ethics approved by the state and not by God, are like, in Adam's words, "An honest man without the fear of God." Is that what we really want?

I know we want a separation of church and state, but do we really want an educational system that advances only the values that the state approves? We are in grave danger in this country of having the state become a religion in its own right and since it is the state, it would be an established religion in spite of everything. The only saving grace that would be for it, it would not be called a religion or called a church.

I ask, is that what we really want? Because we are the government here or at least we are so far, I want to pull together for you some remarks of John Adams from the Constitution of the United States. These are not necessarily in the order that he gave them, but he said these things about the Constitution. He said, and I quote, "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 like 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, and as we day by day become a less moral and religious people, our Constitution becomes increasingly inadequate to the task."

I don't think many of us remember that it is our Creator who guarantees our rights, not the government. Those rights are granted to us by our Creator, by God, not by the government. If we forget our Creator, we are a people who will find ourselves unable to govern ourselves, and only able to be governed by armed power.

Avarice, ambition, revenge, and even gallantry is cutting through our Constitution day by day as we watch.

John Adams wrote a letter to Thomas Jefferson and in the letter, he said these things, "Have you ever found in history, one single example of a nation thoroughly corrupted that was afterward restored to virtue? Without virtue, there can be no political liberty. Would you tell me how to prevent riches from becoming the effects of temperance and industry? Will you tell me how to prevent luxury from producing effeminacy, intoxication, extravagance, vice and folly."

Adams was a deeply religious man, and his words rang like a prophet. It is not surprising in a way for a man who read his Bible regularly. His son, John Quincy Adams, made a point of telling his son, "He reads the Bible every day of his life. He reads all the way through the Bible every year."

Now if you think about Adams words in the light of history, you will know he was right.

Once a nation has become thoroughly corrupted, they can no longer govern themselves and must in the natural course of events, lose their liberties, and many people see, looking around our country today, more and more of the people of this country are willing to lay down their liberties for ease, for safety, for protection from the government.

Benjamin Franklin

Another great name in our history is Ben Franklin. Speaking to the assembled Congress in 1787, Ben Franklin had this to say, "I have lived, Sir, a long time and the longer I live the more convincing proofs I see of this truth, that God governs the affairs of men. And if a sparrow cannot fall to the ground without His notice, is it probable that an empire can rise without His aid? 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, and I also believe that without His concurring aid, we shall succeed in this political building no better than the builders of Babel. We shall be divided by our partial local interests. Our projects will be confounded. We ourselves shall become a reproach and a byword down to future ages and what is worse, mankind may hereafter, from this unfortunate instance, despair of establishing governments by human wisdom and leave it to chance, more than conquest. I therefore beg leave to move that henceforth prayers imploring the assistance of heaven and His blessing upon our deliberation be held in this assembly every morning before we proceed to do business and that one or more of the clergies of this city be requested to officiate in that service."

Here was a man who understood the stakes that he was playing for and he recognized that the freedom of the entire world depended in the end on the freedom of the United States.

By some miracle, our Congress still continues this practice of prayer, although we do not allow it in our schools.

But Franklin was right, nothing has changed. "Without God's concurring aid, we shall succeed in this political building, no better than the builders of Babel, we shall be divided by our partial local interests. Our projects will be confounded. We ourselves will become a reproach and a byword down through future ages."

He sounds like a prophet

Patrick Henry

"Is life so dear or peace so sweet as to be purchased by the price of chains and slavery? Forbid it Almighty God. I know not what course others may take, but as for me, give me liberty or give

me death." Every schoolboy knows the words of Patrick Henry. He was speaking on March 23, 1775, and I wonder how many schoolboys know that he said what I'm about to read to you, "It cannot be emphasized too strongly or too often that this great nation was founded, not by religionists, but by Christians, not only religions but on the Gospel of Jesus Christ. For this very reason, peoples of other faiths have been afforded asylum, prosperity and freedom of worship here."

Think about what he's saying. What Patrick Henry is saying is that nobody else did this, it was Christians. It wasn't religionists, it was a people who follow the gospel of Jesus Christ who believed in the Bible. Plainly and simply they believed in the Bible and followed the teachings of Jesus. It was out of the teachings of Jesus that freedom sprang. It was because of Christian principles, and the gospel of Jesus Christ, it is because of this reason that people of other faiths can find asylum and prosperity and freedom of worship here.

"The Bible," Patrick Henry said, "is worth all the other books that have ever been printed." "Bad men," he said, "cannot make good citizens. A vitiated state of morals, a corrupted public conscience are incompatible with freedom. It is when people forget God that tyrants forge their chains."

Where did Patrick Henry get his ideas? What informed his conscience? The Bible, what else.

Thomas Jefferson

Now the man who actually wrote the verbiage of the Declaration of Independence, Thomas Jefferson, had an interesting thing to say, sort of along the same lines. Thomas Jefferson said, "Indeed I tremble for my country, when I reflect that God is just and that His justice cannot sleep forever. To the corruptions of Christianity, I am indeed opposed, but not to the genuine precepts of Jesus Himself. I am a Christian in the only sense in which He wished anyone to be, sincerely attached to His doctrines in preference to all others."

Thomas Jefferson speaking, "I consider the doctrines of Jesus as delivered by Himself to contain the outlines of the sublime system of morality that has ever been taught. But I hold in the most profound detestation and execration the corruptions of it, which have been invented."

Strong words, a strong rejection of a corrupted Christianity, which he saw around him in very many places, and even in his own day, he was very concerned about what a just God might do when he awoke and looked upon His nation.

"A more beautiful or precious morsel of ethics I have ever seen", said Thomas Jefferson, "of the gospel of Jesus." He said the document has improved as a real Christian. That is to say, a disciple of the doctrines of Jesus.

This man, is the man who wrote, "That all men are created equal and are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights."

The Bible really lays at the roots of the ethical system, the moral system, the general guidance of conscience of many of the men who founded this country.

William Penn

William Penn, who was a founder of Pennsylvania, who turns out to read like a prophet, said this, "If you would rule well, thou must rule for God, and to do that, thou must be ruled by Him. Those who will not be governed by God will be ruled by tyrants."

I think William Penn and the others saw this as inevitable, that whenever a man gives up on God, when a man rejects the power and authority of God, he is left with nothing, except the power and authority of men.

As Lord Acton said, "Power corrupts; and absolute power corrupts absolutely."

The problem with men is, when they had no chains, no limitation, when they have no God, when they have no higher power to whom they owe allegiance, they owe allegiance to their own lust, their own desires, and their own wants.

George Washington

George Washington didn't say as much about religion as some of the others did, although he did say, "It is impossible to rightly govern the world without God and the Bible," but he said something else, something very chilling, he said, and I quote, "Government is not reason, it is not eloquence, it is force. Like fire, it is a dangerous servant and a fearful master." You will never read a more telling commentary about government than those words of the father of our country, "Government is not reason, it is not eloquence, it is force. Like fire, it is a dangerous servant and a fearful master."

I get the distinct feeling in the modern world that we have forgotten that. Somehow, we think that the government is reason, maybe it is eloquent. No! The only thing that the government has is force, and when the people are not governed by morals, when people are not governed by God, when they are not self-governed, there's nothing left for the government to use but raw force.

Daniel Webster

Daniel Webster is a name that is familiar to all of us, from the days of our founding fathers. Daniel Webster said, "Hold on my friends, to the Constitution and the republic for which it stands. Miracles do not cluster and what has happened once in 6000 years may not happen again." He realized that this document that they were putting together, "The Constitution of the United States," the very founding ideas of this country were a miracle and it only happened once in 6000 years of human history, and it may never happen again. "Hold on to the Constitution.," he said, "for if the American Constitution should fail, there will be anarchy throughout the world."

If the American Constitution fails, Daniel Webster said, "There will be anarchy throughout the world." What did he see? What was he looking for? He said, "If we abide by the principles taught in the Bible, our country will go on prospering and to prosper. But if we in our posterity neglect its instruction and authority, no man can tell how suddenly a catastrophe may overwhelm us and bury all our glory in profound obscurity. Let us not forget," he said, "The religious character of our origin, our fathers were brought here 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 in all their institutions, civil, political, or literary. Let's cherish these sentiments and extend this influence still more widely with full conviction that it is the happiest society which partakes in the highest degree of the mild and peaceful spirit of Christianity. God grants liberty to only those who love it, and who are always ready to guard and defend it. The hand that destroys the Constitution rends our union asunder forever," thus says Daniel Webster.

Noah Webster

Noah Webster has been called the father of public education in America. And it's really interesting to go back and read this man's words, in the light of what is going on right now in public education in America.

He declared that government was responsible to discipline our youth in early life in sound maxims of moral, political and religious duties. He declared that education is useless without the Bible. He said that the Bible was America's basic textbook in all fields. He said that God's word contained in the Bible has furnished all necessary rules to direct our conduct. Further he said, "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 as the Christian religion must be the basis of any government that is intended to secure the rights and privileges of a free people."

In 1832, Noah Webster published his history of the United States. In this history, he wrote this, "The brief exposition of the Constitution of the United States, will unfold to young persons the principles of republican government, and it is a sincere desire of the writer that our citizens should early understand that the genuine source of correct republican principles is the Bible, particularly the New Testament for the Christian religion." Continuing to quote now from Noah Webster, the father of public education in this country, "The religion which has introduced civil liberty is the religion of Christ and His apostles, which enjoins humility, piety and benevolence, which acknowledges in every person, a brother or a sister, and a citizen with equal rights. This is genuine Christianity and to this we owe our free Constitutions of government. The moral principles and precepts contained in the Scriptures ought to form the basis of all of our civil constitutions and laws. All the miseries and evils which men suffer from vice, crime, ambition and justice, slavery and war, proceed from there despising or neglecting the precepts contained in the Bible. When you become entitled to exercise the right of voting of public officers, let it be impressed on your mind that God commands you to choose for rulers just men who will rule in the fear of God. The preservation of a republican government depends on the faithful discharge of this duty."

It's really striking, all these generations later, looking back on this man to see how prophetic his words are. He continued to say this, "If the citizens neglect their duty, and they place unprincipled men in office, the government will soon be corrupted. Laws will be made, not for the public good, so much as for the selfish or local purposes. Corrupt or incompetent men will be appointed to execute the laws. The public revenues will be squandered on unworthy men and the rights of the citizens will be violated, or disregarded. If a republican government fails to secure public prosperity and happiness, it must be because the citizens neglect the divine commands and elect bad men to make and administer the laws. Corruption of morals is rapid enough in any country without a bounty from government, and the chief magistrate of the United States should be the last man to accelerate its progress." This was from Noah Webster.

American Prophets

It's staggering, isn't it, to read, what these old wise men who founded our country had to say. They were the Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Hosea, Micah and Zechariah of their day. When I read their words, I can't help but recall what Thomas Jefferson said, quote, "Indeed I tremble for my country when I reflect that God is just and His justice cannot sleep forever."

And then when you read John Adams' letter to Thomas Jefferson, where he said, "Have you ever found in history, one single example of a nation thoroughly corrupted that was afterward restored to virtue?"

There is hope, but it doesn't lie with us.

When I was a child, I knew nothing of Independence Day. I only knew about the Fourth of July. It was a holiday with fireworks and hotdogs and watermelon and picnics and games. Later in life, I grew to understand what it means to be free, and what a terrible price that has been paid to gain our freedom and what a price we must still pay to keep it.

This Independence Day spare a thought for what the day really meant to the men who made it happen. They were winners. They were born to win.

The late Ronald L. Dart was a Christian evangelist whose teachings still inspire thousands of people around the world. His legacy spans decades. For more information about the teachings of Ronald L. Dart, visit RLDEA.com where you will find booklets, articles, sermons, Bible studies, and books by Mr. Dart.

Discussion Questions

1. Do you agree that the majority of the signers of the Declaration of Independence were God fearing men?
2. Does belief in God mean you have to be a regular church member?

3. Do you agree with John Adams that without the belief in God there is no real root for morality?
4. Are John Adams warning words becoming fulfilled today?
5. Do you find it interesting that Congress still prays today, but prayer is not allowed in schools?
6. What do you think of Patrick Henry's words?
7. Do you think atheists would agree with William Penn? Do you?
8. Do you think it is even possible to fulfill Noah Webster's words that we are to vote for "just men who will rule in the fear of God" today in DC politics?
9. Do you think that the founding fathers ever could imagine how diverse this country would become?
10. What was the most profound quote to you from Mr. Dart's article?