

We Must Reclaim the American Vision

In a meeting with Delaware Indian chiefs in 1779, George Washington commended them for their request that their youth be trained in American schools. He assured the chiefs that America would look upon them “as their own children” and then said,

You do well to wish to learn our arts and our ways of life and above all, the religion of Jesus Christ. These will make you a greater and happier people than you are. Congress will do everything they can to assist you in this wise intention.

Washington’s freedom in sharing the gospel of Jesus Christ with this Indian tribe was normal for the founding generation, for such freedom was rooted in the original American vision. This original vision was brought here by the Jamestown settlers of Virginia, the Pilgrims and Puritans of New England, the Baptists of Rhode Island, the Quakers of Pennsylvania and other Christian reform groups who were drawn to this land with a proactive vision burning in their hearts.

The Original American Vision

Indeed, the original American vision was for a land of individual liberty and a place from which the gospel would be spread to the ends of the earth. America’s Founding Fathers were not shy in expressing this vision for they believed, that in this world, real freedom could only be realized in the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

This link between freedom and the gospel was expressed by America’s second president, John Adams, just two weeks before the adoption of the Declaration of Independence. In a letter

to his cousin, Zabdiel, a minister of the gospel, Adams wrote, "Statesmen, my dear sir, may plan and speculate for Liberty, but it is Religion [Christianity] and Morality alone, which can establish the Principles, upon which Freedom can securely stand."

Adams was not expressing anything new or novel for the idea of freedom rooted in the gospel of Christ was a common American belief brought here by the very first European immigrants to this land. Consider the following quotes.

"From these very shores the Gospel shall go forth, not only to this New World, but to all the world." –Rev. Robert Hunt, April 29, 1607, as he and the Jamestown settlers, who had just landed at Cape Henry, gathered in prayer around a large oak cross they had brought from England.

"Having undertaken for the glory of God and the advancement of the Christian faith ... a voyage to plant the first colony in northern Virginia." –From the Mayflower Compact, the governing document of the Pilgrims who formulated it upon their arrival in the New World in November of 1620.

"Whereas we all came into these parts of America with one and the same end and aim, namely to advance the kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ and enjoy the Liberties of the Gospel in purity and peace." –Opening statement of the Articles of Confederation for "The United Colonies of New England," dated May 29, 1643. This confederation of New England towns and colonies was formed for mutual security and to arbitrate land disputes among the growing population.

"Might it not greatly facilitate the introduction of pure religion among the heathen, if we could, by such a colony, show them a better sample of Christians than they commonly see." –Benjamin Franklin in a 1756 letter to George Whitefield, the most famous preacher of the Great Awakening, in which Franklin proposed that they partner together in

founding a Christian colony on the Ohio frontier.

“Pray that the peaceful and glorious reign of our Divine Redeemer may be known throughout the whole family of mankind.” –Samuel Adams, Founding Father and Governor of Massachusetts. This call to prayer was part of a proclamation for a Day of Prayer that he issued as governor of Massachusetts in 1795.

“Pray that all nations may bow to the scepter of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, and that the whole earth may be filled with his glory.” –John Hancock, Founding Father, President of the Continental Congress and Governor of Massachusetts. This statement was part of a call for prayer he issued while Governor.

“The policy of the bill is adverse to the diffusion of the light of Christianity. The first wish of those who enjoy this precious gift ought to be that it may be imparted to the whole race of mankind.” –James Madison, chief architect of the Constitution and America’s fourth president, voicing his opposition in 1785 to a bill that he perceived would have the unintended consequence of hindering the spread of the Gospel.

“The philosophy of Jesus is the most sublime and benevolent code of morals ever offered man. A more beautiful or precious morsel of ethics I have never seen.” –Thomas Jefferson, author of the Declaration of Independence and America’s third president, who took money from the federal treasury to send missionaries to an American Indian tribe and to build them a chapel in which to worship.

“Bless, O Lord, the whole race of mankind, and let the world be filled with the knowledge of Thee and Thy Son, Jesus Christ.” –from a public prayer prayed by George Washington, America’s first president.

No Real Liberty Without the Gospel

It is obvious from the above quotes that America's founders believed freedom and Christianity to be inextricably linked. They believed so strongly in the gospel as the basis of human freedom that they unashamedly prayed and publicly expressed their desire to see it spread throughout the earth.

Recent presidents have sought to export American-style democracy to other nations apart from the gospel of Christ. Indeed, the entire Western world is seeking to secularize liberty and remove it from any association with faith.

America's founders would say that such efforts are futile since true liberty cannot be had apart from the gospel of Christ. Washington made this plain in his farewell address, where he warned the fledgling nation that two things must be guarded if they were to be a happy people—Christianity and morality, which he called “indispensable supports” for political prosperity.

Recovering the Truth About the First Amendment

The day after approving the First Amendment, which states, “Congress shall make no law concerning the establishment of religion or hindering the free exercise thereof,” those same Founding Fathers issued a proclamation for a National Day of Prayer.

The First Amendment was merely their way of saying that America would never have an official, national church like the nations of Europe at that time. Instead of banning faith from the public square, as many moderns suppose, they created a free and open marketplace for religious ideas.

They were not concerned about false religion getting the upper hand in such an open setting, for they believed in the power of the gospel and were convinced that on an open and even playing field, truth would always prevail. They agreed with the Puritan, John Milton, who wrote,

Let truth and falsehood grapple; who ever knew truth put to the worse in free and open encounter? She needs no policies, nor strategems, nor licensings to make her victorious ... Give her but room.

By instituting the First Amendment, the Founders were rejecting the model begun by Constantine in which civil government sets forth and defends a certain church, religious expression or point of view. In their thinking, only those who do not have confidence in the message they proclaim would insist on such an alignment with the civil government.

The founders believed in the inherent power of Christian truth, which is why Jefferson wrote,

Truth can stand by itself ... If there be but one right religion and Christianity that one, we should wish to see the nine hundred and ninety-nine wandering sects gathered into the fold of truth. But against such a majority we cannot effect this by force. Reason and persuasion are the only practicable instruments. To make way for these, free inquiry must be indulged; and how can we wish others to indulge it while we refuse it ourselves.

It is Time to Recover the Vision

It is time for this generation to rise up and reject the lie of the left that the First Amendment bans expressions of faith in the marketplace. It is time to realize with the founders that true freedom and happiness can only be found in Jesus Christ. It is time to learn from the founders that faith and freedom go together like hand and glove, and the loss of one inevitably leads to the loss of the other. It is time for this generation to recover the original American vision. {eo}

*This article is derived from **Eddie Hyatt's** book, Pilgrims and Patriots, available from Amazon and his website, . At his website, you can also check out his vision for America and*

another Great Awakening.