

What the Founding Fathers Knew About Greatness That Our Generation Has Forgotten

Like Madison, Adams, Franklin and Jefferson, George Washington believed that the American republic could only be sustained by a virtuous and moral people. Like them, and virtually all the Founders, he was also firm in his conviction that only Christianity offered the values and belief system that could produce such a virtuous and moral people.

Washington's Key for Greatness

Washington expressed this Christian vision for America numerous times in both his private and public life. One of those times, when he expressed this vision in public, was in a meeting with a group of Delaware Indian chiefs in 1779.

The chiefs had requested that their youth be trained in American schools. Washington commended them for their request and assured them that Congress would look upon their youth "as their own children." He 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 words reveal his commitment to Jesus Christ and his deep conviction that only Christianity provides a belief system that can serve as a basis for social stability, individual happiness and national greatness. It also shows that he saw no conflict with Congress assisting in the promotion of Christianity among this American Indian tribe.

Early Influences

This Christian way of thinking was instilled in Washington from the time he was a child by his mother who was a devout believer. Just before he left home as a young soldier, she admonished him, "Remember that God is our only sure trust." She also exhorted, "My son, neglect not the duty of secret prayer."

Washington grew up in the Anglican Church, which had been the official church of Virginia since the settling of Jamestown in 1607. It was not, however, high church Anglicanism, but something more akin to the faith of the Puritans of New England. Harvard professor, Perry Miller, in fact, suggested that Virginia and New England were not that different since both communities came out of the Reformation, "and that which we consider distinctively Puritan was really the spirit of the times."

Washington would also have been impacted by the Great Awakening, which was at its peak while he was a lad. That the Awakening had a significant impact on his home state of Virginia was confirmed by Charles Hodge who wrote, "In no part of our country was the revival more interesting, and in very few was it so pure as in Virginia."

Guided and Sustained by Faith

There is no question that Washington's faith guided and sustained him throughout his life and career. For example, at the Battle of Fort Duquesne in July 1755, during the French and Indian Wars, the 23-year-old Washington had two horses shot out from under him and his clothes were shredded with bullets. He emerged unscathed and gave glory to God, saying, "I was saved by the miraculous care of Providence that saved me beyond human expectation."

As commander-in-chief of the colonial army, Washington issued an order that each day was to begin with prayer led by the officers of each unit. He also ordered that, unless their

duties required them to be elsewhere, every soldier was to observe, "a punctual attendance of Divine services, to implore the blessing of heaven upon the means used for our safety and public defense." He also issued an order forbidding drunkenness and all forms of profanity.

After the surrender of General Cornwallis and the end of the War for Independence, Washington submitted his resignation to Congress and then penned a letter to governors of the various states. This letter included his "earnest prayer" and expressed his Christian vision for the nation's success, which involved its citizens patterning their lives after Jesus Christ. He wrote,

I now make it my earnest prayer that God would have you, and the State over which you preside, in his holy protection; that he would incline the hearts of the citizens . . . to entertain a brotherly affection and love for one another . . . and to demean ourselves with that charity, humility, and pacific temper of mind, which were the characteristics of the Divine Author of our blessed religion, and without a humble imitation of His example in these things, we can never hope to be a happy nation.

Faith in God Necessary for National Greatness

Washington began the tradition of American presidents taking the oath of office with their hand placed on a Bible. For Washington, this was no mere political formality, for he had once declared, "It is impossible to rightly govern the world without God and the Bible."

By placing his hand on the Bible alone, and not some other religious text, Washington was affirming his belief that Christianity alone offers a belief system necessary for national stability and individual happiness. This was an important part of his vision for America's success.

He affirmed this in his Farewell Address after serving two

terms as America's first president. In this address, Washington warned the young nation to guard the vision for America's greatness. He said,

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. And let us with caution indulge the supposition that morality can be maintained without religion [Christianity]. 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.

Remember, when the Founders use the word "religion" they are referring to Christianity, and in this brief excerpt from his address, we see four salient points that show his deep commitment to Christian truth and values.

1. He says that religion [Christianity] and morality are "indispensable supports" for political prosperity and the "great pillars of human happiness."
2. He says that anyone who would seek to subvert or undermine these two great pillars cannot claim to be a patriot.
3. He says that maintaining these two pillars of Christianity and morality are the responsibility of all men and citizens.
4. He says that these two pillars are to be cherished by the politician as well as by the pious individual.
5. He rejects the notion that the morality necessary to sustain the nation can be obtained apart from Christianity.

Washington and Slavery

Washington has been criticized for being a slave-owner, but the critics tend to leave out the entire story. This is what Walter Williams, the brilliant black Professor of Economics at George Mason University, was referring to when he said,

While slavery constitutes one of the grossest encroachments of human liberty, it is by no means unique or restricted to the Western world or United States, as many liberal academics would have us believe. Much of their indoctrination of our young people, at all levels of education, paints our nation's founders as racist adherents to slavery, but the story is not so simple.

Washington was born into a world where slavery already existed, and he inherited a large plantation that included several slaves. However, when challenged that being a slave-owner was inconsistent with his testimony as a Christian, he set in motion a compassionate program to completely disentangle Mt. Vernon from the institution of slavery.

Those slaves who wanted to leave were free to do so, but none were forced to leave. Those who chose to remain were paid wages, and he began a program to educate and prepare the children of slaves for freedom. He declared,

I clearly foresee that nothing but the rooting out of slavery can perpetuate the existence of our union by consolidating it in a common bond of principle.

Summary

Yes, George Washington had a vision of an America whose citizens governed themselves from within according to Christian principles and values. Such a people, he believed, would sustain the republic and bring heaven's blessings to bear upon the land. This is why he warned the fledgling nation,

The propitious smiles of heaven can never be expected on a nation that disregards the external rules of order and right, which heaven itself has ordained.

Trust God. Make Jesus Christ your role model. Respect the Bible. Follow Christian morality. This was George Washington's blueprint for making America great. This was his vision for a Christian America. {eoa}

*This article was derived from **Dr. Eddie Hyatt's** book, Pilgrims and Patriots, which Pat Robertson calls "a must read!" It is available from Amazon and his website at . Eddie also conducts "America Reawakening" events in which he shows how the Great Awakening gave birth to America and why only a Great Reawakening will save the nation. Read about this at .*