

Will America Survive Without Another Great Spiritual Awakening?

America's Founding Fathers, without exception, would be appalled at the Supreme Court's ruling on same-sex marriage. The Founders, even the so-called nonreligious ones, believed Christian morality and virtue to be necessary for a stable and prosperous society. This is what John Adams was referring to when he said, "Our Constitution was made only for a moral and religious people. It is wholly inadequate for the government of any other." This is why, in a circular letter addressed to the states in 1783, George Washington prayed that God would bind the nation together and grant its citizens "the social and personal virtues necessary for its survival."

Christian Morality and the Founding of America

Two hundred and thirty-nine years ago this week, the United States of America was formed out of a great spiritual awakening that had swept over the 13 Colonies. All the Founders, to one degree or another, were impacted by this awakening, and all agreed that Christianity was necessary to restrain evil and produce a stable and prosperous society. The Founders knew that a people not restrained by religious conviction would turn liberty into licentiousness and freedom into anarchy. Professor Barry Shain has quoted a host of writers from the founding generation demonstrating that they believed that "when sin abounds, natural liberty ends."

As evidence of the Founders' commitment to the morality of the Bible, one need look no further than Benjamin Franklin, generally considered one of the most nonreligious of America's Founding Fathers. In his *Autobiography*, Franklin reported that

his hometown of Philadelphia had been completely transformed by the awakening in 1739. He wrote, "From being thoughtless or indifferent about religion, it seemed as if all the world were growing religious so that one could not walk through the town in an evening without hearing psalms sung in different families of every street (Hyatt, *The Faith & Vision of Benjamin Franklin*, 30).

Franklin described this moral transformation of Philadelphia as "wonderful." He also became a close, lifelong friend with the most famous preacher of the awakening, George Whitefield. The impact on Franklin was obvious when Thomas Paine, the well-known Deist, sent him a manuscript copy of a book in which he attacked historic Christianity. Franklin, in very strong language, advised him to burn the manuscript, saying, "If men are so wicked with religion [Christianity], what would they be if without it" (Hyatt, *The Faith & Vision of Benjamin Franklin*, 45). Franklin, like every other Founder, believed Christian morality to be necessary for the restraint of evil and a stable, prosperous society.

In New England Jonathan Edwards reported that his hometown of Northampton, Massachusetts, seemed to be "full of the presence of God." Everywhere in the town—in homes, on the streets, in places of business—people were discussing the things of God and eternity. He said that if a person was encountered that seemed to be spiritually indifferent it would be spoken of as a *strange* thing (Hyatt, *America's Revival Heritage*, 35). Similar awakenings were reported in the Middle and Southern Colonies.

The Impact of the Great Awakening

These local and regional revivals were drawn together in one Divine inferno of Spiritual awakening through the incessant travels and ministry of Whitefield who arrived in America in 1739 with a burden for the spiritual well-being of the Colonists and a prayer that they would not live as 13

scattered Colonies but as “one nation under God.”

As he traveled up and down the eastern seaboard, shop-keepers closed their doors, farmers left their plows, and workers threw down their tools to hurry to the place where he was to preach. Crowds of 8,000-10,000 were common. At a time when the population of Boston was estimated at 17,000, Whitefield preached to an estimated crowd of 25,000 on the Boston Common. Entire towns, it seemed, were repenting and turning to God.

The Great Awakening broke down sectarian, denominational and ethnic walls. When the population of Philadelphia was around 13,000, Whitefield preached from the courthouse steps of the city to an estimated crowd of 12,000 people of all denominations and theological persuasions. Franklin, who was part of that number, said, “The multitudes of all sects and denominations that attended his sermons were enormous” (Hyatt, *The Faith & Vision of Benjamin Franklin*, 30).

Whitefield, who was ordained with the Anglican Church, ministered to people of all denominations and called them to Christ, not to a particular church or denomination. He exhorted the masses to stop being divided by “names” and live as Christians in word and deed. This became a common theme of the preachers of the Awakening and it served to bring a sense of oneness and camaraderie throughout the colonies. John Wingate Thornton declared, “To the pulpit we owe the moral force that won our independence.”

The Bible and Prayer at the First Continental Congress

The “moral force” of the Awakening showed itself at the First Continental Congress in 1774 that met in Philadelphia to decide how to respond to Britain’s growing hostilities including the recent occupation of Boston by British soldiers and the closing of its port.

At the beginning of the Congress it was proposed that they begin their deliberations each day with prayer. Two delegates

opposed the motion on the grounds that they were such a diverse religious group—Anglicans, Puritans, Presbyterians, Quakers, it would be impossible for them to pray together.

Samuel Adams, a Puritan from Boston, arose and said that he was not a bigoted man and that he could join in prayer with any person of piety and virtue who loved his country. He went on to say that although he was a stranger to Philadelphia he had heard of an Anglican minister, a Rev. Dusche, who was such a man and proposed that they invite him to come and lead them in prayer.

Adams proposal was approved and the elderly, grey-haired Dusche was asked to preside over a time of Bible reading and prayer. As he stood before the Congress, Dusche read the entire 35th Psalm, which powerfully impacted everyone present. It is a prayer of David for deliverance and begins with the words, *Plead my cause O LORD with those who strive against me; fight against those who fight against me.* The psalm ends with praise for God's deliverance.

After reading the Psalm, Dusche began praying for the delegates and for America and especially for the city of Boston and its inhabitants who were under siege. As he began praying, the Anglicans, such as George Washington and Richard Henry Lee, knelt in prayer according to their custom. The Puritans, according to their custom, sat with bowed heads. Others prayed according to their own unique custom but there was a singleness of heart and purpose as they all united in prayer for God's assistance and intervention for America.

A unique sense of God's presence filled the room and tears flowed from many eyes. John Adams wrote to his wife Abigail of the impact of the Bible reading and prayer on the delegates. He said:

"Who can realize the emotions with which they turned imploringly to heaven for divine interposition and aid. It was

enough to melt a heart of stone. I never saw a greater effect upon an audience. It seems as if heaven had ordained that psalm to be read that day. I saw tears gush into the eyes of the old, grave pacific Quakers of Philadelphia. I must beg you to read that Psalm" (Hyatt, *America's Revival Heritage*, 69).

God and Morality in America's Founding

The Great Awakening had prepared the American Colonists for this moment in time by breaking down sectarian walls and giving the scattered Colonists a united sense of identity and purpose—"one nation under God as Whitefield had prayed." It had also bound them together as a people who carried a sense of religious conviction of their moral responsibility before God to live according to biblical precepts.

Two years later this Congress issued the Declaration of Independence declaring America a free and sovereign state. The late Harvard professor Perry Miller was correct when he said, "The Declaration of Independence of 1776 was a direct result of the preaching of the evangelists of the Great Awakening."

During the Revolutionary War, the Continental Congress issued no less than 15 proclamations of "humiliation and prayer" calling on all Americans to set aside particular days to fast and pray for God's assistance to their cause. The proclamation of 1779 urged the nation "humbly to approach the throne of Almighty God" to ask "that He would establish the independence of these United States upon the basis of religion [Christianity] and virtue."

When Washington accepted the call to serve as commander-in-chief of the ragtag Colonial forces, he immediately brought a moral discipline to the ranks. He issued an order that there was to be no drunkenness or profanity and that each day was to begin with prayer led by the officers of each unit. Henry Muhlenberg, pastor of a Lutheran church in the area of Valley Forge where Washington and his troops were camped during the

winter of 1777-78, was able to observe many of their activities. He wrote, "Washington rode around among his army yesterday and admonished each and every one to fear God."

There is no question that America was birthed out of prayer and a great spiritual awakening. Every Founder, without exception, acknowledged God's hand at work in bringing forth this nation. Every Founder also believed that Biblical morality to be necessary for a stable and successful nation. In fact, George Washington, in his Farewell Address, referred to Christianity and morality as "indispensable supports that lead to political prosperity" and he warned against those who would attempt to "subvert these great pillars of human happiness."

Will America Survive?

Can a nation that was birthed in prayer and Spiritual awakening long endure when it has removed acknowledgment of God from just about every area of public life? Can such a nation long endure that no longer recognizes Christian values and believes that it is the state, not God, that has the power to give and take away rights?

Another "nonreligious" Founder, who was also impacted by the Great Awakening, has a sobering message for contemporary America. Thomas Jefferson wrote:

"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" (Hyatt, *America's Revival Heritage*, 75).

At this very moment America is being destroyed from within by the rejection of the Biblical absolutes and moral values on which it was founded. At the same time, enemies from without

are looking for the opportunity to destroy us and our way of life. This is a pattern that has been repeated throughout history—weakened from within and then destroyed from without.

The history of nations would inform us that the America we have known—the land of the free and the home of the brave—will cease to exist unless there is another Great Spiritual Awakening that turns the heart of the nation back to God.

It can happen. *If My people ...* .

Pockets of true revival are breaking out across America. Want to know more about the next great move of God? Click here to see Jennifer LeClaire's new book, featuring Dutch Sheets, Reinhard Bonnke, Jonathan Cahn, Billy Graham and others.

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