

STUDY PACK 11

THE UNITED STATES

A Nation Founded on the Christian Philosophy of Government.

In 1995, while Czechoslovakian President Vaclav Havel was in the United States to accept the Philadelphia Liberty medal, he made the following statement in a speech:

“The Declaration of Independence states that the Creator gave man the right to liberty. It seems man can realize that liberty only if he does not forget the One who endowed him with it.”

Following his speech, an editorial in the Wall Street Journal said:

“As a writer and thinker, Mr. Havel has had certain advantages not given to American intellectuals. That is, he has lived under a genuinely oppressive system, been imprisoned and actually endured state punishment for the expression of his art and views. Our own artists and intellectuals must content themselves with manufactured fantasies of state oppression and assaults on freedom...It must therefore seem peculiar to Mr. Havel to witness what is going on in America where – if liberal establishment opinion is to be believed – the greatest threats to freedom and democracy today are school prayers, radio and TV ministries, evangelical Christians seeking public office, and any and all use of a public accommodation for religious activity.”

I. THE DEBATE OVER THE DECLARATION

Throughout most of United States history, it has been asserted that the Declaration of Independence proves that the United States is a Christian nation. However, this idea has come under heavy attack for the last 40 years. The attack has come from two very different sources.

Liberals assert that the Declaration of Independence was written by secular-minded men with “secular ideas” to give birth to a “secular nation.” The fact that such an idea is so very prominent today is proof that few people have even casually read the Declaration of Independence. References to the “Creator,” the “Law of Nature’s God,” the “Supreme Judge of the World,” and “Providence” are clearly not secular concepts. Such a rewriting of history could only occur in a society where most children are educated in “_____” rather than in historical fact (basic first-source history).

The second attack against the Declaration of Independence comes – surprisingly – from some evangelical Christians. These claim that John Locke was a Deist who heavily influenced the Founders; consequently, the Declaration reflects a non-Christian, Deist view of government. Books have been written and widely spread which advance this view.

II. JOHN LOCKE AND DEISM

According to Webster’s Dictionary, Deism is defined as:

“The belief, based on the testimony of reason, that God created the world and set it in motion, subject to natural laws, but takes no interest in it or its inhabitants. However, the idea that John

Locke was a Deist _____. He was not a Deist, _____.
_____. In *The Reasonableness of Christianity*
(Signet Edition, p. 223) Locke said:

“To one who is once persuaded that Jesus Christ was sent by God to be a King, and a Saviour _____, all His commands become principles. There need be no other proof for the truth of what He says, but that He said it. And then there need be no more but to read the inspired Books, to be instructed. All the duties of morality lie there, clear and plain and easy to be understood.”

In *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (Dover Edition, Introduction) Locke wrote:

“The Holy Scripture is to me, and will always be, the constant guide of my belief; and I shall always hearken to it, _____ relating to things of the highest concernment. And I wish I could say there are no mysteries in it: I acknowledge there are to me, and I fear will always be. Nevertheless, where I lack the evidence of things, _____, and I shall immediately condemn and quit any opinion of mine, as soon as I am shown that it is contrary to any revelation in the Holy Scripture.”

He further wrote in *Reasonableness of Christianity* (Stanford Edition p. 52):

“Not that any to whom the gospel hath been preached shall be saved, without believing Jesus to be the Messiah; for all being sinners, and transgressors of the law, and so unjust, are all liable to condemnation, unless they believe, _____.”

Locke never identified with the Deists during his lifetime! He was clearly an evangelical Christian, though both Armenians and Calvinists sometimes criticized him for not completely agreeing with all points of their doctrine. Casually asserting that Locke was a Deist, as many evangelicals have done, is repeating a myth and does an injustice to a serious, dedicated Christian.

First-source reading of their writings will further demonstrate that George Washington, John Adams, Thomas Jefferson, Ben Franklin, and James Madison were not Deists, even though it is often alleged that they were. In fact, Washington and Madison were clearly believers in Christ and genuine evangelical Christians. While Jefferson and Franklin were not believers, they both rejected Deism and accepted the Scriptures as a source of wisdom in many areas, including philosophy of government. Adams was a professing evangelical most of his life, though he adopted Unitarianism in his later years.

Probably the only real Deist prominent in the discussion of the Declaration of Independence is Thomas Paine. Paine aggressively campaigned for acceptance of the Declaration of Independence, though he played no part in writing or ratifying it.

III. THE HISTORICAL SETTING

By 1776, the colonists had been complaining about British tyranny _____. The American colonies had gradually been tricked into giving up self-government. Their anger spilled out into civil disobedience, smuggling, and isolated acts of violence. The individual colonial militias had been preparing for conflict with Britain. Along the way they had fought conflicts with

the French and Indians. Armed warfare had previously broken out between colonial militias and the British army.

The Continental Congress assigned a five-man committee to write a Declaration of Independence. These men were:

Thomas Jefferson
John Adams
Benjamin Franklin
Roger Sherman
Robert Livingston

Their task was to explain both to the American people and _____ the grounds for declaring independence and forming a new nation. They assigned Thomas Jefferson to write the rough draft. Each of the other four men would go over each word and discuss every sentence. Then the entire document would be reviewed by the whole Congress. On July 2, 1776, the Congress accepted the final draft; it was made effective on July 4, 1776.

IV. POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY AND CHRISTIAN DOCTRINE

The formal request to declare independence had been made by the Massachusetts colony. It said in part:

“For these reasons, as well as many others which might be produced, we are confirmed in the opinion that the present age would be deficient in their duty to God, their posterity, and themselves if they do not establish an American republic. This is the only form of government which we wish to see established; for we can never be willingly subject to any other king than He who, being possessed of infinite wisdom, goodness and rectitude, is alone fit to possess unlimited power.

We have freely spoken our sentiments upon this important subject, but we mean not to dictate; we have unbounded confidence in the wisdom and uprightness of the Continental Congress: with pleasure we recollect that this affair is under their direction; and we now instruct you, sir, to give them the strongest assurance that, if they should declare America to be a free and independent republic, your constituents will support and defend the measure to the last drop of their blood and the last farthing of their treasure (emphasis supplied).”

The relationship between the political philosophy of the Massachusetts representatives and the _____ clearly seen in this statement.

John Adams, one of the drafting committee members (and later the second President of the United States) expected the signing of the Declaration to be celebrated as _____:

“The second day of July, 1776, will be the most memorable epoch in the history of America, to be celebrated by succeeding generations as the great anniversary festival, _____ from one end of the Continent to the other from this time forward forevermore. You will think me transported with enthusiasm, but I am not. I am well aware of the toil, the blood, and treasure that it will cost us to maintain this Declaration and support and defend these states; yet, through all the

gloom, I can see the rays of light and glory; that the end is worth all the means; that posterity will triumph in that day's transaction, even though we shall rue it, which I trust in God we shall not (emphasis supplied)."

V. COMMENTARY ON THE TEXT OF THE DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE

"When in the Course of human events, it becomes necessary for one people to dissolve the political bands which have connected them with another..."

The Founders did not consider "political binds" absolute as most political systems did. The children of Israel had left Egypt and later the Persian Empire. The will of God and the proper role of government were more important considerations than pre-existing political bands.

"... and to assume among the Powers of the earth, the separate and equal station..."

The Founders were clearly intent on founding a new nation.

"...to which the Laws of Nature and of Nature's God entitle them..."

This is a very important phrase. The Founders appeal to two authorities. They distinguish between:

The Laws of Nature (an obvious phrase for the concept of natural law) and the Law of Nature's God. If the "Law of Nature's God" does not refer to natural law, then it is important to know what is. In fact, "The Law of Nature's God" was a common phrase for the Scriptures – the Bible. Sir William Blackstone, the highly regarded British legal authority, had written in 1765:

"Upon these two foundations, the law of nature and the law of revelation, depend all human laws!"

The phrase "the Law of Nature and the Law of God" was common in the writings of such religious writers as John Calvin and Matthew Tindal. Secular thinkers of the 1990's may have trouble understanding this phrase, but the average American in 1776 would not have had any trouble grasping its meaning and significance.

You should note that while the Deists believed in the "Law of Nature," they did not believe in the "_____." Rather than being a Deistic statement, this is a statement that represents Christian thinking contrary to Deist thought.

Some have complained that the phrase "the Law of Nature" is not a Christian one. However, this phrase was common among Christian writers and was based upon such Scriptures as:

"For when the Gentiles, which have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law, these, having not the law, are a law unto themselves" (Romans 2:14), and "The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handywork. Day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night sheweth knowledge. There is no speech nor language, where their voice is not heard. Their line is gone out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world. In them hath he set a tabernacle for the sun" (Psalms 19:1-4).

This phrase was a common expression for a basic doctrine held by many Christian groups (as well as the Deists). Calvinist author Samuel Rutherford, writing in 1644, insisted that a political philosophy had to be based upon both the Law of Nature and the Law of God, the Bible. His book *Lex Rex* along with the writings of John Locke and the legal commentaries of William Blackstone

were the most widely read, quoted, and influential books in the colonies (besides the Bible). _____, _____, and _____ were all _____ . Since they were all human beings, there were slight differences in their political philosophies, but there was a great deal of common ground. The Congress very carefully worded the Declaration of Independence to reflect the thinking of all three writers while corresponding with basic Bible doctrine.

Those who find the Law of Nature and the Law of Nature's God offensive cannot claim to be reflecting the thinking of the Founders of America.

"...a decent respect to the opinions of mankind requires that they should declare the causes which impel them to the separation."

Notice that the Founders did not ask the permission of other nations to declare Independence; they simply felt an obligation to inform them.

"We hold to these truths to be self-evident..."

The belief in "self-evident" truths was based upon Romans 1:18-20:

¹⁸ "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness; ¹⁹ Because that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God hath showed it unto them. ²⁰ For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse."

The self-evident truth referred to in Romans 1:18-20 is that _____. The self-evident truths were those truths made known to men by the direct action of God on man's conscience or intuition, and by God's use of nature to teach basic truths to man.

There is no recorded debate among the Founders about the concepts of Natural Law, Creation or self-evident truths.

"...that all men are created equal..."

The political philosophy of the Founders is clearly rooted in the doctrine of creation.

"...that they are endowed by their Creator..."

Again, it is clear that the Founders based their political philosophy on the doctrine of creation. It is also clear that they believed that men's rights come not from government but from God. John Adams wrote:

"You have rights antecedent to all earthly governments; rights that cannot be repealed or restrained by human laws; _____."

Those who wish to remove God today from all discussion of our rights must strip away the foundation of those rights in order to do so.

"...with certain unalienable Rights..."

The Founders clearly connected the concept of human rights with the doctrine of creation. They believed that men were equal _____.
Governments had no power to take away the rights of men because those rights did not come from governments _____.

Those who believe that the concepts of freedom involved in the Greek city-states was the basis for the Declaration have a real problem with this statement. The Greeks had no clear concept of a Creator God, and they believed that rights were granted by the Government. The Founders stated that the creator God granted these rights.

“...that among these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness.”

While they were not attempting to provide an exhaustive list of rights, the Founders thought three rights needed special mention.

The first is the right to life. Because man was created by God, his right to life came from God and not government. Only those who believe that the right to life comes from government believe that governments can arbitrarily take away – or grant the right to take away – life. This is at the heart of the modern debate over abortion.

The second is the right to liberty. Liberty was considered an “unalienable” right. No one – no government or government agency – has the right to arbitrarily take liberty away.

The third mentioned right is the pursuit of happiness. This was a quote both from Blackstone’s *Commentaries* and the Virginia Constitution. In Blackstone’s *Commentaries on the Laws of England* (1765), he refers to man’s happiness as coming from “his sense of well-being and blessedness, in his earthly existence that comes from obeying the laws of his Creator.” This is the same concept found in the King James Bible word “blessed” (see Matthew 5).

Notice that the Founders did not believe that everyone had a right to happiness. They certainly did not believe that the government could or should try to make everyone happy! They believed that every man had a right to pursue happiness for himself!

“That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men,…”

This very important phrase clearly reveals the Founders’ vision of the purpose of government. The Government’s purpose for existence is to protect (“secure”) the rights given to God by men. This is exactly the Christian doctrine of government. According to Romans 13, God-ordained rulers are a terror to evil works but are not _____. According to I Peter 2:13-14, it is the role of kings and governors to _____ and to _____. Outside of those cultures influenced by the Scriptures, no culture in the history of mankind has presented this philosophy of government.

The position of the Founders was clear: when a government ceases to be a terror to evil and becomes a terror to good, it loses its right to be considered a government. It is no longer ordained of God. They clearly felt that the _____.

Of course, some Christians teach that any organization that claims to be the government or that exercises rule is a legitimate government and must be obeyed. This idea was expressed in the “Divine Right of Kings” theology of past ages, in the Tory refusal to support the War for

Independence in the 1770's, and is expressed by some today. Some Christian writers have even concluded that the War for Independence was unjust and unbiblical. However, the Founders felt that they were acting consistently with Romans 13:1-7.

The Founders felt that Romans 13 bound civil government and the agents of civil government to the role that God had given them. They were ordained of God, were the ministers of God, and were subject unto "higher powers" (higher than human authority or political power). The primary purpose of Romans 13 was to _____. (This was also the purpose of _____.) Romans 13 also teaches the obligation of the individual to obey civil government as it carries out its proper functions.

Again, the Founders were clear. The government of Great Britain, both King and Parliament, had forfeited the privilege of being considered the ministers of God, a legitimate civil government. The government had become a terror to good and a support to evil.

"...deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed."

The Founders distinguished between a legitimate government and _____. The development of feudalism, which formed the European nation-states, was based upon a series of contracts between the people and series of rulers. If the people violated their part of their contract, they would receive retribution from rulers. If rulers violated their part of the contract, they would be overthrown. They would lose their right to rule. The Founders felt that the government of Great Britain had violated its contract with the people and forfeited its right to rule. The original colonial charters had been overthrown by the King and replaced with royal charters ("without consent"). Furthermore, the King was not even fulfilling his obligations in the royal charters.

The Articles of Confederation (and later the Constitution) represented the attempts of the Founders to develop a workable contract with the American people.

"That whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it..."

The Founders clearly saw _____. When civil governments failed in its purpose, or violated its contract with the people, they maintained the right to correct or abolish their form of civil government. The point was simple: a government in rebellion against God should be replaced with one that is not.

"...and to institute new Government..."

The Founders did not promote anarchy. They simply wanted a government that fulfilled its proper role as taught in the Bible. All of the Founders may not have gotten their philosophy of government from the Bible – though many testified that they did, but they all had philosophy of government that was the same as the Christian doctrine of government. The Founders were forming a nation based upon the Christian doctrine of government.

"...having its foundation on such principles and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their Safety and Happiness."

The Founders recognized that government could not be trusted to discipline itself and must be

carefully restricted by the power of the people.

“Prudence, indeed, will dictate that Governments long established should not be changed for light and transient causes;”

The Founders did not feel that every abuse of civil government required a change; a _____ was necessary before a government was changed.

“...and accordingly all experience hath shown that mankind are more disposed to suffer, while evils are sufferable, than to right themselves by abolishing the forms to which they are accustomed.”

The Founders knew that _____. If there had been another way to correct the situation with Great Britain, they would have taken it. They simply had no other remedy but the use of armed force.

“But when a long train of abuses and usurpations pursuing invariably the same Object evinces a design to reduce them under absolute Despotism, it is their right, it is their duty, to throw off such Government, and to provide new Guards for their future security.”

The point of this passage is that the colonists had experienced a very definite and clear pattern of abuse. It also makes another very important point: it is the duty of a free people to overthrow a tyrannical government when its abuses cannot be corrected by any other means.

“Such has been the patient sufferance of these Colonies; and such is now the necessity which constrains them to alter their former Systems of Government.”

The Founders never called their own efforts the “American Revolution.” They felt that the _____! They referred to their efforts as “The War for Independence.” This should be its proper title.

“The history of the present King of Great Britain is a history of repeated injuries and usurpations, all having in direct object the establishment of an absolute Tyranny over these States.”

King John had been forced to sign the Magna Carta over complaints just like these. The English Civil War and the beheading of King Charles had taken place over the same kind of concerns. The English people had long been influenced by the teaching of the Scriptures. The English people had constantly asserted their rights as individuals and fought against the absolute right of Kings.

“To prove this, let Facts be submitted to a candid world.”

Following this statement, there are 26 examples given of the English government’s being a terror to good rather than a terror to evil. These examples prove that rather than protecting life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness, the English government had become the chief threat to the colonists’ life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.

Among the many issues that are mentioned, three deserve special note.

The British government had sought to destroy all separation of powers. All judicial systems had been subjected to the rule of the King. All possible courses of remedy for the colonists had been

abolished. The Bible clearly teaches a separation of powers. Even under the Old Testament economy, the role of civil government and the role of the priest were distinct. King Saul was punished by God for taking upon himself, the role of the priest. Ahaziah and 80 priests withstood King Uzziah when he tried to take over the temple worship. The separation of governmental power is absolutely necessary to restrain the power of government. This is a Biblical concept held by the Founders of America.

Second, the British government had begun to use physical force against peaceful colonists. These colonists possessed the right to defend themselves against government force and to organize to make their defense more efficient.

Thirdly, the ninth protest of British power reads:

“He has erected a multitude of New Offices, and sent hither swarms of Officers to harass our people, and eat out their substance.”

The British King and Parliament were constantly creating _____ . The government agents employed by these agencies had to justify their existence by taxing, fining, and regulating. Rather than protecting the people, the government was now interfering in almost every area of the people’s lives.

After giving 26 examples of British tyranny, the Founders continued:

“In every stage of these Oppressions we have Petitioned for Redress in the most humble terms: Our repeated Petitions have been answered only by repeated injury.”

The Founders again clarified that they had looked for a solution to this problem other than declaring independence.

“A Prince, whose character is thus marked by every act which may define a Tyrant, is unfit to be the ruler of a free people.”

Again, the Founders repeat the point that the King has failed to fulfill the proper role of a ruler of civil government. He was not acting as a minister of God in being a terror to evil. He was acting as a _____ .

The next six sentences refer to the appeals the colonists made to the people of England.

“Nor have we been wanting in attention to our British brethren. We have warned them from time to time of attempts by their legislature to extend an unwarrantable jurisdiction over us. We have reminded them of the circumstances of our emigration and settlement here. We have appealed to their native justice and magnanimity, and we have conjured them by the ties of our common kindred to disavow these usurpations, which would inevitably interrupt our connection and correspondence. They too have been deaf to the voice of justice and of consanguinity. We must, therefore, acquiesce in the necessity, which denounces our Separation, and hold them, as we hold the rest of mankind, Enemies in War, in Peace Friends.

We, therefore, the Representatives of the United States of America, in General Congress, assembled...”

The Founders were not advocating anarchy or rebellion, but they had created a new nation.

“...appealing to the _____ for the rectitude of our intentions...”

By using the title for God referred to in Genesis 18:25 and Judges 11:7, the Founders obviously were not making a “secular” statement. Neither were they making a Deist statement since Deists did not believe that God was the “Supreme Judge of the world.” Deists believed that God had left

His creation to operate solely under natural law and that there was no supernatural judgment. Rather than promoting Deism, once again the political philosophy of the Declaration refutes it.

The members of Congress were conscious of the fact that they were now acting as the “ministers of God,” and that they would answer to the one whom they served as agents of civil government. They also felt that they could appeal to God for help on the grounds that they were trying to establish a Biblical form of government.

“...do, in the name, and by authority of the good People of these Colonies, solemnly publish and declare, that these United Colonies are, and of Right out to be Free and Independent States; that they are absolved from all Allegiance to the British Crown, and that all political connection between them and the State of Great Britain, is and ought to be totally dissolved; and that as Free and Independent States, they have full power to levy War, conclude Peace, contract Alliances, establish Commerce, and to do all other Acts and Things which Independent States may of right do.”

This clear statement announced that a new nation had been formed and that it will carry out all the legitimate functions of a new nation.

“And for the support of this Declaration, with a firm reliance on the Protection of Divine Providence, ...”

This again was not a secular or Deist statement. Those who protest statements like, “One nation under God,” or “In God We Trust” must ignore the attitude of the Founders because their purpose in government was the same as God’s. They felt that they could appeal to Him for aid. “Providence” was a common term for God and was used by John Calvin and others.

“...we mutually pledge to each other our Lives, our Fortunes and our sacred Honor.”

The Founders were aware that liberty would have a great price tag attached to it. Their lives and their fortunes were indeed at risk. The British army paid special attention to finding and punishing signers of the Declaration of Independence.

John Hart of New Jersey was forced to flee into the woods and hide. His farm was destroyed. The experience broke his wife’s health, and she died. Within three years, Hart was also dead.

Richard Stockton of New Jersey was captured, imprisoned, and his home burned. He became an invalid, dying in 1781.

William Ellery of Rhode Island had his home burned.

Francis Lewis of New York had his home destroyed and his wife and son imprisoned. Both died in British captivity.

William Floyd of New York had his home seized and used as a British barracks.

The New York home of Philip Livingston was destroyed.

This was also the case with the Philadelphia home of George Clymer.

Arthur Middleton, Edmund Rutledge, and Thomas Heyward Jr. of South Carolina were all imprisoned by the British.

Caesar Rodney of Delaware had been planning to travel to England for life saving surgery. His role in the Declaration made that impossible, and he died before the war was over.

Many other signers paid a great price for their role in bringing about freedom.

The Founders consciously tried to create a type of government based upon the concept of the Creator God and the role of government described in the Bible. Most understood that the Bible was the infallible Word of God. All agreed that the Biblical doctrine of government was the best one.

The United States was not formed as a Christian nation in the sense that it would be the federal government's job to teach, impose, or regulate Christianity. Christianity is a religion of the heart, and real Christianity cannot be taught, imposed, or regulated by anyone, including government.

However, the United States was formed as a Christian nation in several senses of the term.

The majority of the Founders _____.

The majority of the People _____.

The _____ was adopted as the political philosophy of the government.

The early blessings upon the United States were not accidental. They were the natural and supernatural result of a system of government based upon the truth of a Creator God and upon the revelation given by that God.