

Religion, Morality, and Freedom

Whereas it is the duty of all Nations to acknowledge the providence of Almighty God, to obey his will, to be grateful for his benefits, and humbly to implore his protection and favor—Now therefore I do recommend and assign Thursday the 26th day of November next to be devoted by the People of these States to the service of that great and glorious Being, who is the beneficent Author of all the good that was, that is, or that will be—That we may then all unite in rendering unto him our sincere and humble thanks—for the civil and religious liberty with which we are blessed; and also that we may then unite in most humbly offering our prayers and supplications to the great Lord and Ruler of Nations and beseech him to pardon our national and other transgressions—to promote the knowledge and practice of true religion and virtue, and the increase of science among them and us—and generally to grant unto all Mankind such a degree of temporal prosperity as he alone knows to be best. (George Washington, *Thanksgiving Proclamation*, New York, 3 October, 1789)

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. 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 (George Washington, *Farewell Address*, 1796).

Statesmen, my dear Sir, may plan and speculate for Liberty, but it is Religion and Morality alone, which can establish the Principles upon which Freedom can securely stand (John Adams to Zabdiel Adams, 21 June 1776).

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 as 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 (John Adams, 11 October, 1798).

As no truth is more clearly taught in the volume of inspiration, nor any more fully demonstrated by the experience of all ages, than that a deep sense and a due acknowledgment of the governing providence of a Supreme Being and of the accountableness of men to Him as the searcher of hearts and righteous distributor of rewards and punishments, are conducive, equally, to the happiness and rectitude of individuals and to the well-being of communities;—For these reasons, I have thought proper to recommend, and I do hereby recommend accordingly, that Thursday, the 25th day of April next, be observed, throughout the United States of America, as a day of solemn humiliation, fasting and prayer—That the citizens, on that day, abstaining as far as may be from their secular occupations, devote the time to the sacred duties of religion, in public and in private: That they call to mind our numerous offences against the most High GOD, confess them before him with the sincerest penitence, implore his pardoning mercy, through the great Mediator and Redeemer, for our past transgressions, and that, through the grace of his Holy Spirit, we may be disposed and enabled to yield a more suitable obedience to his righteous requisitions in time to come. (John Adams, *Fast Day Proclamation*, 6 March 1799)

Let us, then, with courage and confidence pursue our own Federal and Republican principles, our attachment to union and representative government. Kindly separated by nature and a wide ocean from the exterminating havoc of one quarter of the globe; enlightened by a benign religion, professed, indeed, and practiced in various forms, yet all of them inculcating honesty, truth, temperance, gratitude, and the love of man; acknowledging and adoring an overruling Providence, which by all its dispensations proves that it delights in the happiness of man here and his greater happiness hereafter -- with all these blessings, what more is necessary to make us a happy and a prosperous people? And may that Infinite Power which rules the destinies of the universe lead our councils to what is best, and give them a favorable issue for your peace and prosperity. (Thomas Jefferson, *First Inaugural Address*, March 4, 1801)

Believing with you that religion is a matter which lies solely between Man & his God, that he owes account to none other for his faith or his worship, that the legitimate powers of government reach actions only, & not opinions, I contemplate with sovereign reverence that act of the whole American people which declared that their legislature should "make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof," thus building a wall of separation between Church & State. (Thomas Jefferson, *Letter to the Danbury Baptists*, 1 January, 1802)

No people ought to feel greater obligations to celebrate the goodness of the Great Disposer of events, and of the destiny of nations, than the people of the United States. And to the same Divine Author of every good and perfect gift, we are indebted for all those privileges and advantages, religious as well as civil, which are so richly enjoyed in this favored land. It is for blessings, such as these, and more especially for the restoration of the blessing of peace, that I now recommend, that the second Thursday in April next be set apart as a day on which the people of every religious denomination, may, in their solemn Assemblies, unite their hearts and their voices, in a free will offering to their Heavenly Benefactor, of their homage of thanksgiving, and of their songs of praise. (James Madison, *Presidential Proclamation*, 4 March, 1815)

The *danger of* silent accumulations & encroachments by Ecclesiastical Bodies have not sufficiently engaged attention in the U.S. *Strongly guarded as is the separation between Religion & Govt. in the Constitution of the United States*, the danger of encroachment by Ecclesiastical Bodies, may be illustrated by presidents [*sic*] already furnished in their short history. The Constitution of the U.S. forbids everything like an establishment of *a national* religion. Religious proclamations by the Executive recommending thanksgivings & fasts are shoots from the same root with the legislative acts reviewed. Although' recommendations only, they imply a religious agency, making no part of the trust delegated to political rulers. The objections to them are 1. that Govts. ought not to interpose *in relation to those subject to their authority* but in cases where they can do it with effect. An advisory Govt. is a contradiction in terms. 2. The members of a Govt. as such can in no sense, be regarded as possessing an advisory trust from their Constituents in their religious capacities. 3. They seem (to) imply and certainly nourish the erroneous idea of *a national* religion. 4. the tendency of the practice, to narrow the recommendation to the standard of the predominant sect. 5. the last & not the least Objection is the liability of the practice, to subserviency to political views; to the scandal of religion, as well as the increase of party animosities. (James Madison, *Detached Memoranda*, 31 January, 1820)