

“The Spiritual Foundation and Heritage of the United States of America”

by Pastor Sam Hollis

Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord; and the people whom he hath chosen for his own inheritance. Psalm 33:12

Righteousness exalteth a nation: but sin is a reproach to any people. Proverbs 14:34

It is an abomination to kings to commit wickedness: for the throne is established by righteousness. Proverbs 16:12

I. Christopher Columbus, 1492

In 1492 Christopher Columbus discovered the New World.

Even secular historians acknowledge that Christopher Columbus was a devout man with a sense of destiny. The Bible made a profound impact upon his life. August J. Kling, who has researched the subject thoroughly, says that Columbus' use of the Bible is one of the best documented facts of his remarkable career but is one of the least known to the general public. All of Columbus' sailing journals and most of his private letters, observes Kling, gave evidence of his biblical knowledge and a genuine love for Jesus Christ.

In the only book ever published by Christopher Columbus entitled Book of Prophecies his faith in Christ is clearly revealed. Let Columbus speak in his own words: “I am a most unworthy sinner but I have cried out to the Lord for grace and mercy and they have covered me completely. I have found the sweetest consolation since I made it my whole purpose to enjoy His marvelous presence. These are great and wonderful things for the earth and the signs that are, that the Lord is hastening the end, the fact that the gospel must still be preached to so many lands in such a short time.”

Christopher Columbus understood something of how the missionary task—the preaching of the gospel to the ends of the earth—related to prophecy.

II. The *Mayflower*

When Americans look back to their beginning they usually point to the little band of sea-weary pioneers that landed in 1620 at Plymouth Rock. The majority of the 100 pilgrims aboard the *Mayflower* were devout Christians. They were Separatists bent on shaking the control of the Church of England and building a new life in an unknown wilderness where they could worship the Lord in the way they believed the Scriptures taught.

III. How Christians founded the Ivy League

A. Harvard, 1638

It took only eighteen years from the time that the Pilgrims set foot on Plymouth Rock until the Puritans who were among the most educated people of their day founded the first and perhaps most famous Ivy League school.

Harvard College's first presidents insisted that there could be no true knowledge or wisdom without Jesus Christ and but for their passionate convictions there would have been no Harvard.

Harvard's "Rules and Precepts" adopted in 1646 declares "Everyone shall consider the main end of his life and studies to know God and Jesus Christ which is eternal life. Seeing the Lord giveth wisdom everyone shall seriously by prayer, in secret, seek wisdom of Him."

According to reliable calculation, 52% of the seventeenth century Harvard graduates became ministers.

B. Yale, 1701

Christians in the Connecticut region launched Yale as an alternative to Harvard in 1701. Many thought Harvard to be too far away and too expensive, and they also observed that the spiritual climate at Harvard was not what it once had been.

C. Princeton, 1746

The school originally called "The College of New Jersey" sprang up in part from the impact of the first Great Awakening. It also retained its evangelical vigor longer than any other Ivy League School.

D. Dartmouth, 1754

A strong missionary thrust launched this school in New Hampshire. Its Royal Charter, signed by King George III of England, specified the school's intent to reach the Indian tribes and to educate and Christianize English youth as well. Eleazar Wheelock, a close friend of Evangelist George Whitefield, secured the charter.

IV. Additional Highlights of America's Spiritual Heritage

A. Declaration of Independence, July 4, 1776

The Declaration of Independence of The United States of America was grounded on one unforgettable premise: Every person derives his rights from the Great Architect of the Universe, God our Father, and the chief purpose of the government is to ensure and protect those rights.

To quote directly from the Declaration of Independence:

“We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, that to secure these rights, governments are instituted among men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed.”

Within the text of the Declaration of Independence God is mentioned twice at the beginning and twice toward the end. Fifty-six brave men conceived, authored, adopted, and signed this document. However, the journey from the declaration to independence was to be blood-stained and long. Between them were war, agony, wounds, death, prison and destitution for the men who signed that declaration. They paid a great price for independence and freedom.

B. Constitutional Convention, June 28, 1787

On June 28, Benjamin Franklin, a delegate from Pennsylvania, rose to his feet and spoke to the Constitutional Convention. No action was taken on Franklin's unique proposal, but within three weeks the convention's deadlock had been broken and the Constitution had been adopted and submitted to thirteen states for ratification.

Franklin stated in his speech, “I have lived, sir, a long time, though the longer I live, the more convincing proofs I see of this truth: that God governs in the affairs of men, and if a sparrow cannot fall to the ground without His notice, is it probable that an empire can rise without His aid? We have been assured, sir, that in the sacred writings that except the Lord build a house they labor in vain that build it. I firmly believe this and I also believe that without His concurring aid we shall succeed in this political building no more than the builders of Babel.

“I therefore beg leave to move that henceforth prayers employing the assistance of Heaven and its blessing on our deliberations be held in this assembly every morning before we proceed to business and that one or more of the clergy of this city be requested to officiate in that service.”

C. The Northwest Ordinance of 1787

The Northwest Ordinance of 1787 set aside federal property in the Territory for schools, and it was passed again by Congress in 1789 which was the same Congress that drafted the Constitution.

This ordinance clearly reveals the importance of religion and biblical morality in the original schools of The United States. The ordinance states religion, morality, and knowledge, being necessary to good government and the happiness of mankind, schools and the means of learning shall forever be encouraged.

From this foundation our nation's schools were born. Part of that foundation according to the Northwest Ordinance was religion.

D. First Chaplain Elected, May 1, 1789

One of the earliest acts of the House of Representatives was to elect a chaplain. On May 1, 1789, the House elected its Chaplain, the Reverend William Line. Five hundred dollars was appropriated from the federal treasury to pay his salary.

E. George Washington, 1789

George Washington held a divine service as a part of his inauguration in 1789. By a resolution adopted by both houses of Congress it was decided that after the administration of the oath of office to the president, divine services should be held in St. Paul's Chapel, performed by the Chaplain of Congress.

George Washington also in 1789 gave a Thanksgiving Day proclamation stating “Whereas it is the duty of all nations to acknowledge the providence of almighty God, to obey His will, to be grateful of His benefits, and to humbly implore His protection, aid and favors... now, therefore, do I assign and recommend Thursday, the 26th day of November... that we may then all unite in rendering unto Him our sincere and humble thanks for His kind care and protection of the people of this country and for all the great and various favors which He has been pleased to confer upon us.”

F. McGuffey Readers, 1836

Another great example of the influence of Christianity upon the school system of America is revealed through the influence of the writings of William Holmes McGuffey, a philosopher and professor at the University of Virginia, who wrote Eclectic Readers in 1836 and from that time until 1920 his books sold more than 120 million copies, which placed them in a class in which only the Bible and Webster's Dictionary sold more.

Historian Henry Steele Commager states that McGuffey Readers were permeated by morality that was deeply religious based on protestant Christianity. The world of the McGuffey Readers was a world where no one questioned the truths of the Bible or their relevance to everyday contact. The Readers therefore are filled with stories from the Bible and tributes to its beauty and nature.

G. Abraham Lincoln, 1863

In 1863 during the Civil War President Abraham Lincoln made a proclamation in which he stated “The awful calamity of Civil War that now decimates the land may be a punishment inflicted upon us for our presumptuous sins and could it be this is because of a need for national reformation for our whole people?” The resolution goes on to state “It behooves us then to humble ourselves

before the offended power, to confess our national sins, and to pray for clemency and forgiveness.”

H. The National Anthem, March 3, 1931

The National Anthem—The Star-Spangled Banner—was adopted by Congress March 3, 1931. The Star-Spangled Banner closes with these words: "Praise the power that hath made and preserved us a nation! Then conquer we must, when our cause it is just; and this be our motto: "In God is our trust."

I. Pledge of Allegiance, 1954

The Pledge of Allegiance with the words added "under God" was adopted by Congress on June 14, 1954.

J. National Motto, 1956

The national motto of The United States of America was approved by joint resolution of the Congress on July 20, 1956. Our national motto is "In God We Trust."

V. Conclusion

In the inaugural addresses of **ALL** the presidents of The United States and in the constitutions of **ALL** fifty of our states without exception there are references to the Almighty God of the Universe, the author and sustainer of our liberty.

It is so obvious that the goodness and grace of God has been with us throughout our national history.

God has given us the privilege of living in the greatest, grandest, freest nation on earth. Our belief in God, and our forefathers' desire to build a nation upon the Word of God has made possible these great blessings and benefits that are ours in The United States of America.

According to the Word of God in Romans 2:4, the Bible states the goodness of God leads us to repentance.

Surely all the goodness and grace of God poured out on us as Americans will lead each of us to repent of all known sin, receive God's cleansing and forgiveness, and commit and dedicate the totality of our beings to serving God with all of the energies of our existence.

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