

## Why Faith Is Important

When our Founding Fathers set out to create a new nation, they were all too familiar with the past centuries of sectarian religious wars suffered by the people of Europe. Even some of the American colonies had established official state religions, and different congregations often found themselves at odds on matters of both faith and politics.

The Founders knew that this young America would not survive if her own people were divided by their government into favored and disfavored religious groups. But they also knew that faith was vital to the wellbeing of any society.

This is why the First Amendment to the Constitution provides that “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof.” Going against most of European history, there was to be no official religion for the United States—but there was to be no government interference with anyone practicing their faith.

Only a few years after our War for Independence, the Western world watched with horror at the rampant violence and depravity of the French Revolution—a rebellion which, unlike that of the American colonies, was explicitly atheistic, anti-clerical, and anti-religion. Countless men and women were killed for their faith, as revolutionary leaders tried to construct a culture that eliminated the need for divine providence.

In opposition to this view, the Founders recognized that it was vital for the wellbeing of a nation that faith inform all aspects of society; it was the opinion of John Adams that “Our Constitution was made only for a moral and religious People. It is wholly inadequate to the government of any other.”

Adams knew the American experiment of democratic self-rule could only succeed if supported by a robust tradition of religious self-rule. America would have no divinely ordained line of kings or clergy to ensure that our laws were just and good; that was the responsibility of every citizen, every legislator, and every patriot.

This has proved true throughout the great moral turning points in American history.

The abolitionist movement was largely driven by a religious revival, which boldly proclaimed the inherent dignity and equality of every person as a child of God. A century later, the legal remnants of slavery and Jim Crow were swept away by a great coalition of the faithful, first among them the Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr., who said

that “if any earthly institution conflicts with God's will, it is your Christian duty to take a stand against it.”

We need such courage today. From the scourge of abortion, which takes hundreds of thousands of young lives every year, to the crisis of homelessness, where the ill and the vulnerable live at the margins of our society, to the decline of the American family and continuing opioid epidemic, people of faith are standing up to heal wounds and save lives.

Their convictions—our convictions—are as vital to the welfare of America today as they were two centuries ago.

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