

## Did The Founders Intended To Banish God From The Public Square?

- Ron Stullenbarger -

The claim is often made that the founders intended to banish God from the public square. They say Christianity and reason are in conflict. These claims are ironic, since the founders said our rights come from the Creator. And the founders had an attraction for the writings of John Locke, and one his books was *"The Reasonableness of Christianity."*

Samuel Adams reflected the common notion that *"the laws of nature and of nature's God"* were in harmony when he said, *"Thou shall do no injury to thy neighbor,' is the voice of nature and reason, and it is confirmed by written revelation."*

In 1893, President Washington wrote to a church in Baltimore: *"We have abundant reason to rejoice that in this Land the light of truth and reason has triumphed over the power of bigotry and superstition, and that every person may here worship God according to the dictates of his own heart."* There was no perceived conflict between faith and rational thought.

Our fourth president, James Madison, a key architect of the Constitution, said, *"Religion, or the duty we owe to our Creator, and manner of discharging it, can be directed only by reason and conviction, not by force or violence..."* Again, faith and reason worked in tandem.

But what about the schools and the idea that religion -- really Christianity -- was unwelcome to our nation's settlers and founders?

Education for the masses began in earnest in America with the Puritans in Boston in the 1640s when they passed *"The Old Deluder Satan Act."* They said it was one of the chief goals of *"that old deluder Satan"* to keep people in darkness by keeping them from the Word of God. Therefore, they would establish schools so the children can be able to read for themselves. The Bible gave birth to the forerunners of the public schools.

In one way or another, the Bible was the chief textbook in colonial America. As many of the founders learned their ABCs, they were taught biblical doctrines in The New England Primer: *"A- In Adam's Fall, we sinned all. B- Thy life to mend, this book [the Bible] attend. C-Christ crucified, for sinner's died."* John Hancock, John Adams, Samuel Adams, Ben Franklin, Roger Sherman -- they were all weaned on this stuff.

In 1787 (under the Articles of Confederation) and then reaffirmed in 1789 (under the Constitution), the founders passed the Northwest Ordinance. The whole point of this legislation was that as new territories were converted into states, they sought conformity to a few basic principles. Article III of the Northwest Ordinance mentions schooling. What did the founders think about education or its content? Were the schools to be *"religion free zones"*?

In their own words, the same men who gave us the First Amendment, which today is often being distorted as to exclude any Christian expression in the public arena wrote: *"Religion, morality, and knowledge, being necessary for good government and the happiness of mankind, schools and the means of education shall forever be encouraged."* In a day when 99.8% of people were professing Christians -- granted, not all professors are possessors -- when they said *"religion,"* that meant Christianity.

Why should children go to school, according to our nation's founders? They were to go to learn about God and about morality -- and knowledge too. Today, we have it exactly opposite! Religion, specifically Christianity, is treated in too many public schools as if it is illegal to be expressed. Stories like this are commonplace.

Yet our second president, John Adams, in his Inaugural Address, spoke positively of *"a veneration for the religion of a people who profess and call themselves Christians."* He said, *"a decent respect for Christianity [is] among the best recommendations for the public service..."*

Remove the Christian base from our freedoms -- something our founders never advocated -- and ultimately we will lose the freedoms themselves. One commentator has put it this way: *"If we extrapolate out of the human experience Christianity, what's left? Well, I think that the answer to that question has to be the basic sin nature of man."*