

Losing What the Founders Founded?

By FRC's Robert Morrison, Senior Fellow, Policy Studies

Our nation in the midst of a fierce political fight for the White House. This year, as we've been told again and again, is crucial for the future of this country. We have never had a President who has assailed life, marriage, and religious liberty as this one has.

One of the reasons we have such a high sense of religious liberty in America is because the man whose birth we celebrate today--George Washington--valued religious liberty as the first of our political institutions. From the beginning of his long public career, as a fighter on the Pennsylvania frontier during the French and Indian War, Washington attributed his own survival and that of his embattled country, to the hand of Providence, the interposition of a wise and benevolent God. He wrote to his brother that his coat and hat had several bullet holes in them. Almost boastfully, the young colonel of the Virginia militia told his brother that he had heard the whine of the bullets past his head "and there is something charming in the sound." In London, King George II scoffed at his young colonial officer's bravado. "He cannot have heard very many bullets," the gruff, German-speaking monarch said. But Washington actually had survived, miraculously.



Washington was the one who introduced the phrase "so help me God" into the Inaugural Oath for President of the United States. As he took that oath in New York City on April 30, 1789, he added those four words. The recently adopted Constitution spelled out the oath for the President, but those words were Washington's addition. And, because he set precedents every day in office, every President since has added those four words.

After adding the words, he did something else remarkable: He kissed the Bible. Now, when skeptics try to tell us that Washington was at most a Deist, and may not even have been that religious, they have to answer this question: Why would Washington have kissed the Bible that tells the story of Christ's coming to save mankind if he did not believe it? Wouldn't that be a shocking instance of hypocrisy? Why would we honor such a man? A man who would so profess his faith in the presence of a cloud of witnesses--tens of thousands gathered to watch him take that oath--would be incredibly cynical to do such a thing.

Throughout his life, Washington affirmed the role of faith. "True religion affords government its surest support," he wrote in 1789. He was replying to a message of congratulations from a synod of the Dutch Reformed Church of the day. He recognized the public importance of religious faith. He knew that a republic, especially, requires religious belief and that requires free exercise. No one sect or denomination could be empowered or established to dominate the others.

When President Washington visited the Hebrew Congregation at Newport, Rhode Island in August, 1790, he gave an eloquent address that has echoed down the centuries. "Happily, the government of the United States gives to persecution no assistance, to bigotry no sanction." Washington closed his address to the Jewish citizens of Newport by citing the words of Scripture. "May each one sit under his own vine and fig tree and let there be none to make him afraid."

The tragic fact today is that we have an administration that *has* made millions afraid.

It has threatened religious freedom in this country. In his farewell address to the nation, Washington made clear the foundational role of religion in this new Republic. "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... And let us with caution indulge the supposition that morality can be maintained without religion..." For the first time in over two centuries, we are ruled by those who reject the warning of George Washington.

Church Leaders Fight Bullying Pulpit



Tony Perkins at today's press conference

It took just three weeks, but every single Catholic Bishop in America has officially condemned the President's mandate. Even though the media has mostly buried this fact, one hundred percent of them oppose the rule that orders faith-based groups to pay for drugs that destroy pregnancies or prevent them. It's a formidable group, and today, they do not stand alone. Every pocket of religious America is linking arms at the front lines of this war on religious freedom. This afternoon, in Nashville, FRC announced that the Catholic bishops will have some good company in the fight. [More than 2,500 pastors and ministry leaders have signed on to FRC's letter of protest](#), urging President Obama to reverse his rule. "This mandate was not necessary, nor warranted under the provision of 'preventive care services for women' contained in the Patient Protection and Affordable

Care Act," the leaders agree. "Worse still is the fact that the mandate essentially ignores the conscience rights of many Catholic and Protestant Americans. Our country was founded on certain freedoms, the first of which is the freedom of religion. The ability of a religious person to follow their conscience without fearing government intervention has long been a protected right for Americans. It is unfathomable to picture a country that would deny religious freedoms."

FRC released the letter in a press conference early this afternoon in Nashville, Tennessee. Together with our good friends Bishop Harry Jackson, Dr. Richard Land, Pastor Gary Simons, and Star Parker, we made it clear that this isn't about contraception. It's about conscience and the freedom of every American and God-fearing organization to exercise their moral convictions. No church should be forced to concede their faith to kneel at the altar of government. And until the administration rights this wrong, we unite with our allies in diverse faith traditions in demanding what George Washington called "the invaluable rights of free citizens."