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Notes upon

TESTIMONY

J. J. Waterman


OF

WASHINGTON,

AND OF THE

CONGRESS OF 1776,

IN FAVOR OF THE

SPECIAL PROVIDENCE OF GOD,

AND

THE BIBLE.

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The following compilation from the writings of Washington, and the Journals of the Congress of 1776, was delivered before the young men of Richmond-street Congregation, in Providence, on the evening of February 22d, 1836.

It is designed to furnish proof of the reverence with which our Fathers cherished the truth of God's superintending and universal agency, and of the Bible as his word.

It is commended to the perusal of all who joy in commemorating the men and the deeds of our Revolution.

Let young men, especially, ponder this testimony, and note well the convoy under which the ark of our liberties safely outrode the storms of 1776. Let them by sentiment and practice, with the devoted Father of the Nation, "commend the interests of their dearest country to the protection of Almighty God, and its rulers to His holy keeping."

A D D R E S S .

“ There must be in every government a power to preserve itself, not only against force from *without*, but against corruption violence, and every thing destructive from *within*.”

“ No incidental events can make a people *little*, while the principles and practice remain which made them *great*.” In this maxim, as philosophical as it is simple, we have revealed to us the secret of our nation’s continued prosperity and glory. This secret is, a firm adherence to the principles and practice which made us great.

To furnish proof of the religious principles and practice of those under whose heroic deeds and legislative wisdom our liberties were achieved, and our civil compact perfected, is our present design.

This design is in keeping with the associations of this one hundred and fourth anniversary of the birth of him who was first in war, first in peace, and first in the hearts of his countrymen.

On the 15th of June, 1775, Washington was unanimously chosen by Congress, commander-in-chief of the American forces.

His disinterestedness is signally marked in his acceptance of this appointment. His language was—“ As to pay, sir, I beg leave to assure the Congress, that as no pecuniary consideration could have tempted me to accept this arduous employment, at the expense of my domestic ease and happiness, I do not wish to make any profit from it. I will keep an exact account of my expenses, these I doubt not they will discharge, and *that is all I desire!*”

At the close of the campaign, 1778, he says—“ Both armies are brought back to the point they set out from, and the offending party in the beginning is now reduced to the use of the pickaxe and the spade for defence. *The hand of Providence is so conspicuous in all this, that he must be worse than an infidel that lacks faith, and more than wicked that has not gratitude, to acknowledge his obligations.*”

On the surrender of Lord Cornwallis, October, 1781, the event which decided the war of the Revolution, in his orders for the day, he says—"Divine service shall be performed to-morrow in all the brigades and divisions. The commander-in-chief recommends that all the troops that are not upon duty, do assist at it with a serious deportment, and that sensibility of heart which the recollection of the *surprising and particular interposition of Divine Providence* in our favor, claims."

Addressing the army for the last time, Nov. 3, 1783, he again says—"The signal interposition of Providence, in our feeble condition, were such as could scarcely escape the attention of the most unobserving, while the unparalleled perseverance of the armies of the United States through almost every possible suffering and discouragement for the space of eight long years, was little short of a **STANDING MIRACLE.**"

On the 19th of December, 1783, Washington arrived at Annapolis, where Congress was then assembled, and resigned his commission. It was a scene of deep interest, when amid an assembly in tears, the illustrious man was enabled to say—

"The successful termination of the war has verified my most sanguine expectations, and my gratitude for the interposition of Providence, and the assistance I have received from my countrymen, increases with every view of the momentous contest. I consider it an indispensable duty to close this last solemn act of my official life, by commending the interests of our dearest country to the protection of Almighty God, and those who have the superintendence of them to His holy keeping."

In 1789 he entered upon his duties as chief magistrate of the nation with this language—

"It would be peculiarly improper to omit in this first official act, my fervent supplications to that Almighty Being who rules over the universe; who presides in the councils of nations; and whose Providential aids can supply every human defect; that His benediction may consecrate to the liberties and happiness of the people, a government instituted by themselves; and may enable every instrument employed in its administration to execute with success the functions allotted to his charge. In tendering this homage to the great author of every public and private good, I assure myself that it expresses *your* sentiments not less than my own."

He adds—"No people can be *bound* to acknowledge and adore the invisible hand that conducts the affairs of men, more than the people of the United States. Every step by which the people have advanced to the character of an independent nation, seems to have been distinguished by some token of *Providential agency*, and cannot be contemplated without some return of pious gratitude, along with a humble anticipation of future blessings. These reflections have *forced themselves too strongly* on my mind to be suppressed. You will join with me, I trust, that there are none under the influence of which the proceedings of a new and free government *can more auspiciously commence!*"

"We ought to be persuaded that the propitious smiles of Heaven can never be expected on a nation that disregards the eternal rules of order and right which Heaven itself has ordained."

In his farewell address, he says—"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 would 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. A volume could not trace all their connection with private and public felicity. Let it simply be asked, where is the security for property, for life, if the sense of religious obligation desert the oaths which are instruments of investigation in courts of justice.

"And let us with caution indulge the supposition that morality can be maintained without RELIGION. Whatever may be conceded of 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!*

"It will be worthy of a free, enlightened, and at no distant period, a great nation, to give to mankind the magnanimous and too novel example, of a people always guided by an exalted justice and benevolence. Who can doubt that in the course of time and things, the fruits of such a plan would richly repay any temporary advantages which might be lost by a steady adherence to it? Can it be that Providence has not connected the permanent felicity of a nation with virtue? The experiment, at least, is recommended by every sentiment which ennobles human nature. Alas! *is it rendered impossible by its vices?*"

These were the religious principles inculcated by the pen and the life of Washington. They are too full of interest as uttered and applied by him to need comment. They live in what he did—in what he hoped and prayed for his country. Will the nation trample them in dust—and this while singing hosannas at the remembrance of him who inculcated them?—alas! is it possible that such a fact can be recorded of human nature?

In these religious principles and practices, Washington stood not alone during the eventful period of our revolution. In the resolution passed by Congress appointing a national fast, 1776, is the following language—“It becomes the indispensable duty of these hitherto free and happy colonies, with true penitence of heart and the most reverent devotion, publicly to acknowledge *the overruling Providence of God*. Congress, therefore, desirous to have people of all ranks and degrees duly impressed with a solemn sense of God's superintending providence, and of their duty, devoutly to rely in all cases in their lawful enterprises on his aid and protection, do earnestly recommend that Friday, the 17th day of May next, be observed by the said colonies as a day of humiliation, fasting, and prayer; that we may, by a sincere repentance and amendment of life, *through the mercy and mediation of Jesus Christ*, obtain his pardon—that he would graciously bless all the people, and grant that a spirit of incorruptible patriotism, and pure and undefiled religion may universally prevail. And it is recommended to Christians of all denominations to assemble for public worship, and abstain from servile labor on said day.” This recommendation was cordially received—the throne of mercy was supplicated throughout the nation. Congress itself adjourned and observed its solemnities. This national fast preceded the declaration of our nation's independence.

On the memorable fourth of July, in our first national act, God was recognised as Creator and “*Supreme Judge of the world*,” as acquainted “*with the intentions of the heart*,” and their reliance was “firmly on the protection of Divine Providence.”

In December, 1776, a committee was appointed to prepare an address to the nation, and a recommendation to the several states to appoint a day of fasting, humiliation and prayer. In the Report which was accepted by Congress, is this language: “Whereas the war is likely to be carried to the greatest extremity, and whereas it becomes all *public*

bodies, as well as private persons, to reverence the Providence of God, and look up to him as the Supreme Disposer of all events, and the arbiter of the fate of nations!"

Thus the Declaration of the Independence of these United States, *was preceded and succeeded by national humiliation and prayer.* Under this convoy the ark of our liberties was launched, and set sail upon the then dark, stormy and angry deep of Britain's oppression and power. This fact should be told to every man, woman and child in the nation, and should be remembered—every young man should treasure it up and ponder it, as he pants after his country's continued prosperity and peace.

In February, 1778, it was recommended by Congress, that Wednesday, the 22d of April, be observed as a day of fasting, humiliation and prayer. They request that the people would "beseech the Divine Being, that vice, profaneness, extortion, and every evil, may be done away. That it may please Almighty God to guard and defend us, bless the rulers and people, strengthen and perpetuate the Union—bless our schools of learning, and make them *nurseries of true piety and virtue*, as well as useful knowledge."

In March, 1779, Congress again recommended a day of humiliation and prayer. In this they notice the critical situation of public affairs. They confess the fact that too few had been awakened to a sense of their guilt; they recommend prayer "that God would be pleased to avert impending calamities; that He would grant us his grace to repent of our sins and amend our lives according to His *holy word*—that he would inspire us with humility, moderation and *gratitude*—that he may diffuse useful knowledge, and extend the influence of *true religion*, and give us *that peace of mind which the world cannot give: that he will be our shield in the day of battle, our comforter in the hour of death, and our kind parent and merciful judge through time and through eternity!*" Congress adjourned to attend to the solemnities of the day.

In 1780, Congress again recommended in that day of darkness and trouble, that the last Wednesday of April be observed by the States as a day of fasting, humiliation and prayer. This they did—"That the Sovereign Lord of heaven and earth would remember mercy in his judgment, prepare us for deliverance, banish vice and irreligion from among us, and establish virtue and piety—that he would bless all public councils, and direct them to the best mea-

asures for the public good." *Congress adjourned to take part in the solemnities.*

In 1781, Congress recommended that the third day of May be observed as a day of humiliation, fasting and prayer. Their design, as expressed, was—"that we may with united hearts, by sincere repentance, appease his righteous displeasure, and through the merits of our blessed Saviour, obtain forgiveness. And that it may please Him to grant that truth, justice, benevolence, and pure and undefiled religion may prevail." *Though business was pressing, Congress adjourned to regard the day.*

In 1782, another and "perhaps bloody campaign," being in prospect, Congress appointed a day of fasting and prayer. This they did, "deeming it their indispensable duty to call upon the several States to set apart this day, that by our *joint* supplications we may beseech the Ruler of the universe, to diffuse a spirit of universal reformation, among all ranks and degrees of our citizens, and make us a HOLY that we may be a HAPPY people—that he would impart wisdom, integrity and unanimity to our counsellors, give success to our arms, administer comfort to our prisoners in cruel captivity, and that the religion of our DIVINE REDEEMER, with all its benign influences, may cover the earth, as the waters cover the seas."

Thus did the Congress who legislated during one of the most difficult and eventful periods of the world's history, solemnly and unequivocally testify before the nation and the world, their religious principles and practice. The record of *eight* special seasons of national humiliation and prayer, proclaim in language which cannot be gainsayed or misinterpreted, their impressive views of JEHOVAH'S agency in the government of individuals, nations, and the world. Never should it be forgotten that these principles and practices were among the things which made us great!

Nor were these eight special seasons of fasting and prayer, all that was done by the Congress of 1776, to show their regard for God. They remembered his mercies and publicly acknowledged them.

In 1777, a day of public thanksgiving was recommended by them, and Congress joined in the services of the day, devoutly remembering the signal success which attended the efforts of the nation.

In 1778, the king of France having become an ally to our cause, they appointed the 30th of December, as a day of public thanksgiving.

In 1779, on account of the fertility of the season, successful expeditions against the Indians, and general prosperity, it was recommended by Congress, that the second Thursday of December be set apart by the several states as a day of Thanksgiving. “*Above all they say that He hath diffused the glorious light of the gospel, whereby through the merits of our gracious Redeemer we may become the heirs of eternal glory,*” and praying that he would establish the independence of these United States, *on the basis of religion and virtue.*”

In 1780, Thursday the seventh of December, was recommended by Congress as a day of public praise to God for the deliverance of the Commander-in-Chief, and the army, from imminent danger, at the moment treason was ripened for execution, and *above all*, for continuing to us the enjoyment of the *gospel of peace.*”

In 1781, on motion of Mr. Randolph, of Virginia, the 24th of October, it was resolved, that Congress will at 2 o'clock P. M. this day, go in procession to the Lutheran Church, and return thanks to ALMIGHTY GOD for the crowning the allied arms of the United States and France with success, by the surrender of the whole British army under the command of the Earl Cornwallis.” On the 26th of October, a resolution passed recommending the 13th of December to be observed as a day of national thanksgiving.

1781—They say—“Whereas, it hath pleased Almighty God, the father of mercies, remarkably to assist and support the United States of America, in their important struggle for liberty, against the long continued efforts of a powerful nation: it is the duty of all ranks to observe and thankfully acknowledge the interpositions of his providence in their behalf. Through the whole of the contest, from its first rise to this time, the influence of Divine Providence may be clearly perceived in many signal instances, of which we mention but a few.”

In 1782, the 28th of November, and in 1783, the second Thursday of December, were appointed as days of public national praise. These days were observed by Congress by adjournment. In all these acts of thanksgiving they recognised the principle they so often declared, “that true religion and good morals are the only solid foundations of public liberty and happiness.

This was the spirit of the Congress of 1776. A legislative body which for the amount and difficulty of their la-

bors, the wisdom of their counsels, the success of their plans, and their avowed acknowledgment of God, have been unparalleled in the history of the world!

Nor does the testimony of the religious principles and practice of our rulers in 1776, stop here. A still more expressive evidence of the strong hold which the fear and love of God had of this nation in those days, is, if possible, found in the interest they manifested and the resolutions they passed in behalf of the BIBLE.

In those days of peril, and when all intercourse with the parent nation was cut off, and the advantages for printing in this country, small, *Bibles were in great demand!*

In 1777, Congress answered a memorial, by appointing a Committee to advise as to the printing an edition of 30,000 Bibles.

The committee, finding it so difficult to obtain paper and types, recommended Congress—“*the use of the Bible being so universal and its importance so great,*” to direct the Committee of Commerce to import at the expense of Congress, 20,000 English Bibles from Holland, Scotland, or elsewhere, into the different ports of the States of the Union ;” *and Congress ordered the importation!*

In 1781, “when from the circumstances of the war, an English Bible could not be imported, and no opinion could be formed how long the obstruction might continue, the subject of printing the Bible was again presented to Congress, and by them referred to a committee of three. This Committee reported in 1782, recommending to Congress an edition printed by Robert Aitken, of Philadelphia. Whereupon it was *Resolved*, That the *United States in Congress assembled*, highly approve the pious and laudable undertaking as subservient to the interests of religion, and being satisfied of the care and accuracy in the execution of the work, *recommend this edition of the Bible to the inhabitants of the United States.*”

How interesting is such a history of one of the earliest impressions of the HOLY BIBLE in English, in these United States! What moral sublimity in the fact, as it stands imperishably filed in the archives of our national council, in the records of the Congress of 1782! What an act this, considered in reference to the dealings of God in our behalf at the time of our nation’s perils! A fact which should be remembered, and told to every child and every young man in the nation, at a day when many of the rulers, and the

ruled too, would feign despise the book their fathers, nay, the chief men of the nation, honored!

The Congress of 1776 and 1782 revered the Bible, and legislated upon its worth.

Nor let us forget to notice the testimony of the venerable Franklin, whom all must have admired, as, amid the difficulties and trials of the National Convention of 1787, he spoke as follows:—"I will suggest, Mr. President, the propriety of nominating and appointing a Chaplain to this Convention, whose duty it shall be uniformly to assemble with us, and introduce the business of each day by an address to the Creator of the universe, and the Governor of all nations, beseeching him to preside in our councils, enlighten our minds with a portion of heavenly wisdom, influence our hearts with a love of truth and justice, and crown our labors with complete and abundant success."

A more full, explicit and solemn avowal of the existence of God—of the obligation which rests upon all to acknowledge and fear Him—of the high claims of evangelical religion as essential in its influence to the stability and perpetuity of individual and national prosperity, and of the inestimable value of the Bible, cannot be found in the records of nations. That furnished by the Father of his country, and the acts of Congress, from 1776 to 1782, stands pre-eminent.

The testimony is as clear as the sun in the heavens. It speaks in a voice loud and distinct as that of many waters. The principles and practice which made our nation *great*, were imbibed from and sustained by the Bible. This was the charter of this country's hopes, in the days of pilgrim toil, suffering and triumph. This was the charter of our nation's faith in the dark and troublous times of the revolution—times "which tried men's souls." The ark of American independence was built, and launched, and pushed out upon the stormy deep of revolution and war, amid humiliation, fasting and prayer! In their capacity and delegated power as a nation's council, our Fathers of 1776 looked to Heaven and the God of Heaven for guidance, acceptance and salvation.

They have written their record with their own hands. It is interwoven with the essentials of our history. He who runs may read. The record is there, it cannot be blotted out. It cannot be concealed or perverted but by him who would be recreant to truth and justice, recreant to all that is ennobling in the memory of those whom the nation and

the world delight to honor—recreant to all that as a basis, is broad, deep, firm enough to sustain the massive, growing structure of our national independence and glory.

Our Fathers acted well and openly their part; they proclaimed the principles and the practices which under God made us great. They bound the Constitution and the triumphs which preceded it strongly to the great first principles of revealed religion. Seven national fasts—seven seasons of national offerings of praise,—an edition of thousands of Bibles, are strong cords. To *relax* these cords, much more to break them asunder, will cost a mighty daring. When this is done—when the acts of 1776, testifying our *dependence on God* are forgotten, or are remembered by our fathers and our young men and youth, to be despised, then the shroud for the freest, happiest nation known under the whole heavens, will be completed. Then luxury, extravagance and irreligion will have finished their suicidal act; the hopes which in the vision of some, if not all, so brilliantly shine over the millions of coming generations, will go down in darkness of midnight.

Consider this ye who believe that no nation can be made small while the principles and practices remain which made it great; and measure, if you can, the importance of every man's influence in behalf of the religious principles and practices of our Fathers. These principles are the only anchor of our hopes as a nation. With these we can alone outride the waves of foreign luxury, and foreign vice, and foreign error, which mountain high are rolling and breaking upon our shores. We must have in the present and coming generation of **YOUNG MEN**, a host armed with high and holy principles. The motto of this our native or adopted State—"IN GOD WE HOPE"—must be engraved on the heart and exemplified in the life. Liberty and love will then roll their blessings down to our children and our children's children. Then the joys of this day, which tell of Washington, the champion of freedom, the father of his country, the pride of modern times, the ornament of our race, will be told amid richer and holier scenes than we witness, and shouted loud, mid jubilee whose thrill shall move every tongue and swell every heart.