

CHAPTER IV

The Constitution is Written

The Stormy Constitutional Convention

How Thirteen Colonies Became the United States

The war was over. Independence from England had been secured.

Yet even while victory was being celebrated, another challenge loomed. The document that had united the thirteen colonies throughout the Revolution was called the Articles of Confederation. Written in 1777 and ratified in 1781 by the Continental Congress, this loose agreement had given the colonies enough cohesion to face a common enemy, but it fell far short of what was needed to forge a nation. Looking at the problems besetting the fledgling nation and the challenges awaiting her, our Founding Fathers saw the need for a stronger republican form of government than they had had under the Articles of Confederation. The Continental Congress faced a \$42 million war debt, but had no authority to raise revenues to pay the American patriots who had mostly funded the cost of the Revolutionary War.

Under the Articles of Confederation, taxes were voluntary. Each state collected its own taxes and many people refused to pay.

Noah Webster, of dictionary fame, said in 1785, "Our pretended union is but a name, and our confederation a cobweb." The president under the Continental Congress had no real authority other than to negotiate treaties and conduct foreign relations. States were setting up trade barriers among themselves. Each state had its own army and some their own navy. Pennsylvania declared war on Connecticut when Connecticut attempted to establish a colony in western Pennsylvania.

The bonds of the infant nation were threatening to come apart, and the Founding Fathers realized a stronger bond was needed. This was the situation that led to the convening of the Constitutional Convention of 1787.

Horrendous Obstacles Had to be Overcome

The stormy, tumultuous 1787 Constitutional Convention was held in the shadow of political breakdown, possible armed rebellion, and commercial chaos. As the delegates trickled into the Philadelphia Assembly Room to sit in the stifling heat, there was little agreement on what should be done. Jefferson called the delegates an "assembly of demigods"; there was danger they would give way to petty bickering, like the eight-year-old who said, "I know God loves everybody, but he never met my sister!"

I have lived, sir, a long time, and 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, in the Sacred Writings, that "except the Lord build the house, they labor in vain that build it." I firmly believe this. I also believe that without His concurring aid we shall succeed in this political building no better than the builders of Babel; we shall be divided by our little, partial, local interests. Our projects will be confounded, and we ourselves will become a reproach and a byword down to future ages. And, what is worse, mankind may hereafter, from this unfortunate instance, despair of establishing government by human wisdom, and leave it to chance, war, or conquest.

I therefore beg leave to move that more prayer, imploring the assistance of heaven and its blessing on our deliberations, be held in this assembly every morning before we proceed to business. (The Works of Benjamin Franklin, Federal edition, Vol. 11, John Bigelow, pp. 377378)

Benjamin Franklin's words reminded the delegates that God governs in the affairs of men. His plea broke through the selfishness that had been limiting their vision. Before long our divinely inspired Constitution was written:

WE THE PEOPLE of the United States, in order to form a more perfect union, establish justice, insure domestic tranquility, provide for the common defense, promote the general welfare and secure the blessings of liberty to ourselves and to our posterity, do ordain and establish this constitution for the United States of America....

The Declaration of Independence

How God Used the Delegates

Divine Love had moved the delegates to see the need for the Constitution and the Bill of Rights and to act to take the human footsteps leading to fulfillment of that divine plan.

The Constitution and Declaration of Independence are really two parts of one document. The Declaration sets forth the fundamental rights of man and the primary principles upon which America is based. The Constitution takes on the much more difficult task of putting those principles into effect.

The Constitution is a farsighted document without which the Declaration would be only a visionary proclamation. The Constitution gave the people of America a framework of principles, principles that included liberty and equality. These concepts would take time to grow but they would lead to greater freedom for all and enable this nation to grow under stable conditions.

There was, of course, disagreement among the framers of the Constitution. But each delegate was aware of their common frontier and destiny. Each was aware that this was a new nation formed to offer freedom and hope to all who sought it. Each was aware that the freedom they had won at such great cost was too vital to squander away in splintered self interest.

Divine Love, the kingdom of God within the consciousness of each delegate, used that delegate to further Love's plan. God, Mind, provided the resources; it gave the delegates the necessary intelligence and humility, a listening attitude, and willingness to compromise.

The Mind that is Love is the only actor. It inspired the delegates with faith and Christian zeal. Nothing, it has been said, is so contagious as enthusiasm; "it moves stones, it charms brutes." Enthusiasm is the genius of sincerity. Our Founding Fathers brought to their task this Godlike quality, without which truth accomplishes no victories.

Heroic Forbearance Characterized Our Founding Fathers

To correctly assess the miracle of 1787 we need to remember that when the delegates gathered, the United States did not exist. Each state was a sovereign power. Nine states still had their own navies! The Articles of Confederation was just a treaty among these sovereign states.

Diplomacy, tact, and divine wisdom guided men of the caliber of Benjamin Franklin and George Washington, who instinctively knew how to handle words carefully, realizing words had more power than today's atom bombs. Divine wisdom, farsighted vision, and the heroic forbearance of the Founding Fathers assured the creation of the United States of America.

As the days evaporated under the hot Philadelphia sun, these noble and courageous men, animated with constancy of purpose, handled the jealousy and self interest that posed such a threat. No state was willing to part with its sovereignty. This lack of a wider, higher view, this lack of vision, had to be surmounted in the long and trying deliberations preceding the signing of their momentous world-transforming instrument.

The more spiritually-minded delegates clung to the truth that it was not their personal cause, but was God's cause, and God would handle every problem as they steadfastly turned to Him in prayer.

When a delegate suggested making the thirteen original states dominant lest the Western territories eventually dwarf the Eastern Seaboard, James Madison, demonstrating divine wisdom, magnificently led the effort to forestall this shortchanging of future states, and secured the right of each state to be admitted on an equal footing.

A Foundation for Future Generations

God also mightily used Madison's influence along with Patrick Henry's when the Bill of Rights was added to the Constitution.

The Declaration of Independence had proclaimed, "all are created equal." With the signing of the Constitution and the ratification of the Bill of Rights the die was cast and progress toward freedom and full rights for all people began in earnest.

"We the People," the delegates wrote, but "the people" did not originally include those trapped in slavery, nor did "we the people" include women, who were denied the vote until the twentieth century. One hears the Constitution criticized because of this, but the Founding Fathers, at their point in history, could no more have abolished slavery or extended equal rights to women than they could have deposed the king of France. Had the delegates attempted to abolish slavery, the Southern delegates would have walked out. It would take another 130 years of spiritual progress before women got the right to vote.

The valiant Founding Fathers had their hands full in accomplishing what they did. All honor to them. Their job was not to solve every problem of society, but to show the way. If the document they wrote and the government that evolved from it were to survive, it would have to be adaptable to the tests and stresses of their times, as well as of all times.

The greatness of the Constitution lies in its laying the foundation for a system in which future generations could carry out their own reforms and solve their own problems. Within two years the cry for a Bill of Rights was addressed and ten amendments were added to further curb the power of the government and protect "we the people."

Slowly the shackles began coming off women's rights. Increasingly calls for the abolition of slavery began to make themselves heard. Regarding the problem of slavery, we might add here that the Constitution led almost directly to the Civil War. Once North and South became one nation, the conflict over slavery was inevitable, irrepressible.

Sixteen times since the ratification of the Bill of Rights we have amended the Constitution, carefully and judiciously. The genius of our charter lies in its corrective power.

Protecting Our Religious Heritage

The protections our Constitution offers for freedom of religion are among its most important. While the First Amendment's church-state separation provisions (enacted in 1791) are well known, the Constitution itself also contained an important religious liberty protection. Article 6, Section 3, states that "no religious test shall ever be required as a qualification to any office or public trust under the United States."

This meant that all Americans, regardless of religious beliefs, are eligible to hold any federal office in the land from the Presidency to the lowest level of the bureaucracy. "This guarantee of liberty and religious pluralism," says Church and State, "was a break with the policy of every nation on earth throughout history. For the first time, a nation extended first class citizenship to persons of all religious persuasions."

"The real object of the First Amendment," said Joseph Story, "was to exclude all rivalry among Christian sects, and to prevent any national ecclesiastical establishment which should give to a hierarchy the exclusive patronage of the national government."

It thus cut off the means of religious persecution (the vice and pest of former ages), and of the subversion of the rights of conscience in matters of religion which had been trampled upon almost from the days of the Apostles to the present age."

Does this mean the Founders were anti-religion or anti-Christian? Of course not! The Constitution's writers concluded their work by signing it "In the year of our Lord one thousand seven hundred and eighty seven," and assumed the existence of the Christian Sabbath, saying the President has "ten days (Sundays excepted)" to veto a bill from Congress. Some people are offended because the Constitution

doesn't mention the Lord Jesus Christ more specifically than it does. However countless documents show Christianity permeated the nation.

In 1892 the United States Supreme Court determined, in the case of *The Church of the Holy Trinity vs. the United States*, that America was a Christian nation from its earliest days. The court opinion, delivered by Justice Josiah Brewer, was an exhaustive study of the historical and legal evidence for America's Christian heritage. It concluded:

Our laws and our institutions must necessarily be based upon and embody the teachings of the Redeemer of mankind, it is impossible that it should be otherwise; and in this sense and to this extent our civilization and our institutions are emphatically Christian.... This is a religious people. This is historically true. From the discovery of this continent to the present hour, there is a single voice making this affirmation.... We find everywhere a clear recognition of the same truth.... These, and many other matters which might be noticed, add a volume of unofficial declarations to the mass of organic utterances that this is a Christian nation.

Upon signing the Constitution, Samuel Adams said: "We have this day restored the Sovereign, to Whom alone men ought to be obedient"

The Constitution Has Stood the Test of Time

The aim of the Founding Fathers was to create a framework in which future generations, in a deliberate, dignified way, could set about making reforms. The delegates of the 1787 Constitutional Convention stated their purpose simply and eloquently:

"We the people of the United States, in order to form a more perfect Union, establish Justice, insure domestic tranquility, provide for the common defense, promote the general Welfare, and secure the blessings of liberty to ourselves and our posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States."

Their goal was to build a government that would accomplish this.

The Founding Fathers' magnanimity and tolerance lies in their willingness to abide by the will of the majority. Patrick Henry fought fiercely against the Constitution, and for the liberty of each sovereign state. But after Virginia ratified the Constitution, when a great throng of anti-Federalists desperately strained to get him to lead them, he refused. And the crowd obeyed when the old patriot counseled: "The majority has made its decision. Now as good Republicans I suggest you all go home. "

God's Constitution

The United States Constitution has been called "the greatest political instrument ever struck off on a single occasion." Its vibrancy and vitality has kept the United States of America true to changeless principles in the face of changing times.

When King John signed the Magna Charta on June 15, 1215, it was a grant from the king to the people; but the Constitution was a grant of power from the people to the government that the people themselves had created.

Considering what was in the offing with the birth of Christian Science in this country we realize some of the most enlightening occurrences in world history took place with the formation of the United States of America, with its fight for the ideals upon which it was founded.

Of course Christian Science was never born. It rests on everlasting foundations and "touches time only to take away its frailty." The same is true of America and the Constitution.

What is seen as the United States of America with its Constitution and Bill of Rights is an illustration of the divine Principle, just as 2×2 on the blackboard is an illustration of the principle of arithmetic.

The Declaration of Independence, the Constitution and the Bill of Rights all acknowledge the prior genius of Christian Science; it was Christian Science, which is as ageless as God, that made possible these documents.

Of course God's Constitution is perfect from the beginning, never needing amendments, but the physical illustration of this Constitution may from time to time need amendments as a higher sense of it unfolds to mortals.

Mortals need spiritual sense to comprehend the Constitution that is part of the kingdom of God within their spiritual consciousness. As it is spiritually comprehended, we behold a better man, woman, or child.