

# “One Nation Under God”

by David Barton <sup>1</sup>

Despite America’s great diversity, nothing unifies Americans more than their support for public acknowledgments of God. Consider:

- 93% want “In God we Trust” to remain on coins and currency <sup>2</sup>
- 90% support keeping “under God” in the Pledge <sup>3</sup>
- 84% support references to God in schools, government buildings, and public settings <sup>4</sup>
- 82% support voluntary school prayer <sup>5</sup>
- 76% support Ten Commandments displays on public property <sup>6</sup>

There are few other subjects on which over three-fourths of Americans consistently agree; and while the Left complains that religious expressions are divisive, the evidence proves otherwise; religious expressions have unified Americans from the beginning.

In fact, at the first-ever meeting of Congress in 1774 when it was suggested that Congress open with prayer, some delegates predicted that the act would be divisive, <sup>7</sup> but John Adams reported exactly the opposite, noting that “it has had an excellent effect upon everybody here.” <sup>8</sup> Several Supreme Court Justices still believe that such acts are unifying, noting:

[T]he founders of our Republic knew...that nothing, absolutely nothing, is so inclined to foster among religious believers of various faiths a toleration – no, an affection – for one another than voluntarily joining in prayer together to God Whom they all worship and seek. <sup>9</sup>

Yet the public acknowledgement of God was more than just a pleasant practice in early America; it actually formed the basis of our government philosophy – a philosophy set forth in eighty-four simple words in the Declaration of Independence:

We hold these truths to be self-evident: that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness; that to secure these rights, governments are instituted among men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed. That whenever any form of government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the right of the people to alter or to abolish it and to institute new government. <sup>10</sup>

Thus, five immutable principles constitute the heart and soul of American government:

1. Government acknowledges that there is a Creator
2. Government acknowledges that the Creator gives specific inalienable rights to man
3. Government acknowledges that it exists to protect God-given rights
4. Government acknowledges that below the level of God-given rights, government powers are to be operated only with the permission of citizens – i.e., with the “consent of the governed”
5. If government fails to meet the four standards above, the people have an inalienable right to abolish that government and institute a new one that does observe the four criteria above.

Significantly, without a public and official recognition of God, there is no hope of limited government, for rights come only from God or from man. If rights come from God, then we can require man to protect

those rights – as we did in the Declaration, Constitution, and Bill of Rights. But if our rights come from man, then man is permitted to regulate or abolish those rights, and government's power over our lives therefore becomes absolute and unlimited, as has been the growing trend since the 1990s.

The Founders understood that irrevocable limitations can be placed on government only when God is recognized as the source of our rights; they also understood that if we became complacent in our recognition of God as the center of our lives and government, then we would lose our liberties. As Thomas Jefferson warned:

[C]an the liberties of a nation be thought secure when we have removed their only firm basis: a conviction in the minds of the people that these liberties are of the gift of God? – that they are not to be violated but with His wrath? <sup>11</sup>

According to Jefferson, the only “firm basis” of our national liberties is a “conviction in the minds of the people” that our liberties are from God and that government cannot intrude into those liberties without incurring God's wrath.

President George Washington likewise admonished:

[I]t is the duty of all nations to acknowledge the providence of Almighty God, to obey His will, to be grateful for His benefits, and humbly to implore His protection and favor. <sup>12</sup>

President John Adams similarly urged:

[T]he safety and prosperity of nations ultimately and essentially depend on the protection and the blessing of Almighty God, and the national acknowledgment of this truth is an indispensable duty which the people owe to Him. <sup>13</sup>

And Samuel Adams agreed, reminding Americans:

May every citizen . . . have a proper sense of the Deity upon his mind and an impression of the declaration recorded in the Bible, “Him that honoreth Me I will honor, but he that despiseth Me shall be lightly esteemed” [I Samuel 2:30]. <sup>14</sup>

To restore honor and restore America, we first must restore God to His rightful place in our own lives and thinking. We must then reintroduce those original principles back into the public arena, thus restoring the foundation on which our Declaration and Constitution were built and the only foundation which allows them to operate as intended.

It is time for us to re-embrace the truth of President Reagan's warning that:

If we ever forget that we're one nation under God, then we will be a nation gone under. <sup>15</sup>

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## Endnotes

1. This is an op-ed article that David Barton wrote for a national website.
2. Dana Blanton, “FOX Poll: Courts Driving Religion Out of Public Life; Christianity Under Attack,” *Fox News*, December 1, 2005 (November 29-30, 2005 poll results) (at: <http://www.foxnews.com/story/0,2933,177355,00.html>).

3. Dana Blanton, "FOX Poll: Courts Driving Religion Out of Public Life; Christianity Under Attack," *Fox News*, December 1, 2005 (November 29-30, 2005 poll results) (at: <http://www.foxnews.com/story/0,2933,177355,00.html>).
4. See, "Vast Majority in U.S. Support 'Under God'," *CNN*, June 29, 2002 (at: [http://articles.cnn.com/2002-06-29/us/poll.pledge\\_1\\_newsweek-poll-christian-nation-religion?s=PM:US](http://articles.cnn.com/2002-06-29/us/poll.pledge_1_newsweek-poll-christian-nation-religion?s=PM:US)); Howard Fineman, "One Nation, Under... Who?" *The Daily Beast*, July 7, 2002 (at: <http://www.thedailybeast.com/newsweek/2002/07/07/one-nation-under-who.html>).
5. Dana Blanton, "FOX Poll: Courts Driving Religion Out of Public Life; Christianity Under Attack," *Fox News*, December 1, 2005 (November 29-30, 2005 poll results) (at: <http://www.foxnews.com/story/0,2933,177355,00.html>).
6. Dana Blanton, "FOX Poll: Courts Driving Religion Out of Public Life; Christianity Under Attack," *Fox News*, December 1, 2005 (November 29-30, 2005 poll results) (at: <http://www.foxnews.com/story/0,2933,177355,00.html>).
7. John Adams, Abigail Adams, *Letters of John Adams Addressed to His Wife*, Charles Francis Adams, editor (Boston: Charles C. Little and James Brown, 1841), Vol. I, pp. 23-24, to Abigail Adams on September 16, 1774. See also *Journals of the Continental Congress* (Washington, D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1904), Vol. I, pp. 26-27, September 6-7, 1774.
8. John Adams, Abigail Adams, *Letters of John Adams Addressed to His Wife*, Charles Francis Adams, editor (Boston: Charles C. Little and James Brown, 1841), Vol. I, pp. 23-24, to Abigail Adams on September 16, 1774.
9. *Lee v. Weisman*, 120 L. Ed. 2d 467, 519 (1992) (Scalia, J., dissenting).
10. The Declaration of Independence.
11. Thomas Jefferson, *Notes on the State of Virginia* (Philadelphia: Matthew Carey, 1794), Query XVIII, pp. 236-237.
12. Jared Sparks, *The Life of George Washington* (London: Henry Colburn, 1839), Vol. II, p. 302, proclamation for a National Thanksgiving on October 3, 1789.
13. John Adams, *The Works of John Adams, Second President of the United States*, Charles Francis Adams, editor (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1854), Vol. IX, p. 169, proclamation for a National Thanksgiving on March 23, 1798.
14. Samuel Adams, *The Writings of Samuel Adams*, Harry Alonzo Cushing, editor (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1908), Vol. IV, p. 189, article signed "Vindex" originally published in the *Boston Gazette* on June 12, 1780.
15. Ronald Reagan, "Remarks at a Ecumenical Prayer Breakfast in Dallas, Texas," *The American Presidency Project*, August 23, 1984 (at: <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=40282>).

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