



Focus on Religious Freedom

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Religious Liberty: The Words of America's Founders

Early American history—from resistance to British tyranny, through the Declaration of Independence to the establishment and early years of a Constitutional Republic—resounds with the Founders' consistent testament to religious freedom.

They espoused religious liberty for its own sake, conscious of the religious persecution that many came to the American colonies to escape. Understanding that all human rights come not from government but from God, they also knew that religious freedom was indispensable to their cause of advancing all natural rights and human freedom. And they recognized that the system of self-government they sought to establish could best flourish among a virtuous populace guided by moral standards undergirded by religious faith.

To expand on the importance of the 250th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence which proclaimed the inalienable rights each man has from our Creator, over the next month we present a range of inspiring quotations from America's founders on Religious Liberty; its centrality to natural human rights; and its essential role in a self-governing polity.

We begin this week with thoughts from our Founders on Religious Freedom:

- ***"Let the pulpit resound with the doctrine and sentiments of religious liberty."***

John Adams, A Dissertation on the Canon and Feudal Law, 1765

- ***"(W)hen we are making a constitution, it is to be hoped, for ages and millions yet unborn, why not establish the free exercise of religion as a part of the national compact."***

Richard Henry Lee, Letters of the Federal Farmer, 1788

- ***"The liberty enjoyed by the people of these States of worshipping Almighty God, agreeable to their consciences, is not only among the choicest of their blessings, but also of their rights."***

George Washington to the Society of Quakers, 13 October 1789.

- ***"I am for freedom of religion, & against all maneuvers to bring about a legal ascendancy of one sect over another."*** Thomas Jefferson, Letter to Elbridge Gerry, January 26, 1799.

- ***"I have ever regarded the freedom of religious opinions and worship as equally belonging to every sect."***

James Madison, Letter to Dr. Jacob De la Motta, a leading Jewish orator of the time, 1818.