



Focus on Religious Freedom

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America's Spiritual and Structural Heritage

America's Declaration of Independence asserted that all men are endowed by their Creator, not their government, with rights which could not be taken away...life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. After signing the Declaration of Independence, Founding Father, Samuel Adams, wrote: *"We have this day restored the Sovereign to Whom all men ought to be obedient. He reigns in heaven and from the rising to the setting of the sun, let His kingdom come."*

In 1787 Founder Benjamin Franklin reminded the Constitutional Convention about the divine protection for which they had prayed daily and gratefully observed in many battles. Franklin asked "And have we now forgotten that powerful friend? Or do we imagine that we no longer need his assistance?" Franklin encouraged continued prayers, "And if a sparrow cannot fall from a tree without his notice, is it probable that an empire can rise without his aid."

Throughout the Revolutionary War and the rise of this new nation, our founding fathers and mothers believed that morals and religion were essential to their victory and to the continued preservation of individual liberties. George Washington advised, "Religion and morality are the essential pillars of civil society." To further protect religious freedom/conscience rights the 1st Amendment to the Constitution begins with protection from government imposed religion and protection for the free exercise of religion.

As the Declaration of Independence declared, governments are instituted among men to secure men's rights based on the consent of the governed. The government structure adopted by the Constitution was a three branch structure so defined as to separate federal powers into three co-equal branches of government. The checks and balances of each branch upon the others was intended to prevent the tyranny our founders and their forefathers had endured.

When religious freedom is the issue we have seen each of the three branches significantly involved. The Legislative Branch, which is centered around Congress, makes the laws. The Executive Branch, led by the President, enforces laws. The Judicial Branch, headed by the Supreme Court, interprets the laws. Several important religious freedom cases have been heard by the Supreme Court in recent years and more are on the court's schedule. We can also expect and track new laws and executive orders dealing with issues of conscience and religious freedom. Knowing our rights to religious freedom allows us to exercise and preserve those freedoms and insure the open practice of our Catholic faith for generations to come.