



## Focus on Religious Freedom

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### America's Founders: Rights Come From God, Not From Government

America's Founding document, the Declaration of Independence, begins with a proclamation of "self-evident" truths, "that all men are created equal, and that they are endowed *by their Creator* with certain inalienable rights."

This concept, revolutionary for its time, that our rights as human beings come from God, not from government, is found over and over again in the words of America's Founders.

#### Examples from the words of our Founders:

- *"I say RIGHTS, for such they have, undoubtedly, antecedent to all earthly governments; rights that cannot be repealed or restrained by human laws; rights derived from the Great Legislator of the Universe."* John Adams, *A Dissertation on the Canon and Feudal Law*, 1765

- *"Kings or parliaments could not give the rights essential to happiness...we claim them from a higher source – from the King of Kings, and Lord of all the Earth. They are not annexed to us by parchments and seals. They are created in us by the decrees of Providence, which establish the laws of our nature. They are born with us, exist with us; and cannot be taken from us by any human power, without taking our lives."*

John Dickinson, ("Penman of the Revolution"), *An Address to the Committee of Correspondence in Barbados*, ca. May 1766.

- *"Freedom is not a gift bestowed upon us by other men, but a right that belongs to us by the laws of God and nature."* Benjamin Franklin's *Pennsylvania Gazette*, April 1, 1736

- *"Resistance to tyranny becomes the Christian and social duty of each individual. ... Continue steadfast and, with a proper sense of your dependence on God, nobly defend those rights which heaven gave, and no man ought to take from us."* John Hancock, *First Signer of the Declaration of Independence*, *Message to Congress of Massachusetts*, October 22, 1774

- *"God who gave us life gave us liberty. Can the liberties of a nation be secure when we have removed a conviction that these liberties are the gift of God?"*

Thomas Jefferson, *Notes on the State of Virginia*, 1781