

# Morality and Religion: The Foundation of Free Societies

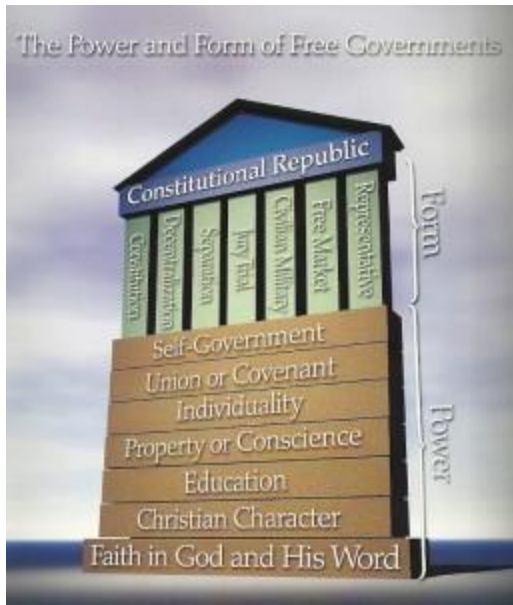
*By Stephen McDowell*

Many people today think that religion should be kept separate from government, but in truth the faith of a people is the most important aspect of civil society. George Washington wrote in his “Farewell Address” in 1796, “Of all the dispositions and habits which lead to political prosperity, religion and morality are indispensable supports.”<sup>1</sup>

Our Founders believed that it was not just faith in any god or religion that formed the foundation of free societies, but it was specifically the Christian religion and faith in the true God. Signer of the Declaration, Benjamin Rush wrote in 1806: “Christianity is the only true and perfect religion, and that in proportion as mankind adopt its principles and obeys its precepts, they will be wise and happy.”<sup>2</sup>

All nations are religious. All nations are built upon some religion, that is, upon some set of presuppositions about life, law, right, truth, and morality that is ultimately rooted in the faith of the people. A people’s faith determines a people’s character and worldview, which in turn determines how free, prosperous, just, and virtuous the nation is. The religion of a people is the life-blood of the nation. It is the primary seed that produces fruit in every sphere of life.

President John Adams wrote that, “Our Constitution was made only for a moral and religious people. It is wholly inadequate to the government of any other.”<sup>3</sup> Why is this? Only a moral and religious people can provide the power or principles necessary to support our unique form of government. Diagram 1 depicts the power and form of our constitutional republic. The pillars in this diagram represent the framework of our free nation and include such concepts as constitutionalism, decentralization of power, separation of powers, election of representatives, and separation of jurisdictions. This framework has been an important component in the United States becoming the most free and prosperous nation the world has ever seen. But more important than the form is the power of our republic. In fact, the form cannot exist without the power. Good structures are not enough because the best forms of government in bad hands can do nothing great or good. A people must be prepared from within to live in liberty.



The power is the internal principles that must reside in the lives of the American populace. Any people who desire to live free must be self-governed, work together in union for the common good, recognize the value of the individual, protect property rights, and be knowledgeable and moral. Notice from the diagram that the foundational building block of a free nation is faith in God. Each one of the principles that must be a part of people's lives for a free nation to be established and maintained requires the indispensable support of the Creator.

The uniqueness and value of man comes from his being created by God. Man becomes self-governing as he is subject to God and His truth. Morality cannot exist separate from religion. Man's most precious possession, his conscience, responds to right or wrong put in his heart by his Creator. The strongest force to bring union among a people is a common faith. Education that will propagate liberty must sow seeds of truth. All truth originates with God.

For the fundamental rights of man to be secure from government, the people must recognize that these rights are endowed by their Creator, and not granted by government. If people think that government, or man, is the source of rights then government can take away these rights. But if God gives rights to men, they are inalienable.

A fundamental question in securing liberty for all men is: "Who is the source of law in a society?" In reality, the source of law in a society is the god of that society. If man is the final source of the law, then the law will constantly change as man's worldview changes. God is the source of true law and His law is absolute. William Blackstone, the great English legal scholar, said that no human laws are of any validity, if contrary to the higher law of God.

Historically, the Christian faith has been the source of laws of liberty. This truth was once well known by Americans. The chamber of the U.S. House of Representatives contains 23 marble relief portraits of noted lawgivers. Most of them were Christians and had a Biblical view of law. Only one is seen full-faced and is the greatest lawgiver of all — Moses.

Certain aspects of the laws of liberty are revealed by God to all men through creation and their conscience, in what our Founders called the “laws of nature.” However, the primary way that God has revealed His law to man is through “the laws of nature’s God” as revealed in the Holy Scriptures. To the degree that nations have applied the principles of the Bible, is the degree to which those nations have prospered and been free.

The Christian faith is not only the source of the ideas of liberty, but it also produces the internal character necessary for a people to live free. Christianity has produced the power in the people that leads to liberty and prosperity.

On June 8, 1783, not long before Washington resigned his commission as General of the Army of the newly independent American republic, he wrote a letter to the governors of the thirteen states communicating a number of important points he believed necessary for the support of the new nation. He concluded:

“I now make it my earnest prayer, that God would have you, and the State over which you preside, in his holy protection, . . . that he would most graciously be pleased to dispose us all, to do Justice, to love mercy, and to demean ourselves with that Charity, humility, and pacific temper of mind, which were the Characteristics of the Divine Author of our blessed Religion, and without an humble imitation of whose example in these things, we can never hope to be a happy Nation.”<sup>4</sup>

His advice for the preservation and advancement of the new nation was to imitate the character of Christ Jesus, the founder of the Christian faith. If we follow his wise counsel, we can have the highest hope for the future fortunes of our nation, but if we turn aside from this eternal truth we will cease to exist as the land of the free.

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Stephen McDowell is co-founder of the Providence Foundation, a Christian educational organization whose mission is to train and network leaders to transform nations. As President of Providence Foundation Biblical Worldview University, Stephen has trained people throughout America and from over 100 nations. He has traveled throughout the world where he has consulted with government officials, assisted in writing political documents, advised political parties, and started Christian schools and Biblical worldview training centers. He has authored and co-authored over 20 books, videos, and training courses including *America’s Providential History*, *Liberating the Nations*, and *Building Godly Nations*. To learn more about ideas presented in this article see these and other books published by the Providence Foundation (website: [www.providencefoundation.com](http://www.providencefoundation.com)).

#### End Notes

1. George Washington’s “Farewell Address,” September 17, 1796. *A Compilation of the Messages and Papers of the Presidents*, by James D. Richardson, Washington: Bureau of National Literature and Art, 1910, 1:205-216.

2. Benjamin Rush, *Essays, Literary, Moral and Philosophical*, Philadelphia: printed by Thomas and William Bradford, 1806, p. 93.
3. "A Letter to the Officers of the First Brigade of the Third Division of the Militia of Massachusetts, Oct. 11, 1798," in *The Works of John Adams, Second President of the United States*, Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1854, 9:228-229.
4. "Circular to the Governors of the States," June 8, 1783, *The Writings of George Washington from the Original Manuscript Sources, 1745-1799*, Edited by John C. Fitzpatrick, Washington DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1931, 26:496.