

The Last Will & Testaments of the Founders Reveal Their Christian Faith

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Introduction

The evidence of the Christian Foundation of America is great. The Providence Foundation has presented much of this in our books and publications, including *America's Providential History*, *America a Christian Nation*, *Building Godly Nations*, and others. Many other people have written on the topic as well. But the material is so vast that it would take myriads of books to even present a good introduction. In this *Providential Perspective* we add more to the evidence with words of some of the people who gave birth to this nation — words that these men wanted their posterity to remember them by.

In their Last Will and Testaments, many of our Founders testified of their strong Christian faith. Some who were devout Christians, as seen in other writings and actions, made little or no mention of this in their wills (for example Roger Sherman), while others who had written little of their Christian beliefs during their life proclaimed their strong faith in this last testament. Some wills are very explicit in showing their reliance upon Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; others reflect their reverence for God briefly — using such terms as “In the name of God” (George Washington) and “By permission of Almighty God” (James McClurg). Many declared in language similar to Josiah Bartlett, Signer of the Declaration: “Firstly I commit my Soul into the hands of God, its great and benevolent author.”

The following are excerpts of some of the Founding Fathers' wills that express their Christianity. While these are from the time of American independence and the early years of our republic, we could have examined many of those who colonized America. For example, **John Smith**, leader in early Virginia, stated in his will:

First I commend my soule into the handes of Allmightie God my maker hoping through the merites of Christ Jesus my Redeemer to receave full remission of all my sinnes, and to inherit a place in the everlasting kingdome.



The wills of leading women in early America also reveal the Christian faith of our Founders. Mary, the mother of George Washington, stated in her will:

In the name of God! Amen. I, Mary Washington, . . . do make and publish this, my last will, recommending my soul in the hands of my Creator, hoping for a remission of all my sins through the merits and mediation of Jesus Christ, the Saviour of mankind.

(These quotes have been taken from copies of the wills in our files, most made available by courtesy of WallBuilders. These wills may be obtained from various state and county archives; and some from historical societies and documents.)

Samuel Adams (1722-1803)



Signer of the Declaration, Father of the Revolution, Governor of Massachusetts

In the name of God. Amen. . . . Principally & first of all, I commend my Soul to that Almighty Being who gave it, and my body I commit to the dust, relying upon the merits of Jesus Christ for a pardon of all my sins.

Daniel of Saint Thomas Jenifer (1723-1790)

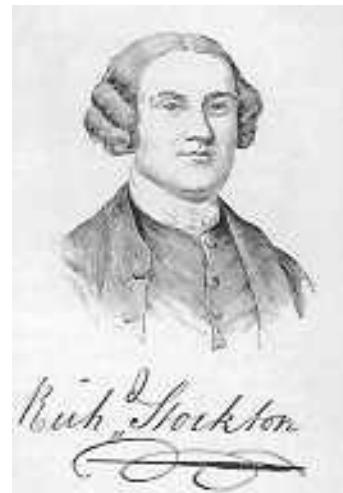
Signer of the Constitution, Maryland

In the Name of God Amen. I Daniel of Saint Thomas Jenifer . . . commend my Soul to my blessed redeemer.

Richard Stockton (1731-1781)

Signer of the Declaration, New Jersey

And as my children will have frequent occasion of perusing this instrument, and may probably be particularly impressed with the last words of their father, I think it proper here not only to subscribe to the entire belief of the great and leading doctrines of the Christian Religion, such as the Being of God, the universal defection and depravity of human nature, the divinity of the person and the completeness of the redemption purchased by the blessed Saviour, the necessity of the operations of the divine Spirit; of divine Faith, accompanied with an habitual virtuous life, and the universality of the divine Providence: but also, in the bowels of a father's affection, to exhort and charge them, that the fear of God is the beginning of wisdom, that the way of life held up in the Christian system, is calculated for the most complete happiness that can be enjoyed in this mortal state; that all occasions of vice and immorality is injurious either immediately or consequentially; even in this life; that as Almighty God hath not been pleased in the holy Scriptures to prescribe any precise mode in which he is to be publicly worshipped, all contention about it generally arises from want of knowledge or want of virtue. I have therefore no particular advice to leave with my children upon this subject, save only that they deliberately and conscientiously, in the beginning of life, determine for themselves, with which denomination of Christians they can, the most devoutly and profitably worship God; that after such determination they stately adhere to such denomination without being given to change; and without contending with or judging others who may think or act differently upon a matter so immaterial to substantial virtue and piety.

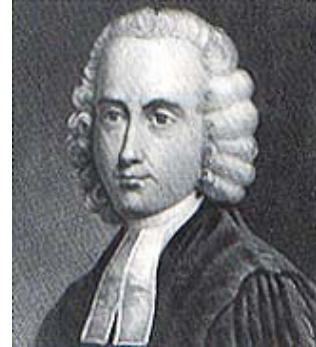


That distinguished abilities, stations and authority are only desireable as occasions of doing greater private and public good, but that their footsteps being invariably masked with envy and opposition, make them enemies to private peace, and therefore unless public life is evidently pointed out by divine providence it should rather be avoided than coveted.

John Dickinson (1732-1808)

Signer of the Constitution, Revolutionary General, Delaware

Rendering Thanks to my Creator for my Existence and Station among his works, for my Birth in a Country enlightened by the Gospel and enjoying Freedom, and for all his other Kindnesses, to him I resign Myself, humbly confiding in his Goodness, and in his Mercy through Jesus Christ, for the Events of Eternity.



Christopher Gadsden (1724-1805)

Member of First Continental Congress, Revolutionary General, South Carolina

My Soul with humble submission and confidence in the merits of my blessed Saviour Jesus Christ, I hope in the last trying moment to resign with chearfulness, to that Almighty and Merciful being who gave it.

John Blair (1732-1800)

Signer of the Constitution, Supreme Court Justice, Virginia

After commending my soul to God, the Universal Creator, and trusting that he will exercise towards it the same beneficent care and protection, for which I have such abundant reason, in the course of a fully long life, to thank him with earnest devotion: and that he will thro the merits of a crucified Saviour, raise up my body at the last day to partake, in union with my soul; of endless life and bliss.

John Jay (1745-1829)



Member of First and other Continental Congresses, First Supreme Court Chief Justice, author of The Federalist, New York

Unto Him who is the author and giver of all good, I render sincere and humble thanks for his manifold and unmerited blessings, and especially for our redemption and salvation by his beloved Son. He has been pleased to bless me with excellent parents, with a virtuous wife, and with worthy children. His protection has accompanied me through many eventful years, faithfully employed in the service of my country; and his providence has not only conducted me to this tranquil situation, but also given me abundant reason to be contented and thankful. Blessed be his holy

name. While my children lament my departure, let them recollect that in doing them good, I was only the agent of their Heavenly Father, and that he never withdraws his care and consolations from those who diligently seek him.

Robert Treat Paine (1731-1814)

Signer of the Declaration, Massachusetts

I am constrained to express my adoration of the Supreme Being, the author of my existence, in full belief of his Providential Goodness and his forgiving mercy revealed to the World through Jesus Christ, through whom I hope for never ending happiness in a future state acknowledging with grateful remembrance the happiness I have enjoyed in my passage through a long life.

George Mason (1725-1792)

Constitutional Convention, Father of the Bill of Rights,
Virginia

My soul I resign into the hands of my Almighty Creator, whose tender mercy's are all over his works, who hateth nothing that he hath made, and to the Justice and Wisdom of whose Dispensations I willingly and chearfully submit humbly hoping from his unbounded mercy and benevolence, thro the Merits of my blessed Savior, a remission of my sins.



Philip Livingston (1715-1778)

Signer of Declaration, New York

In the name of God Amen. . . . First I do resign my soul to the Great Most Mighty and Most Merciful God who gave it in hopes thro mercy alone by the merits of Jesus Christ to have joyfull Resurrection to life Eternal.

John Langdon (1741-1819)

Signer of Constitution, Governor New Hampshire

First: I commend my Soul to the infinite mercies of God in Christ Jesus, the beloved Son of the Father, who died and rose again, that he might be the Lord of the dead, and of the living; and my body I commit to the earth, to be interred in a decent manner, at the discretion of my Executors hereinafter named, professing to believe and hope in the joyful Scripture doctrine of a resurrection to eternal life.

Henry Knox (1750-1806)

General in Revolution, Secretary of War

First, I think it proper to express my unshaken opinion of the immortality of my Soul or mind; and to dedicate and devote the same to the Supreme head of the Universe —

To that great and tremendous Jehovah — who created the Universal frame of Nature, Worlds and Systems in number infinite, and who has given intellectual existence to the rational beings of each globe, who are perpetually migrating and ascending in the scale of mind according to certain principles always founded on the great basis of morality and virtue — to this awfully sublime Being do I resign my spirit with unlimited confidence of his mercy and protection.

John Hall

Member of Continental Congress

I recommend my Soul to God who made me hoping for his mercy and forgiveness of all my sins through the merits and mediation of our blessed saviour Jesus Christ.

Elias Boudinot (1740-1821)

President of Congress under Articles of Confederation, Member of the First Congress under the Constitution from New Jersey, Director of U.S. Mint



I do therefore improve so good an Opportunity of repeating the profession I have made for more than Sixty Years, and which by the free grace of God, thro' Jesus Christ and by the continued influences of his holy Spirit has been strengthened & confirmed by the most happy Experiences, founded on solid grounds, and by a thorough examination & Enquiry into the divine Scriptures thro' that long period, and in which I hope, under the same blessed influences, to finish my mortal life, I mean that of a firm, unfeigned & prevailing belief

in one sovereign, omnipotent & eternal Jehovah, a God of infinite Love & Mercy, “who hath delivered us from the powers of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son; in whom we have redemption thro his blood, even the forgiveness of Sins, who is the image of the invisible God, the first born of every creature. and He is before all things and by him all things consist” and who ever has been and still is reconciling a guilty world unto himself, by his Righteousness & atonement, his death & his Resurrection, thro whom alone Life & Immortality have been brought to light in his gospel, and by the all powerful influences of his holy Spirit, is daily sanctifying, enlightening & leading his faithful people into all necessary Truth. And as it has pleased a holy & sovereign God to favour me with the Continuance of one only Child, to whom I do most cordially wish & pray for the best & greatest possible good in time & Eternity; I do in the most solemn manner, as in the presence of the one only great & glorious God, The Father the Son and the holy Spirit, and in view of an approaching Eternity, beseech & intreat her, to make the fear & the love of God, the great objects of her constant attention & pursuit. And in a particular manner that she will, by a persevering inquiry into, and a thorough knowledge of the Spirit of Power of the gospel of Jesus Christ, which she has been so long, and I trust thro' divine mercy, savingly acquainted with, endeavour to cherish & increase the like Temper, disposition & usefulness in life, as are therein so clearly & plainly taught [&

impressed?] and which generally speaking, consist in an universal benevolence, meekness, self denial, deep contrition for sin & unfeigned love to our Brethren, with an habitual of lively faith in & dependence upon our Lord Jesus Christ as the only atonement for our Sins, and the source of every blessing. . .

John Hart (1711-1779)

Signer of the Declaration, New Jersey

Thanks be given unto Almighty God therefore, and knowing that is appointed for all men once to die and after that the Judgment, do make & ordain this my last Will and Testament . . . First and principally I give & recommend my Soul into the Hands of Almighty God who gave it and my Body to the Earth to be buried in a decent and Christian like manner . . . not doubting but to receive the same again at the General resurrection by the mighty power of God and as touching all such Temporal Estate wherewith it hath pleased Almighty God to bless me in this life.

William Samuel Johnson (1727-1819)

Signer of the Constitution, Connecticut

I give and bequeath to the first of my grandsons who shall apply himself to the study of divinity and take Holy Orders in the Protestant Episcopal Church my Polyglot Bible the two Hebrew Bibles and Hebrew Psalter which my father used, Bates' translation of the Pentateuch Hanes Hebrew Psalms Grabis Septuagint and an interleaved Greek Testament.



Peter Muhlenberg (1746-1807)



Minister, Revolutionary General, Member of First National Congress, Pennsylvania

Principally and first of all I recommend my immortal Soul into the hands of God who gave it and my Body to the Earth to be buried in a decent christian like manner . . . And as to such worldly Goods and Estate wherewith God has been pleased to bless me in this life I give and dispose of it in the following manner.

Patrick Henry (1736-1799)

Orator of the Revolution, First Continental Congress, Governor Virginia

This is all the inheritance I can give to my dear family. The religion of Christ can give them one which will make them rich indeed.

Gabriel Duval (1752-1844)

Congressman from Maryland, U.S. Supreme Court Justice

I resign my soul into the hands of the Almighty who gave it in humble hopes of his mercy through our Savior Jesus Christ.

John Morton (1724-1777)

Signer of the Declaration, Pennsylvania

With an Awful Reverence to the Great Almighty God Creator of all mankind, I John Morton of Ridley in the County of Chester in the province of Pennsylvania, being sick and weak in Body but of sound mind & memory, thanks be given to almighty God for the same, and for all other his mercies and favours, and considering the certainty of death & the uncertainty of the time thereof, do for the settling such Temporal Estate as it hath pleased God to bless me with in this life make this my last Will and Testament as followeth.

Henry Middleton (1717-1784)

First and Second Continental Congresses, South Carolina

In the Name of God Amen. I Henry Middleton . . . , being in declining state of Health, but of sound and disposing Mind and Memory (Thanks be to God for the Same) do make and declare this Instrument of Writing to be my last and only Will and Testament in Manner following, that is to say, first and principally I commend my Soul to God the Author and Giver of Life, hoping for a blessed Immortality through the Merits and Mediation of my Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

Jonathan Trumbull (1710-1785)

Governor of Connecticut, Minister, trusted counselor of Washington during the war

Principally and first of all, I bequeath my Soul to God the Creator and giver thereof; and body to the Earth, to be buried in decent christian burial at the discretion of my Executors hereafter named, nothing doubting but that I shall receive the same again at the General Resurrection thro' the power of Almighty God; believing and hoping for eternal life thro' the merits of my dear, exalted Redeemer Jesus Christ.

Philip Schuyler (1733-1804)

Member of Continental Congress from New York, Revolutionary General, New York Senator in first Congress

In the name of God, Amen. I, Philip Schuyler . . . being by the mercy of the Father of all mankind of sound and disposing mind and memory, do make this my last will and Testament. . . To the great Omnipotent Just and merciful Sovereign who directs the destinies of created beings, I humbly submit, that of my Soul, relying for the pardon of my sins on his free grace, thro the mediation of the blessed Redeemer of mankind.



David Ramsay (1749-1815)



Member of Congress under Articles of Confederation, physician, author of history of Revolution, South Carolina

I give my Soul to God in the hope of his Mercy through the Merits & intercession of his Son Jesus Christ & my body to the Grave there to be kept till the resurrection day agreeable to the hopes inspired by Gods holy word contained in the Bible the best of Books & given by divine inspiration for the Salvation of the fallen race of Adam.

Rufus Putnam (1738-1824)

Revolutionary General, New York Congressman, founder of Marietta, Ohio, Surveyor-general of U.S., member of Constitutional convention of Ohio.

First, I give my soul to a holy Sovereign God who gave it, in humble hope of a blessed immortality, through the atonement and righteousness of Jesus Christ and the sanctifying grace of the Holy Spirit. My Body I commit to the Earth to be buried in a decent Christian manner, In full belief that this body shall by the mighty power of God be raised to life at the Last day, “for this corruptible must put on incorruption and this mortal must put on immortality.”

Charles Cotesworth Pinckney (1746-1825)

Signer of the Constitution, Revolutionary General, South Carolina

To the eternal immutable and only true God be all honour and Glory now and forever Amen!

Eliphalet Dyer (1721-1807)

Member of First and many early Continental Congresses, Connecticut Judge

Whereas it has pleased God in his good Providence to bestow upon me considerable worldly estate & property, and calling to mind my own frailty & mortality & hope and trust in the fear of God.

Andrew Jackson (1767-1845)

Seventh President of the United States

First, I bequeath my body to the dust, whence it come, and my soul to God who gave it: hoping for a happy immortality through the atoning merits of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Saviour of the world.