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OURS IS A RELIGIOUS NATION

Commemoration of the religious feast of Christmas reminds us to be grateful that we live in a nation that officially recognizes the birth of Christ by a national holiday. It gives us a chance to recall that our American heritage is religious, not secular; and that the foundation of our governmental institutions is a proclaimed togetherness of God and His people.

The Declaration of Independence, the Northwest Ordinance, George Washington's Farewell Address, Lincoln's Gettysburg Address, our coins, our Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag, military and Congressional chaplains, oaths of office, oaths by witnesses in court, and more than a hundred Presidential proclamations of Thanksgiving Day, all are proof of the close intertwining of our American heritage with reliance on God.

The practical and courageous men who led the exploration and settlement of the American wilderness, and then formed one Union of many states, made it clear that a firm reliance on God was the foundation of their actions, that His laws were the rationale of all our man-made laws, and that His support was an essential part of every community they founded. From Columbus to the first charter of Virginia to the Declaration of Independence to the separate constitutions of almost every state, the founders of the American Republic spoke with a unanimous voice.

The Mayflower Compact, written and signed by a little band of English emigres just before they landed in the New World, was principally a solemn affirmation of the moral law as the basis for the governance of men.

A century and a half later, when the Founding Fathers declared our independence as a free nation, they proclaimed our national dependence on God as Creator, as supreme Lawmaker, as the Source of all rights, as Supreme Judge, and as our Patron and Protector.

George Washington summed up this attitude when he said in his Farewell Address: "Of all the dispositions and habits which lead to political prosperity, religion and morality are indispensable supports. Reason and experience both forbid us to expect that natural morality can prevail in exclusion of religious principles."

George Mason, author of the famous Virginia Bill of Rights of 1776, which became the model for most other bills of rights, argued to the General Court of Virginia, "The laws of nature are the laws of God, whose authority can be superseded by no power on earth." William Penn, the founder of Pennsylvania, expressed the consensus of the colonists when he warned, "Those people who are not governed by God will be ruled by tyrants."

The constitutions of 47 states, variously adopted in different decades, spoke with a consistent voice. "The people of Connecticut acknowledging with gratitude, the good providence of God, in having permitted them to enjoy a free government ..." (1818) "We the people of Kansas, grateful to Almighty God for our civil and religious privileges..." (1863)

"We, the people of the State of Illinois -- grateful to Almighty God for the civil, political and religious liberty which He hath so long permitted us to enjoy, and looking to Him for a blessing upon our endeavors to secure and transmit the same unimpaired to succeeding generations..." (1870) "Humbly invoking the blessings of Almighty God, the people of the State of Texas, do ordain and establish this Constitution." (1876)

"We, the people of the State of California, grateful to Almighty God for our freedom..." (1879) "Invoking the guidance of Almighty God, in order to secure and perpetuate the blessing of liberty; to secure just and rightful government..." (1907) Oklahoma, *"We, the people of Missouri, with profound reverence for the Supreme Ruler of the Universe, and grateful for His goodness..." (1945)*

The U.S. Supreme Court recognized the pervasiveness of religion in all our institutions of government in the Church of the Holy Trinity v. United States in ~~1870~~ 1892. *The Court declared: "This [United States] is a religious people. This is historically true. From the discovery of America to this hour there is a single voice making this affirmation."*

After reviewing the long history of religious affirmations that are part of our nation's heritage, as expressed in charters, proclamations, and constitutions, the Court declared: "There is no dissonance in these declarations. These are not individual sayings or declarations of private persons; they are organic utterances; they speak the voice of the entire people ... There is a universal language pervading them all having but one meaning; they affirm and reaffirm that this is a religious nation."