

A Public Prayer – A Stir

I was asked to give the Invocation at the February Polk County Commissioners meeting. Realizing that this was to take place on what we now call President's Day—which officially is the country's annual birthday celebration for President George Washington as I understand it—I took to heart words which he spoke in his "Farewell Address" on September 19, 1796. In this address, President Washington informed the citizenry of the nation that he would not stand for re-election. He thanked the people for the high privilege to serve and for their confidence in him and bid them farewell. He then continued at length:

Here, perhaps, I ought to stop. But a solicitude for your welfare which cannot end but with my life, and the apprehension of danger, natural to that solicitude, urge me on an occasion like the present, to offer to your solemn contemplation, and to recommend to your frequent review, some sentiments; which are the result of much reflection, of no inconsiderable observation, and which appear to me all important to the permanency of your felicity as a People. These will be offered to you with the more freedom, as you can only see in them the disinterested warnings of a parting friend, who can possibly have no personal motive to bias his counsel. Nor can I forget, as an encouragement to it, your indulgent reception of my sentiments on a former and not dissimilar occasion. . . .

What our first president includes in this address is "all important" to him—and he wished that his hearers would give his words "solemn contemplation" and "frequent review." They are the result of "much reflection" and "no inconsiderable observation." Thus, the following two paragraphs deep within the address were not spoken lightly, but from strong conviction and great concern. President Washington addressed his fellow citizens:

Of all the dispositions and habits which lead to political prosperity, Religion and morality are indispensable supports. In vain would that man claim the tribute of Patriotism who should labour to subvert these great Pillars of human happiness, these firmest props of the duties of Men and citizens. The mere Politician, equally with the pious man ought to respect and to cherish them. A volume could not trace all their connections with private and public felicity. Let it simply be asked where is the security for property, for reputation, for life, if the sense of religious obligation desert the oaths, which are the instruments of investigation in Courts of Justice? And let us with caution indulge the supposition that morality can be maintained without religion. Whatever may be conceded to the influence of refined education on minds of peculiar structure, reason and experience both forbid us to expect that National morality can prevail in exclusion of religious principle.

'Tis substantially true, that virtue or morality is a necessary spring of popular government. The rule indeed extends with more or less force to every species of free Government. Who that is a sincere friend to it, can look with indifference upon attempts to shake the foundation of the fabric?...

Given those words by President Washington, at whatever public or political meeting a preacher might be asked to pray on the day of Washington's birthday celebration, that preacher would not be worth his salt—especially in this day of great moral crisis—were he not to pray for the very specific needs of the people and implore God to deliver this nation and our own Polk County from a debilitating lack of "National morality."

We have been blessed by God with a "free Government." Washington asks, "Who that is a sincere friend to it, can look with indifference upon attempts to shake the foundation of the fabric?" Family is such a foundation.

I was reminded of how seriously the National moral "fabric" is torn when I listened to BookTalk on KFYO-St. Louis recently [kfyoam.org]. Clarke D. Forsythe was interviewed concerning his book, sure to cause a stir, "Abuse of Discretion: The Inside Story of Roe v Wade." Forsythe has investigated the papers and notes of eight of the nine Supreme Court Justices involved in making that abominable decision. These documents are now available along with the two hour arguments in the fall of 1971 and 1972, and they paint a dismal picture. I had read the entire 1973 decision some time ago, but hearing "the inside story" sickened me even more. As Americans, 41 years later, how can any of us escape culpability. We live in a nation that is hurting terribly due to our lack of "National morality," as George Washington speaks of it.

The following words are attributed to President Washington, "Government is not reason. It is not eloquence. It is force." In government the church has no authority and yet the church has the right to speak and be heard in society, which is the very opportunity given pastors to offer prayers to God to open such meetings. Those who cry "separation of church and state" to prohibit such prayers betray their misunderstanding of the First Amendment: "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; . . ." This in no way applies to County Commissions requesting area pastors to pray at their public meetings. Following is my prayer that I am told has caused a "stir."

Gracious God and Father,

Thanks be to You, for blessing us with our American homeland and for the many who have served and continue to serve the people of this nation in the military especially and in government service at every level. Give us, we pray, community leadership reflective of the great presidents of our nation, George Washington and Abraham Lincoln, whose commitment to freedom and strict moral standing set a course of greatness for the people of the United States.

Deliver us from those destructive laws and godless practices that are tearing apart the holy institutions of marriage and family among us, institutions established by You in the creation of man as male and female with the command to be fruitful and multiply: save us from rampant no-fault divorce, illicit sexuality by live-in partners, the public promotion of homosexual lifestyles which endangers our young and leads directly to the corruption of our boys especially, the proliferation of children of single moms fueled by economic encouragement, and worst of all, the indefensible slaughter of the unborn in our beloved homeland based on the deceitful and dishonest judgments of a few evil men over 40 years ago. Help us see the good that we can do here in Polk County to curb the spread of lawlessness and the abuse of children, and help us stand for decency with sound instruction in our schools, with honesty and integrity in business and government, and with committed husband/wife and father/mother relationships in our homes.

Lord Jesus Christ, Holy Son of God,

You have given husbands especially the example of self-sacrifice, as You shed Your precious blood to purify for Yourself a holy Bride, Your Church; You established love and forgiveness as the hallmarks of Your kingdom; help the men of this community stand as protectors and defenders of the common good, and strengthen and uphold the women of our county, whose leadership roles in business, education, community government and protective agencies are ever increasing, and whose place as pillars of family and church are an encouragement to all. As You have won for mankind spiritual freedom from the assaults of devil, world and flesh, and have delivered all believers from the fear of death, guide and strengthen all who serve in government here and throughout our nation in the defense of liberty, of equality under the law, and of justice for all.

O Holy Spirit,

who in the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testament gives to mankind the very mind of Christ, You are the Comforter who brings healing and peace to people's lives through faith in Jesus Christ; stir up the hearts of all our citizens to shun evil and hold fast to what is good, that our children may be free from the violence and rank immorality that permeates movies and music, TV shows and video games. By Your goodness grant us continued freedom of worship and deliver us from coercive laws which infringe upon conscience, especially in the area of healthcare and in matters of life and death. Bless the expansion of St. Luke's Hospital and the service it renders our community.

Let Your wisdom, mercy and justice direct this Board in all its discussions and determinations, we pray, **in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.** sdg

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