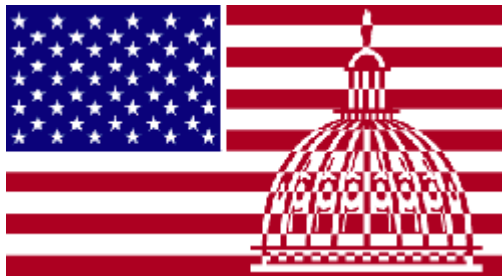


DOES AMERICA HAVE A PRAYER?



CONTENTS:

- **How do we pray for our country? Do we assume we are a Christian nation?**
- **Anti-Christian Movements & Influence: A Long History**
- **Civil Religion: The “Four Ms” of a Common Faith of the State**
- **Other Religions**
- **Pray for America with God’s Perspective**
- **What If?**

“If at any time I announce that a nation or kingdom is to be uprooted, torn down and destroyed, and if that nation I warned repents of its evil, then I will relent and not inflict on it the disaster I had planned. And if at another time I announce that a nation or kingdom is to be built up and planted, and if it does evil in my sight and does not obey me, then I will reconsider the good I had intended to do for it.” (Jeremiah 18:7-10 NIV)

Does America have a prayer?

It surely will when millions of Americans will—hopefully—pray for our nation and its leaders on the next National Day of Prayer.

National days of prayer have a long history in America. They were called as early as 1775 with the First Continental Congress and in 1863 by Abraham Lincoln. But our current Day was established by a joint Congressional resolution in 1952 and signed into law by President Truman. In 1988, President Reagan declared it to be the first Thursday of May each year.

How do we pray for our country? Do we assume that we are a Christian nation?

Clearly, many founders were deeply committed Christians, and our nation's historical structure reflects innumerable Christian principles. For instance, many early states' charters and constitutions acknowledged that their settlement was to propagate the Christian faith. The Continental Congress of 1775 officially called all citizens to fast, pray and confess their sin. And the Declaration of Independence (1776) makes four specific references to national dependence on God.

The Mayflower Contract of 1620 opened *"In the name of God, Amen. Having undertaken for the glory of God and advancement of the Christian faith..."*

In 1789 George Washington proclaimed Thanksgiving Day by saying it is "the duty of all nations" to acknowledge and obey Almighty God. President John Adams stated in 1798 that, ***"Our Constitution was made only for a moral and religious people. It is wholly inadequate to the government of any other."*** And U.S. Supreme Court Justice Brewer announced in an 1892 opinion that *"this is a Christian nation."*

Eight different Scripture sections are inscribed on the Washington Monument. And even our coins say, *"In God we trust."*

**Anti-Christian Movements & Influence:
A Long History**

And yet, we have to be careful talking about "God in America" or "a nation under God," for false spirituality and man-centered, anti-Christian thought also have a long history in America.

Native Americans inhabited the continent long before the Europeans and their **animistic paganism** is still with us as the spiritism and earth worship of today's New Age movement.

Seventeenth and 18th century Europeans imported "**Enlightenment**" thought—an anti-Christian, rationalistic philosophy that had great influence in civic life and eventually gave birth under the influence of Darwinism to modern **secular humanism** and today's split in American culture. **Masonry**, with its amalgamation of Biblical, Egyptian and Greco-Roman imagery and occultism, also has been very influential.

In many instances over time, Christian elements were diluted or replaced by a **civil religion** that took on a Christian appearance but sucked the heart out of the Gospel and replaced it with the idols of state and culture.

Civil Religion: The “Four Ms” of a Common Faith of the State

The term *civil religion* refers to using a spiritual religion (such as Christianity) to support and elevate the state above God.

1. Moralism. Religion’s most important role is seen as producing moral, good citizens. For instance, Thomas Jefferson promoted this view although he spoke of God and created the Washington, D.C. school system with the Bible and a hymnal as texts. He even drastically edited the Bible (on view in the Jefferson Memorial).

2. Mission. God has a mission for America similar to that of Old Testament Israel, despite the fact that America is not a theocracy. There is also a tendency to believe that what works in America is ordained of God.

3. Memorials. The Ten Commandments reveal God’s basic requirements, rather than the Gospel. (They are sometimes part of war and civic memorials.)

4. Molds. Some groups assume that accepting Christ as Savior means dressing and acting in a certain culturally prescribed mold or holding certain prescribed political views.

Conversion is dying to self, sin, and the world, and being raised to a new form of life lived by grace. Civil religion’s tendency is toward a kind of unitarian universalism where salvation means becoming a nice person instead of a new creature.¹

Other Religions

In addition to civil religion, many other religious traditions are deeply ingrained in American culture.

Tenets of spiritualism and mind science, which arose in the last century, can be seen in Christianity in Norman Vincent Peale’s “Positive Thinking,” Kenneth Hagin’s “Faith Teaching” and the “Human Potential Movement” (seen most often in sales training and popular self-empowerment seminars).

Even the National Day of Prayer Task Force itself does not represent a specifically Christian focus, but rather the “Judeo-Christian” heritage.

These are just a few complex influences.

How to Pray? Pray for America with God’s Perspective

- (1) He is absolutely sovereign (Psalm 104:31-35; 105:3-5; 145:1-7), and Jesus Christ is the only answer.
- (2) He judges nations, causing their rise and fall (Jer. 18:7-10).
- (3) He is patient, not wanting any to perish (2 Peter 3:9).
- (4) He gives prophetic warning of judgment (see Jeremiah, etc).
- (5) Catastrophe can be averted by repentance and prayer (Jer. 18:7-10; 2 Chron. 2:14).

Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones warns:

“God forbid that we should abuse the Scriptures by reducing them to the level of our ideas or contemporary events. Look at the ultimate, look at God’s grand and glorious purpose. Do not be over-particular in your interpretation of contemporary history, do not waste your time in attempts to fix ‘times and seasons’. What matters is God’s plan, God’s eternal scheme....”²

As We Pray, Let Us Ask:

- **What is His plan for this nation?**
- **Am I trying to “fix times and seasons”—or am I praying in accord with His plan?**
- **Am I discerning His plan from civil religion and popular fads and philosophies?**

What If?

Habbakuk talks of ***judgments and convulsions that will come***. Surely God's judgment is upon America now, and whether she rises or falls, the prophet teaches us to trust Him regardless of circumstances.

“Though the fig tree does not bud and there are no grapes on the vine, though the olive crop fails and the fields produce no food, though there are no sheep in the pen and no cattle in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will be joyful in God my Savior. The Sovereign Lord is my strength; he makes my feet like the feet of a deer, he enables me to go on the heights.”
(Habbakuk 3:16-19 NIV).

—***Can we say the same?***

—Linda Nathan

¹ Thanks to Richard Nathan for the quote and for the historical information from his American Church History class.

² D. M. Lloyd-Jones, *God's Ultimate Purpose: An Exposition of Ephesians 1:1 to 23* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1994), p. 207.

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