

The Soul of America

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America was founded by men who believed that God took an active part in supporting their effort to establish a nation founded upon the idea that human rights originated in the mind of God. In this excerpt from Ron Pappalardo's recently published book

Messages from God: 21st Century Prophets Speak for a New Age, the author gives examples of this dynamic in American history:

Chapter 6 The Soul of America

Have you ever looked closely at a dollar bill? Everybody knows that on the front there is a famous portrait of George Washington, but I want to call your attention to the back. The back of a dollar bill is very mysterious. There are words and symbols there whose meanings are not easy to understand at first glance. For one thing, some of the words are in Latin, and some of the symbols look more Egyptian than American.



Parts of the bill are pretty straightforward. For example, in the center above the word "One" you'll find the words *In God We Trust*, which is America's national motto. Other parts are not so straightforward. To the left of the words *In God We Trust* is part of the Great Seal of the United States. It includes a drawing of a pyramid, and at the top of the pyramid is an eye. The eye is surrounded by an aura of light, with beams of light projecting outward in all directions. Above the eye are the Latin words *Annuet Coeptis*. This eye at the top of the pyramid is known as "The Eye of Providence;" it is a symbol for God. *Annuet Coeptis* is Latin for "He has favored our undertakings."

So what does all this mean?

Fortunately, the man who created the final design of the Great Seal in 1782, Charles Thomson, provided a written description that helps explain its meaning: The Eye over it and the motto *Annuet Coeptis* allude to the many signal interpositions of providence in favor of the American cause.

"...The many signal interpositions of providence" means the many exceptional interventions of God.

In a nutshell, these words and symbols reflect the belief held by most of the Founders of the United States that God had taken an active part in their struggle for liberty and had looked favorably upon their efforts to establish a new nation. George Washington, who had led the Continental Army throughout the war to gain independence from Great Britain, epitomized this conviction in many of his writings and public speeches.

After his great victory over the British forces at the Battle of Yorktown, General Washington urged all of his soldiers to attend services to thank God for his support of their endeavors: "The Commander in Chief earnestly recommends that the troops not on duty should universally attend with that seriousness of Deportment and gratitude of Heart which the recognition of such reiterated and astonishing interpositions of Providence demand of us." October 20, 1781

General Washington was convinced that many American military victories were the direct result of “astonishing” Divine intervention. He was in a state of astonishment that October morning because he had just witnessed what he must have thought was a miracle, a miracle that caused the British commander Lord Cornwallis to have no choice but to surrender his entire army at Yorktown.

Lord Cornwallis had had no intention of surrendering his forces to General Washington, and had devised a clear plan of how he would escape the combined American and French forces in an orderly retreat. On the night of October 16, Lord Cornwallis ordered 350 of his soldiers to attack the American lines while he secretly began his withdrawal under the cover of darkness. He evacuated his wounded and 1,000 soldiers by sailing them across the York River to the safety of Gloucester Point. Then disaster struck. While the boats were sailing back to evacuate the next group, a storm suddenly arose, scattering the boats and making it impossible for the withdrawal to continue.

As the dawn broke in the morning, Cornwallis realized he had no choice but to surrender his army of over 7,000 men, leading directly to Britain’s abandoning it’s long struggle to defeat the Americans in the Revolutionary War.

Part of the reason for General Washington’s great astonishment that morning may have been the fact that he had seen this same situation unfold before, five years earlier. At that time, however, the roles were reversed. He was the commander who found himself under pressure with a river at his back, trying to retreat, with the British army closing in on him and his troops.

It was in the month of August 1776 at the Battle of Long Island. Invading British soldiers had broken through Washington’s lines and were crushing his forces when, as night fell, the British commander suddenly stopped the attack even though many of his officers wanted to continue. The commander, General William Howe, believed he had Washington trapped. He saw no reason to be hasty. He could attack at a time of his own choosing to finish off Washington and his army.

Two nights later, on August 29, Washington made a daring and dangerous decision to try and escape under the noses of the British, who not only had troops on the ground in front of him, but also had warships bristling with cannon controlling the waters behind him. Using the cover of darkness and with muffled oars to keep the silence, he managed to get most of his men and their equipment across the East River to Manhattan. However, as the dawn began to break, he realized that he was about to lose the forces that still remained on the Brooklyn side as soon as it became light enough for the British to see what was going on. Just then, a dense fog moved in, hiding the American movements from British eyes long enough for them to complete their very orderly retreat.

The Americans were able to rescue about 9,000 men, their supplies, and cannon, without a single life lost, in about nine hours. From Washington’s point of view, it was another example of how God, whom he referred to as Divine Providence, had intervened on his behalf. Washington was a man of deep faith. My favorite story about him is the testimony of Isaac Potts, who accidentally came upon Washington praying alone in the woods at Valley Forge:

...to my astonishment I saw the great George Washington on his knees alone, with his sword on one side and his cocked hat on the other. He was at Prayer to the God of the Armies, beseeching to interpose with his Divine aid, as it was ye (sic) Crisis and the cause of the country, of humanity, and of the world. Such a prayer I never heard from the lips of man.

This account reveals a central characteristic of Washington’s personality, a profound humility before God. After the war, some of his supporters wanted him to take power over the new nation, by force of

arms if necessary. Instead, Washington relinquished his position as military commander and peacefully departed for his home at Mt. Vernon. Even after ascending to the presidency, Washington did not lose his demeanor of humility.

His Thanksgiving Proclamation, issued in 1789, begins with these words, “Whereas it is the duty of all nations to acknowledge the providence of Almighty God, to obey his will, to be grateful for his benefits, and humbly to implore his protection and favor... (I) recommend to the People of the United States a day of public thanksgiving and prayers to be observed by acknowledging with grateful hearts the many signal favors of Almighty God...”

Abraham Lincoln had a faith similar to that of our first president. Like Washington, his faith wasn't merely an intellectual exercise; it was something held deep in his soul based on personal experience. Neither of these great leaders had much use for institutional religion, and neither was a full participant in the activities of any particular church. They were men of deep, profound faith, but they were not attracted by the agenda of any denomination. They were simply interested in discerning, to the greatest extent possible, the will of God, and then living in accordance with it.

When Abraham Lincoln was asked during the Civil War whether or not God was on the Union side, Lincoln replied, “Sir, my concern is not whether God is on our side; my greatest concern is to be on God's side, for God is always right.” In my view, these men exhibit the real heart and soul of what America is all about. It was founded upon the conviction that all human beings are equal in the sight of God, that we “are endowed by our Creator with certain inalienable rights ... life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness,” as the Declaration of Independence boldly proclaims. That document was signed by a group of fifty-six men who also thought in the manner of Washington and Lincoln. They placed their signatures under these sacred words:

“...with a firm reliance on the protection of divine Providence, we mutually pledge to each other our Lives, our Fortunes and our sacred Honor.” That phrase – firm reliance on the protection of Divine Providence – is a distinctly American sentiment. It reflects a time when almost every American – from each individual to the entire society as a whole – placed their relationship with God as the most important consideration in their lives.

If America is to survive in the twenty-first Century, she will have to produce a similar group of like-minded individuals, men and women who will commit their all to discerning and then following the Spirit of God.

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