



Religious Liberty in the Marketplace Overview

Examples of the Free Exercise of Religion in America's Marketplace

1. National Days of Prayer, Fasting and Repentance Throughout our nation's evolution, from the first permanent settlement at Jamestown, Virginia in 1607, until the present day, and from our Founding Fathers to ordinary citizens who cherish this country's heritage, prayer has played a vital role in strengthening the very fabric of society. Prayers have been offered in petition, in thanksgiving, to embrace our grief and sorrow, for our troops and first responders, in times of uncertainty and crisis, during war and in peace, for protection, provision, guidance and the acknowledgement that in and of ourselves, we are wholly insufficient. At the birth of the earliest elected legislative body in America—the House of Burgesses in 1619—the first act of those who gathered together, was to pray and entreat the Lord of heaven and earth to bless them and provide wisdom in governing this new land. Only five weeks into the 1787 Continental Convention, the monumental effort to establish a "United States" of America was in jeopardy. Benjamin Franklin, an elder statesman at 81 years of age, addressed the group of frustrated delegates with words that are as true now as they were then. *"In the beginning of the Contest with G. Britain, when we were sensible of danger, we had daily prayer in this room for the divine protection. Our prayers, Sir, were heard, & they were graciously answered...I have lived, Sir, a long time, and the longer I live, the more convincing proofs I see of this truth, that God Governs in the affairs of men. And if a sparrow cannot fall to the ground without his notice, is it probable that an empire can rise without his aid? We have been assured, Sir, in the sacred writings, that 'except the Lord build the House they labour in vain that build it.' I firmly believe this; and I also believe that without his concurring aid we shall succeed in this political building no better, than the Builders of Babel."* During the Revolutionary War, Massachusetts ordered a "suitable number" of the Congressional Prayer and Fasting Proclamations to be printed so, "that each of the religious Assemblies in this Colony, may be furnished with a Copy of the same." The motto, "God Save This People," was added as a substitute for, "God Save the King." Today, we cry once again, "God Save This People," and do it through the King of Kings. It is no coincidence that the Continental Congress issued a proclamation recommending, "a day of publick [sic] humiliation, fasting, and prayer" prior to the greatest victory America has known. Numerous Presidents have honored God throughout the inauguration process, promoting prayer and Judeo-Christian principles, and calling national days of repentance, prayer and fasting. Abraham Lincoln summoned America to fast and pray during the horror of the Civil War. In a comment to a staff member, he said, "I have been driven many times upon my knees by the overwhelming conviction that I had nowhere else to go."³ Franklin D. Roosevelt and Dwight Eisenhower are known for their powerful D-Day prayers⁴ just before the largest amphibious invasion in history to liberate Europe from Hitler's devastation. Ronald re-envisioned this legacy in his own prayer life. At his first National Day of Prayer Proclamation in 1981, he told attendees: *"While never willing to bow to a tyrant, our forefathers were always willing to get on their knees before God. Join with me in giving thanks to Almighty God for the blessings He has bestowed on this land and the protection He affords us as a people. Let us as a Nation join together before God, fully aware of the trials that lie ahead and the need, yes, the necessity for divine guidance."* *"Fasting and prayer are religious exercises; the enjoining them, an act of discipline. Every religious society has a right to determine for itself, the time for these exercises, and the objects proper for them, according to their own particular tenets; and right can never be safer than in their hands, where the Constitution has deposited it."* Thomas Jefferson, 1808. The official National Day of Prayer was created in 1952 by a joint resolution of the United States Congress and signed into law by President Harry S. Truman. In 1988, the law was amended so that the National Day of Prayer would be held on the first Thursday of May. Each year, the President signs a proclamation, encouraging all Americans to take pause and earnestly seek God's face on this day. Last year, all 50 state governors, plus the governors of several U.S. territories, signed similar proclamations. On April 15, 2010, U.S. District Judge, Barbara Crabb, ruled that the statute establishing the National Day of Prayer was unconstitutional, stating it is, "an inherently religious exercise that serves no secular function." However, the Seventh U.S. Court of Appeals upheld the right of Americans to observe this National Celebration of our spiritual heritage and the freedom to pray and worship God in the public square. In times of national prosperity, Presidents, Congress and other key leaders have acknowledged our blessings as a result of God's hand upon the United States; and in times of tragedy and crisis, these same leaders humbly acknowledged that God was our only hope. There has been no corporate outrage, no lawsuits, no widespread demand that the government was forcing a particular faith on anyone, no loss of individual religious freedoms and rights, and no public outcry or demand by citizens to remove every reference or vestige of the Creator from the national conscience. **2. National Days of Thanksgiving** President George Washington set aside Thursday, November 26, 1789, as a day for, "public thanksgiving and prayer." His intention was to set a non-sectarian tone for personal devotion that emphasized the political, moral and intellectual blessings that sustained America's form of self-government. The Thanksgiving holiday was established by Abraham Lincoln during the Civil War and enacted into law by Congress in 1941. Here is the Proclamation Washington issued on October 3, 1789 at the request of Congress: *"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; and—Whereas both Houses of Congress have, by their joint committee, requested me "to recommend to the people of the United States a day of public thanksgiving and prayer, to be observed by acknowledging with grateful hearts the many and signal favors of Almighty God, especially by affording them an opportunity peaceably to establish a form of government for their safety and happiness. Now, therefore, I do recommend and assign Thursday, the 26th day of November next, to be devoted by the people of these States to the service of that great and glorious Being who is the beneficent author of all the good that was, that is, or that will be; that we may then all unite in rendering unto Him our sincere and humble thanks for His kind care and protection of the people of this country previous to their becoming a nation; for the signal and manifold mercies and the favor, able interpositions of His providence in the course and conclusion of the late war; for the great degree of tranquility, union, and plenty which we have since enjoyed; for the peaceable and rational manner in which we have been enabled to establish constitutions of government for our safety and happiness, and particularly the national one now lately instituted; for the civil and religious liberty with which we are blessed, and the means we have of acquiring and diffusing useful knowledge; and, in general, for all the great and various favors which He has been pleased to confer upon us. And also that we may then unite in most humbly offering our prayers and supplications to the great Lord and Ruler of Nations, and beseech Him to pardon our national and other transgressions; to enable us all, whether in public or private stations, to perform our several and relative duties properly and punctually; to render our National Government a blessing to all the people by constantly being a Government of wise, just, and constitutional laws, discreetly and faithfully executed and obeyed; to protect and guide all sovereigns and nations (especially such as have shown kindness to us), and to bless them with good governments, peace, and concord; to promote the knowledge and practice of true religion and virtue, and the increase of science among them and us; and, generally, to grant unto all mankind such a degree of temporal prosperity as He alone knows to be best. Given under my hand at the City of New York the third day of October in the year of our Lord 1789. In the spirit of Thanksgiving, the following sentiments were given by then Governor of Virginia, Thomas Jefferson: "[I] appoint . . . a day of public Thanksgiving to Almighty God . . . to [ask] Him that He would . . . pour out His Holy Spirit on all ministers of the Gospel; that He would . . . spread the light of Christian knowledge through the remotest corners of the earth; . . . and that He would establish these United States upon the basis of religion and virtue. And again from President Ronald Reagan: "Perhaps no custom reveals our character as a Nation so clearly as our celebration of Thanksgiving Day. Rooted deeply in our Judeo-Christian heritage, the practice of offering thanksgiving underscores our unshakable belief in God as the foundation of our Nation and our firm reliance upon Him from Whom all blessings flow."* **3. The Aitken Bible** The Aitken Bible, published by Philadelphia printer, Robert Aitken, was the first known English-language Bible to be printed in the colonies (in 1782) and was dubbed, the, "Bible of the Revolution." After a review of accuracy by the Congressional Chaplains, it was approved and authorized by the Congress of the Confederation. The need for this printing was because the supply of Bibles had been cut during the Revolutionary War. The following Congressional endorsement was printed in the front of the Bible: *"Honble James Duane, Esq. Chairman, and the other Honble Gentlemen of the Committee of Congress on Mr. Aitken's Memorial." Whereupon, RESOLVED, THAT the United States in Congress assembled highly approve the pious and laudable undertaking*

of Mr. Aitken, as subservient to the interest of religion, as well as an instance of the progress of arts in this country, and being satisfied from the above report of his care and accuracy in the execution of the work, they recommend this edition of the Bible to the inhabitants of the United States, and hereby authorize him to publish this Recommendation in the manner he shall think proper.” **4. Opening Legislative Sessions in Prayer** The use of opening prayers for legislative sessions—at both the federal and state levels—is a longstanding tradition and derives, in part, from both houses of the British Parliament. The inclusion of a prayer before the opening of each session of both the House and the Senate, traces its origins back to the days of the Continental Congress, and the official recommendation of Benjamin Franklin, June 28, 1787. Two other men responsible for having the Continental Congress open with a prayer were Samuel Adams and Thomas Cushing. In the United States, this practice has continued without interruption at the federal level since the first Congress under the Constitution in 1789. It was determined that two chaplains of different denominations would be selected and their pay would be \$500.00 per year. In late 1800, Congress actually allowed church services to be held in the U.S. Capitol, something that continued until well after the Civil War and in the same building where our nation’s legislators still convene, debate and vote. The United States Supreme Court recently reaffirmed that the offering of prayers in legislative sessions, council meetings, etc., are constitutional and do not meet the separation of church and state condition, nor do they violate the principles of the First Amendment (see [Town of Greece v. Galloway](#)). [Read More Examples Here](#)

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