

Yankee Steve's Almanac  
for the week of November 4, 2008  
Presidential Election Day

Among the industrialized nations, America is the most religious. From its founding, the United States of America has acted as if our nation came into being because of a mysterious yet apparent providence.

The Continental Congress met in 1787 to form "a more perfect union." At first very little progress was made. State jealousies and personal interests were about to bring the meetings to an end. Sounding like a clergyman, George Washington admonished the quarreling delegates with these words,

"It is too probable that no plan we propose will be adopted . . . If, to please the people, we offer what we ourselves disapprove, how can we afterward defend our work? Let us raise a standard to which the wise and honest can repair; the event is in the hand of God."

Benjamin Franklin took Washington's admonishment to heart. He went so far as to rebuke the members for having neglected prayer. This was surprising since Franklin is generally lumped in with skeptics and free thinkers.

James Madison preserved in his journals the following message that Franklin sent to Washington. Through this entry Franklin served to illustrate that if man is a religious animal as Socrates held that an American is the leader of the pack, even if he is a man of science and politics as was Franklin. This demonstrated that the founding fathers did not separate the state from the church because they thought that religion did not serve a purpose, or that we should not witness to our faith just because we had been elected to political office.

Doctor Franklin to Mr. President:

The small progress we have made after four or five weeks close attendance & continual reasonings with each other - our different sentiments on almost every question, several of the last producing as many noes as ayes, is methinks a melancholy proof of the imperfection of Human Understanding. We indeed seem to feel our want of political wisdom since we have been running about in search of it. We have gone back to ancient history for models of government, and examined the different forms those Republics which having been formed with the seeds of their own dissolution now no longer exist. And we have viewed modern States all around Europe, but find none of their Constitutions suitable to our circumstances.

In the situation of this Assembly, groping as it were in the dark to find political truth, and scarce able to distinguish it when presented to us, how has it happened, Sir, that we have not hitherto once thought of humbly applying to the Father of lights to illuminate our

understanding? 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, and they were graciously answered. All of us who were engaged in the struggle must have observed frequent instances of a Superintending providence in our favor. To that kind providence we owe this happy opportunity of consulting in peace on the means of establishing our future national felicity. And have we now forgotten that powerful friend? Or do we imagine that we no longer need his assistance. 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 the Tower of Babel. We shall be divided by our little partial local interests; our projects will be confounded, and we ourselves will become a reproach and a bye word down to future ages. And what is worse, mankind may hereafter from this unfortunate instance, despair of establishing Government by Human Wisdom and leave it to chance, war and conquest.

I therefore beg leave to move - that henceforth prayers imploring the assistance of Heaven, and its blessings on our deliberations, be held in this Assembly every morning before we proceed to business, and that one or more of the Clergy of this City be requested to officiate in that service.

Mr. Roger Sherman seconded the motion.