



# The Clarion\* Call

## \* THE CLEAR CALL OF A BATTLE TRUMPET

JESUS SAID, "MY SHEEP RECOGNIZE MY VOICE. I KNOW THEM, AND THEY FOLLOW ME." (JOHN 10:27)

From the desk of:

The Reverend Dr. Kenneth L. Beale, Jr.

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## *The Spirit of America ...*

### *According to Historic Revolutionaries – Not Today's Revisionists*

The American Revolution was a dream of the unthinkable: fifty-six men with no army, navy, or military of their own, pledging their "lives, fortunes, and sacred honor" to defeat the world's greatest military power. Imagine fifty-six individuals (today) coming together for that purpose! What was the spirit that motivated the Founding Fathers? What was the spirit behind the American Revolution? Those fifty-six who pledged themselves to make America free and independent explained their motivation in the preamble to the *Declaration of Independence*: "When in the course of human events it becomes necessary for one people to dissolve the political bands which have connected them with another, and to assume among the powers of the earth the separate and equal station to which **the laws of nature and of nature's God** entitles them, a decent respect to the opinions of mankind requires that they should declare the causes which impel them to the separation."

In that one (run-on) sentence, the Founders forcefully declared *why* they must separate themselves from Great Britain. The *why* is because of "... the laws of nature and of nature's God ...". Today, these eight words seem to carry no special significance; but in their day, that eight-word phrase described a complete *philosophy of life*.

We can recapture the meaning of that phrase—and thus understand much of the motivation and spirit behind the American Revolution—by turning to the source largely responsible for those words: *Blackstone's Commentaries on*

*the Law*. Introduced in 1766, Blackstone's became the law book of the Founding Fathers. Notice Blackstone's explanation of "the laws of nature": "Man, considered as a creature, must necessarily be subject to the laws of his Creator, for he is entirely a dependent being.... And consequently, as man depends absolutely upon his Maker for everything, it is necessary that he should in all points conform to his Maker's will. This will of his Maker is called the law of nature.... This law of nature ... [coexisting] with mankind and dictated by God Himself, is of course superior in obligation to any other. It is binding over all the globe, in all countries, and at all times; no human laws are of any validity, if contrary to this."

This, then, was the understanding of our Founders in reference to "the laws of nature"; they are the will of God for man. Blackstone continued: "And if our reason were always ... clear and perfect ... the task would be pleasant and easy; we should need no other guide but this [the law of nature]. But every man now finds the contrary in his own experience; that his reason is corrupt, and his understanding full of ignorance and error. This has given manifold occasion for the benign interposition of Divine Providence; which ... hath been pleased, at sundry times and in diverse manners, to discover and enforce its laws by an immediate and direct revelation. The doctrines thus delivered we call the revealed or divine law, and they are to be found only in the Holy Scriptures."

Very simply: The Holy Scriptures,

containing the laws of the God who created nature; thus termed "the laws of nature's God"—the second half of the phrase in the *Declaration*. Notice Blackstone's conclusion which couples these two phrases: "Upon these two foundations, the law of nature and the law of revelation [the law of nature's God], depend all human laws; that is to say, no human laws should be suffered to contradict these."

So, the meaning of the eight-word legal phrase in the opening lines of the *Declaration* was expounded in America for years before the Revolution, and accurately identifies the spirit undergirding that conflict.

Beginning with the infamous Stamp Acts of 1765, and for years following, the Founding Fathers had been frustrated with King George III's persistent disregard both for God's law and for English law. America faithfully attempted to reconcile her differences with Great Britain, but the gap widened rather than narrowed. While still pursuing reconciliation, the Americans began to make preparations for a separation. Their first consideration was the matter of their own government, for the Colonies had never truly been self-governed. Their governments, and their governors, had been Crown-appointed; all of their State congresses were conducted under British supervision. Therefore, to prepare themselves for managing their own government ... should they need to ... the Founders convened America's first Congress: the 1774 Provincial Congress.

(continued ... on page two)

(continued ... from page one)

One of the first official acts of that Congress was to open in prayer. Yet it was not a shallow “to-whom-it-may-concern” prayer. Some writings indicate that it may have lasted several hours. Because the Founding Fathers were prolific writers, we know much of what happened ... not only at that first Congress ... but also throughout the Revolution. Perhaps some of the most interesting correspondence during the Revolution occurred between John and Abigail Adams. Their letters have been published. In one such letter, John told Abigail about the first prayer in Congress: “[Rev. Duché] read several prayers ... and then read ... the thirty-fifth Psalm. You must remember, this was the next morning after we heard the horrible rumor of the cannonade of Boston. I never saw a greater effect upon an audience. It seemed as if Heaven had ordained that Psalm to be read on that morning. ... I must beg you to read that Psalm.” As John noted, on the morning of that prayer, Congress had been very concerned about Great Britain’s attack on Boston. Their distress was understandable ... for it was their own government unjustly attacking them. The Founders were still British citizens and had no defense of their own—in fact, it was their own army and navy attacking them! Psalm 35 spoke directly to their distress and calmed their fears. The words of that Psalm reveal why it was so significant to that Congress: “Plead my cause, O Lord, with them that strive with me: fight against them that fight against me. Take hold of shield and buckler, and stand up for mine help. Draw out also the spear, and stop the way against them that persecute me: say unto my soul, ‘I am thy salvation.’ Let them be confounded and put to shame that seek after my soul: let them be turned back and brought to confusion that devise my hurt. Let them be as chaff before the wind: and let the angel of the Lord chase them. Let their way be dark and slippery: and let the angel of the Lord persecute them. For without cause have they hid from me their net in a pit, which without cause they have digged for my soul.”

It is easy to understand why John begged Abigail to read that Psalm. Others noted of the first Congress that: “Washington was kneeling there, and Henry, and Randolph, and Rutledge, and Lee and Jay; and by their side

*there stood, bowed down in deference, the Puritan Patriots of New England, who at that moment had reason to believe that an armed soldiery was wasting their humble households.... They prayed fervently for ‘America, for the Congress, for the province of Massachusetts Bay, and especially for the town of Boston.’ ... Who can realize the emotions with which they turned imploringly to heaven for divine interposition and aid? ‘It was enough,’ said Mr. Adams, ‘to melt a heart of stone. I saw the tears gush into the eyes of the old, grave, pacific Quakers of Philadelphia.’”* What a way to start a Congress; but that was the way the first Congress of the United States began!

Congress understood that America could not succeed without God’s help, and on June 17, 1775, John told Abigail: “We have appointed a continental fast. Millions will be upon their knees at once before their great Creator, imploring His forgiveness and blessing; His smiles on American councils and arms.” It was a regular practice of both the national and the State congresses to call citizens to days of prayer and fasting. And when America witnessed God’s direct intervention, Congress was faithful to call for national days of thanksgiving.

Samuel Adams, cousin of John Adams, set much of the tone for the American Revolution. If something occurred in the early years, there was a good chance that Sam Adams was behind it—including the Sons of Liberty, the Boston Tea Party, and the Committees of Correspondence.

The Committees of Correspondence were a sort of alternative news source ... created because of the Founders’ strong distrust of the British-sympathetic news media. The Committees served as the central nervous system of the American Revolution and were much like an early “Pony Express” ... able to distribute messages and news throughout the Colonies within seven to ten days. One example of their effectiveness occurred when Great Britain blockaded Boston Harbor in 1774 with the intention of starving the colonists into submission. The Committees spread the news of the blockade, and soon wagon-loads of food and supplies were rolling into Boston to sustain the citizens and enable them to resist British tyranny.

The Committees were established with a threefold goal: (1) to inform Americans of their rights and how they had been violated; (2) to announce what should be done as a result of those violations; and (3) to transmit “news flashes” throughout the Colonies.

In 1772, Samuel Adams’ famous work, *The Rights of Colonists* (considered one of the most significant political writings of the American Revolution), was distributed across the country by the Committees. In that work, Adams centered on the first of the three purposes of the Committees and reminded the American people of the best means of understanding their rights. He explained: “*The Rights of the Colonists as Christians. These may be best understood by reading and carefully studying the institutes of the great Law-Giver and Head of the Christian Church, which are to be found clearly written and promulgated in the New Testament.*” Sam Adams, referred to as “The Father of the American Revolution” for his leadership in the cause of American Independence, was in essence saying, “America, if you don’t know what our rights are, get into the New Testament and do some study!” Adams’ recommendation was consistent with what Blackstone and others had taught: resistance to tyranny must be based on and guided by “the laws of nature and of nature’s God.”

In 1775, a year after Great Britain’s military had invaded America, Congress selected one of its own members, George Washington, to organize the farmers and local militia groups into an army capable of defeating the world’s greatest military power—quite an undertaking! Washington’s first order, issued on July 9, 1776, again confirms the religious spirit permeating the Founders. In that first order, Washington urged that “... every officer and man will endeavor so as to live and act as becomes a Christian soldier, defending the dearest rights and liberties of his country.” That his troops display Christian character was important to Washington, and on May 2, 1778, he charged them: “*To the distinguished character of Patriot, it should be our highest glory to add the more distinguished character of Christian.*”

Since America was considered to be

(continued ... on page three)

(continued ... from page two)

a Christian nation, our leaders were very concerned that we behave appropriately. This consistent emphasis throughout the Revolution perhaps ultimately resulted in the American Revolution being characterized by historians as one of the most atrocity-free revolutions in the history of the world. While atrocities did occur, those atrocities were greatly minimized on the American side. This was not true on the British side, however—evidenced by British treatment of American prisoners. The British placed many captured Americans in the holds of British ships lying offshore—and those prison ships were houses of death. However, American treatment of British prisoners was quite different. Often, if a captured British prisoner was not needed for a prisoner exchange, he would be offered an opportunity to pledge that he would no longer take up arms against the Americans. If he gave his personal pledge, he was frequently allowed to keep his personal side-arms and was then sent home! For example, when America won the Battle of Saratoga in 1777, five thousand British prisoners were captured. They gave their pledge; and then (amazingly) three armed American officers led five thousand British prisoners from New York back to Boston to put them on ships to send them home. Congress recognized the hand of God in the Saratoga victory and on November 1, 1777, proclaimed a national thanksgiving, explaining: *“Forasmuch as it is the indispensable duty of all men to adore the superintending providence of Almighty God, to acknowledge with gratitude their obligation to Him for benefits received and to implore such further blessings as they stand in need of; and it having pleased Him ... to crown our arms with most signal success: It is therefore recommended [a day] ... for solemn thanksgiving and praise; that with one heart and one voice the good people may express the grateful feelings of their hearts, and consecrate themselves to the service of their Divine Benefactor; and that together with their sincere acknowledgments and offerings, they may join the penitent confession of their manifold sins ... and their humble and earnest supplication that it may please God, through the merits of Jesus Christ, mercifully to forgive and blot out of remembrance [and] ... to take schools*

*and seminaries of education, so necessary for cultivating the principles of true liberty, virtue and piety, under His nurturing hand, and to prosper the means of religion for the promotion and enlargement of that kingdom which consisteth ‘in righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost’ [Romans 14:17].”*

Clearly, the Congressional proclamations throughout the Revolution were neither bland nor deistic (e.g., overtly acknowledging Jesus Christ and quoting of New Testament Scriptures). However, this was not unusual ... considering the prominent role that many ministers played in the Revolution. One such example is that of the Reverend John Peter Gabriel Muhlenberg. In a sermon delivered to his Virginia congregation on January 21, 1776, Pastor Muhlenberg preached verse by verse from Ecclesiastes 3—the passage which speaks of a season and a time to every purpose under the sun. Arriving at verse 8, which declares that there is a time of war and a time of peace, he noted that this surely was not the time of peace; this was the time of war. Concluding with a prayer, and while standing in full view of the congregation, Pastor Muhlenberg removed his clerical robes to reveal that beneath them he was wearing the full uniform of an officer in the Continental Army! He marched to the back of the church and ordered the drum to beat for recruits; over three hundred men joined him and they became the Eighth Virginia Brigade. Pastor Muhlenberg finished the Revolution as a Major-General ... having survived Valley Forge and participated in the major battles at Brandywine, Germantown, Monmouth, and Yorktown.

Another minister-leader in the Revolution was the Reverend James Caldwell. His actions during one battle inspired a painting showing him standing with a stack of hymn books in his arms while engaged in the midst of a fierce battle against the British outside a battered Presbyterian church. During the battle, the Americans had developed a serious problem: they had run out of wadding for their guns, which was just as serious as having no ammunition. Reverend Caldwell recognized the perfect solution; he ran inside the church and returned with a stack of *Watts Hymnals*—one of the strongest

doctrinal hymnals of the Christian faith. (Isaac Watts authored hymns like “O God Our Help In Ages Past,” “Joy to the World,” “Jesus Shall Reign,” and several other classics.) Distributing the *Watts Hymnals* among the soldiers served two purposes: first, its pages would provide the needed wadding; second, it carried a symbolic message. In fact, Reverend Caldwell took that hymn book—the source of great doctrine and spiritual truth—raised it up in the air and shouted to the Americans, “Give ‘em Watts, boys!”, the famous cry that inspired that painting and its title.

The Minutemen also confirm the strength of the Christian beliefs undergirding the American Revolution. While the Minutemen remain wonderful folk heroes, symbolic of American patriotism, few realize that Minutemen who stood to fight for their liberties and to defend their local towns were often groups of laymen from local congregations, led either by their pastor or a deacon! Records even indicate that it was not unusual that following their militia drills they would go to church “where they listened to exhortation and prayer.”

The spiritual emphasis manifested so often by the Americans during the Revolution caused one Crown-appointed British governor to write to Great Britain complaining that: *“If you ask an American who is his master, he’ll tell you he has none, nor any governor but Jesus Christ.”* Letters like this, coupled with statements such as that made by Ethan Allen, and sermons like those preached by the Reverend Peter Powers (“Jesus Christ the True King”), gave rise to an expressive motto for the American Revolution. Directed against King George III (considered the primary source of the conflict, for it was he who ... in the minds of the patriots ... arbitrarily and regularly violated “the laws of nature and of nature’s God”). The motto was simple and direct: No King but King Jesus!

On March 16, 1776, in preparation for that imminent separation, Congress wanted to make sure that America was “right with God,” and therefore called the people to prayer, explaining: *“The Congress... desirous ... to have people of all ranks and degrees duly impressed with a solemn sense of God’s superintending providence, and*

(continued ... on page four)

(continued ... from page three)

*of their duty, devoutly to rely ... on His aid and direction, do earnestly recommend ... a day of humiliation, fasting, and prayer; that we may, with united hearts, confess and bewail our manifold sins and transgressions, and, by a sincere repentance and amendment of life appease His righteous displeasure and, through the merits and mediation of Jesus Christ, obtain His pardon and forgiveness."*

A few months later, on July 2, 1776, Congress voted to approve a complete separation from Great Britain. Two days afterwards, the early draft of the *Declaration of Independence* was signed, albeit by only two individuals at that time: John Hancock, President of Congress, and Charles Thomson, Secretary of Congress. Four days later, on July 8, members of Congress took that document and read it aloud from the steps of Independence Hall, proclaiming it to the city of Philadelphia, after which the "Liberty Bell" was rung. The inscription from Leviticus 25:10 encircling the top of that bell was appropriate to its ringing: "*Proclaim liberty throughout the land and to all the inhabitants thereof.*" On July 19, Congress voted to produce a beautifully inscribed copy of the *Declaration* on parchment, and on August 2, fifty-six of our Founding Fathers signed the famous version we now recognize.

When the Founders signed the *Declaration of Independence*, they did more than just create a new nation; they also created a crisis of government. By separating from Great Britain, they effectively abolished their State governments, which had been British-run. Consequently, following the signing of the *Declaration*, the Founders returned from Philadelphia to their own States and began to create their new State constitutions. Every constitution references faith in God and obedience to His Word. Numerous other writings and Congressional acts during the Revolution provide additional confirmation of the Christian spirit behind it. For example, in 1777, because America was at war with her primary trading partner, Great Britain, there was a shortage of many items, including Bibles. Congress therefore appointed a special committee to investigate the shortage of Bibles, and Congress eventually decided: "[T]hat the use of the Bible is so universal,

*and its importance so great ... that Congress will order the committee of commerce to import 20,000 Bibles from Holland, Scotland, or elsewhere, into the different ports of the states of the Union."* In 1781, a second shortage of Bibles occurred. This time, Robert Aitken of Philadelphia approached Congress with a plan of how to prevent future shortages: publish the Bibles here in America. As the publisher of a large magazine, he offered his presses, explaining to Congress on January 21, 1781, that the proposed Bible would be "a neat edition of the Holy Scriptures for the use of schools." Congress approved his request and "The Bible of the Revolution" rolled off his presses. Congress issued an endorsement placed in the front of that Bible which read: "*Resolved that the United States in Congress assembled, highly approved the pious and laudable undertaking of Mr. Aitken.... [T]hey 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.*"

Later in 1781, the American Revolution was effectively ended with the surrender of the British at Yorktown. However, even though British arms were laid down, it was not until two years later that a formal treaty was finalized and signed in Paris by John Adams, Benjamin Franklin, and John Jay. The opening line placed in the final treaty is still another indication of the spirit so often displayed during the American Revolution. The first line announces: "In the name of the most holy and undivided Trinity. Amen." Like so many other official documents during the Revolution, the final document openly acknowledged God. When the announcement of official peace reached America, George Washington offered his resignation. He issued his final sentiments to the governors, to the officers, and to his troops in circular letters. In his circular letter to the governors on June 8, 1783, Washington, after gratefully acknowledging that we had won the war, urged the governors to remember ... "*... the characteristics of the Divine Author of our blessed religion; and without an humble imitation of Whose example in these things, we can never hope to be a happy nation.*" According to George Washington, if America did not imitate Christ, it could never hope to be a happy nation! From George

Washington's first order through his last official correspondence, he maintained a constant Christian emphasis.

On March 27, 1854, Congress released a report which noted: "*Had the people, during the Revolution, had a suspicion of any attempt to war against Christianity, that Revolution would have been strangled in its cradle. At the time of the adoption of the Constitution, and the amendments, the universal sentiment was that Christianity should be encouraged, [but] not any one sect [denomination]. ... In this age, there can be no substitute for Christianity.... That was the religion of the founders of the republic and they expected it to remain the religion of their descendants.*" And two months after that report, Congress added: "*The great, vital and conservative element in our system is the belief of our people, in the pure doctrines and the divine truths of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.*"

Our Founders intended that this religious spirit not only be remembered, but also practiced whenever we celebrated our National Independence. It is amazing that on the day following the approval of the *Declaration*, Adams was already foreseeing that their actions would be celebrated by future generations. Adams contemplated whether it would be proper to hold such celebrations, but then concluded that the day *should* be commemorated—but in a particular manner and with a specific spirit. As he told Abigail: "*It ought to be commemorated as the day of deliverance by solemn acts of devotion to God 'Almighty.'*" John Adams believed that the fourth of July should become a religious holiday—a day when we remembered God's hand of deliverance and a day filled with religious activities when we recommitted ourselves to God in "solemn acts of devotion." Such was the spirit of the American Revolution as seen through the eyes of those who led it!

My friends: Perpetuating American liberty depends first upon our understanding the foundations on which this great country was built and then preserving the principles on which it was founded. May we not let the purpose for which America was established be forgotten. The Founding Fathers have passed us a torch; let's not let it be extinguished!