

September 2007

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Important things to remember

We the people of the State of Washington, grateful to the Supreme Ruler of the Universe for our liberties, do ordain this Constitution. --Preamble to the Constitution of the State of Washington

Rachel is enrolled in a high school Honors English Class in Tacoma, Washington. Her class assignment is to select reading material for a "Reading for Pleasure" time twice a week. Selections may include books, magazine, or even comic books deemed appropriate for a 9th grade reading level. Turns out, Rachel's selection is the only book specifically referred to as "unacceptable reading material." Any guesses?

Fortunately, our Governor is culturally sensitive to people of faith. She proclaims in part:

WHEREAS, the Declaration of Independence declares that governments are to secure our creator-endowed unalienable rights to "Life, Liberty and the Pursuit of Happiness;" and **WHEREAS**, our country was founded in part because of the desire of people to have the freedom to worship as they please;

NOW THEREFORE, I, Christine O. Gregoire, Governor of the [S]tate of Washington, do hereby proclaim October 21-27, 2007 as **Christian Heritage Week**.¹

Question: Do students know the source of "our creator-endowed unalienable rights?"

Samuel Adams, one of the prominent founders of the United States of America said, "The rights of the colonists as Christians...may be best understood by reading and carefully studying the institution of The Great Law Giver and Head of the Christian Church, which are to be found clearly written and promulgated in the New Testament." George Washington said, "It is impossible to rightly govern the world without God and the Bible."

John Wycliffe, an Oxford professor, scholar, and theologian who produced the first hand-written English-language Bible, recognized the importance of transmitting our heritage through the written Word. He believed that without knowledge of the Bible there can be no real and abiding good in society.² Wycliffe wrote in the General Prologue of his 1384 Bible: "The Bible is for the Government of the People, by the People, and for the People."

Through the centuries, Christians have often been referred to as the "people of the Book," implying a literate people. Dr. J. D. Douglas, editor of *The New International Dictionary of the Christian Church* writes: "From its beginning the religion of the Bible has gone hand in hand with teaching...As Christianity spread, patterns of more formal education developed."³

Dr. Marshall Foster, historian and President of the *Mayflower Institute* agrees. He says:

"It cannot be denied that the greatest universities, as well as literacy and education for the common man, were a product of Christianity. The Christian work ethic was the foundation of the free enterprise system and Capitalism, which have geometrically increased the wealth of the world. Representative constitutional government had its roots in the Old and New Testaments...and found its fullest expression in the Christian experiment in colonial America."

“The biblical worldview of a created universe of order and design provided the basis for justice and peace that is still the wonder of the world. Christian conscience, preaching, and the Bible were central in the abolition of slavery, both in antiquity and in more modern times. With Christianity came a high regard for all human life...and the elevation of women as joint-heirs in God’s kingdom, not servants of men. Christ’s Samaritan example...produced hospitals, homes for the insane and orphans, and food banks for the hungry.”

“...The ancient world had no conception of education for the common man. Scholarship was the sole property of the class-conscious elite of Greece, Rome, and Egypt... Christians spearheaded the cause of literacy...Monasteries and schools were established and eventually the first universities were started for the purpose of Christian and classical training at Cambridge, Paris, and Bologna.”⁴

In America, the Pilgrims so valued education, they established a college (Harvard) within 16 years of landing at Plymouth Rock. Christians, in fact, established 123 of the first 126 colleges, and, up to the early 1900s, it was rare to find a university president who was not an ordained clergyman.

The **Great Migration** began as a missionary movement—inspired by a school teacher who introduced blackboards to America’s classrooms. In 1829, Hall Jackson Kelley formed the *AMERICAN SOCIETY FOR ENCOURAGING THE SETTLEMENT OF THE OREGON TERRITORY*, for “...planting, in the genial soil of those regions, the vine of Christianity, and the germ of civil freedom.” Kelley’s vision was to lead 3,000 New England farmers to the banks of the Columbia. Jason Lee, a Methodist minister, also a visionary, established several Oregon cities, was instrumental in forming a territorial provisional government, and founded the first university (Willamette) in the west.

In 1835, Marcus Whitman, medical doctor turned missionary, traveled west with a band of rowdy mountain men led by the famous Jim Bridger. At Green River (Wyoming), he concluded that if trapper wagons could make it through the wilderness, so could wagons of pioneer families. Whitman returned east to recruit Christian settlers, and is said to have accomplished more for the settlement of Oregon Territory than any other person. His Mission at Waiilatpu spawned Walla-Walla, Washington’s largest city until the 1880s. Whitman is honored in National Statutory Hall.

Esther Pariseau, Washington’s only other distinguished person so honored, was also a Bible-reader. When Esther (Mother Joseph) arrived in Washington Territory from Quebec, Canada in 1856 with four other nuns, there were few schools and no hospitals. Under her leadership, more than 30 hospitals, schools and homes for orphans were opened in Washington, Oregon, Idaho, Montana, and southern British Columbia. The legacy of Mother Joseph’s special concern for those who are poor and vulnerable continues today through The Sisters of Providence Health System.

Indeed, America’s Christian Heritage is important to remember, because, as Benjamin Franklin said, “A nation of well informed men who have been taught to know and prize the rights which God has given them cannot be enslaved. It is in the region of ignorance that tyranny begins.”

Where can men discover their “creator-endowed unalienable rights?” The BIBLE—the book that teaches men to honor God and to prize the rights that He alone can give.

Rick Forcier

¹ Governor Gregoire’s full “Proclamation” is available in *Adobe* format at www.christianheritageweek.us.

² For more information go to <http://www.greatsite.com/timeline-english-bible-history/john-wycliffe.html>

³ Kennedy, D. James, *What if Jesus Had Never Been Born?*, 1994, Thomas Nelson, Inc., Nashville, TN, pg.40

⁴ Foster, Marshall, *Christian Home Learning Guides*, 1997, Zane Publishing, Inc., pg.8