

This subject involves an issue in which I have a deep interest—the part that religion has played and is playing in our social and political life.

We ask ourselves the question, then: How has religion figured in the construction of a new nation carved out in a new continent?

The religious influence on the early settlements of the North American continent is well known to all of us. There are few Americans who cannot claim in their ancestry one or more who migrated here for a religious purpose. This fact of history has had a profound influence upon our society and upon our lives as individuals. It has molded the form and substance of our institutions. It has shaped our thinking and our behavior. I think no one will disagree with me when I say that religion is the one predominant ingredient of our culture. So much so that it is a little surprising to know that there have been those who have accused us of being a profane nation and an irreligious people.

It has been remarked, for example, that the basic documents of our Republic contain few references to the Deity. Let us take a look—our Declaration of Independence speaks of “the laws of nature and of nature’s God,” goes on to say that all men are “endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights” and closes with an invocation for the protection of a “Divine Providence.” Our Constitution contains no reference to the Deity at all, and mentions religion only to the extent that it grants all men protection in their right to worship as they please.

As a matter of fact, a main argument of those who opposed the adoption of the Constitution of 1789 was that it was, as they asserted, “ungodly,” for the reasons I have just mentioned. But is such an argument valid? In view of its deeper significance, can such a contention be sustained? I say that it cannot . . . .

The Constitution of the United States can easily be defended against a charge of godlessness. It takes no imagination to establish a direct linking of that document with the Sermon on the Mount. Did not Christ preach the equality of all men—an equal and exact justice to all, as did the men who drafted this great political document in Philadelphia in 1789?

Yes, the basic elements of Christianity are implicit in the fabric of our federal Constitution, and particularly in that portion of it which has come to be called the Bill of Rights. To impute godlessness and irreverence to the Constitution and to the men who wrote it is to confuse the issue. These men, so lately the victims of religious persecution, were determined to achieve freedom, and the document they wrote was to be their guaranty. There is no conflict at all between this almost blind zeal for freedom and the religious spirit which pervaded the hearts of all of them.