

QUOTES ABOUT THE CONSTITUTION

Abraham Lincoln was of the opinion that

“the world has never had a good definition of [the term]. We all declare for liberty,” he said; “but in using the same word we do not mean the same thing. With some, the word liberty may mean for each man to do as he pleases with himself and the product of his labor; while with others [liberty] may mean for some men to do as they please with other men and the product of other men’s labor.”

George Washington, who was elected president of the convention, said:

It is probable that no plan we propose will be adopted. Perhaps another dreadful conflict is to be sustained. If to please the people we offer what we ourselves disapprove, how can we afterwards defend our work? Let us raise a standard to which the wise and honest can repair. The event is in the hand of God. [Frank Donovan, Mr. Madison's Constitution (New York: Dodd, Mead and Co., 1965), p. 39]

James Madison had written:

I feel it a duty to express my profound and solemn conviction, derived from my intimate opportunity of observing and appreciating the views of the Convention, collectively and individually, that there never was an assembly of men, charged with a great and arduous trust, who were more pure in their motives, or more exclusively or anxiously devoted to the object committed to them, than were the members of the Federal Convention of 1787. [Debates on the Adoption of the Federal Constitution, arr. Jonathan Elliot, vol. 5 (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott Co., 1901), p. 122]

A year later, the day after Massachusetts ratified the Constitution, Washington wrote to another friend, Lafayette, of the miraculous nature of their efforts:

It appears to me, then, little short of a miracle, that the Delegates from so many different States (which States you know are also different from each other in their manners, circumstances and prejudices) should unite in forming a system of national government. [Letter of 7 February 1788, in John C. Fitzpatrick, ed., Writings of George Washington (1788), vol. 29 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1931–1944), p. 409]

As president of the convention, George Washington also said:

The hand of Providence has been conspicuous in all this, that he must be worse than an infidel that lacks faith, and more than wicked that has not gratitude enough to acknowledge his obligations. [Washington to Brigadier-General Nelson, 20 August 1778; quoted by William J. Johnson, George Washington the Christian (Milford, Michigan: Mott Media, 1919, 1976), pp. 119–20]

Many of the other delegates also recognized divine inspiration in their work. Writing in The Federalist (No. 37), **James Madison**, often referred to as the Father of the Constitution, wrote:

It is impossible for the man of pious reflection not to perceive in it a finger of that Almighty hand which has been so frequently and signally extended to our relief in the critical stages of the revolution.

Alexander Hamilton, famous as the originator of The Federalist and author of 51 of the papers, said: For my own part, I sincerely esteem it a system, which, without the finger of God, never could have been suggested and agreed upon by such a diversity of interests. [Paul Leicester Ford, ed., Essays on the Constitution of the United States (Brooklyn, New York: Historical Printing Club, 1892), p. 288]

In a letter to the editor of the Federal Gazette in 1755, Benjamin Franklin said:

I have so much Faith in the general Government of the world by Providence, that I can hardly conceive a Transaction of such momentous Importance to the Welfare of Millions now existing, and to exist in the Posterity of a great Nation, should be suffered to pass without being in some degree influenc'd, guided, and governed by that omnipotent, omnipresent, and beneficent Ruler, in whom all

inferior spirits live, and move, and have their Being. [Albert H. Smyth, ed., The Writings of Benjamin Franklin, vol. 9 (New York: Haskell House Publishers, 1970), p. 702]

Such comments were not limited to delegates themselves, but came from others who had studied the events concerned as well. **Daniel Webster**, a noted defender of the Constitution, although not a delegate, said in 1847:

I regard it (the Constitution) as the work of the purest patriots and the wisest statesmen that ever existed, aided by the smiles of a benignant Providence; . . . it almost appears a Divine interposition in our behalf . . . [T]he hand that destroys the Constitution rends our Union asunder for ever. [The Works of Daniel Webster, vol. 1 (Boston: Little,

Francis Grund wrote:

The American Constitution is remarkable for its simplicity; but it can only suffice a people habitually correct in their actions, and would be utterly inadequate to the wants of a different nation. Change the domestic habits of the Americans, their religious devotion, and their high respect for morality, and it will not be necessary to change a single letter of the Constitution in order to vary the whole form of their government. [Francis J. Grund, The Americans, in Their Moral. Social, and Political Relations (Boston: Marsh, Capen and Lyon, 1837), p. 171]

Abraham Lincoln, who said:

Let every American, every level of liberty, every well wisher to his posterity [support the Constitution.] Let . . . it be taught in schools, in seminaries, and in colleges; let it be written in primers, spelling-books, and in almanacs; let it be preached from the pulpit, proclaimed in legislative halls, and enforced in courts of justice. And in short, let it become the political religion of the nation; [and in particular, establish a reverence for the Constitution.] [Complete Works of Abraham Lincoln, ed. John G. Nicolay and John Hay, vol. 1 (New York: Francis D. Tandy Co., 1905), p. 43]