

REFLECTIONS ON THE LIFE OF THOMAS JEFFERSON

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Thomas Jefferson was the author of the Declaration of Independence, the third President of the United States, the founder of the University of Virginia, and the individual who made the greatest contribution in establishing our nation's firm protection of religious freedom. Jefferson and his partisans established what became the Republican Party, called the Democratic-Republican Party by some, and later called the Democratic Party. Jefferson's commitment to the principles of limited government and the protection of individual rights influences our political life today. Certainly his ideas concerning the Constitution, the rights of property, and economy, if heeded today, would produce much better results than the welfare state experiments that have dominated since the 1930s. His basic approach to foreign policy, if seriously considered by policy makers over the past century, would likely have contributed to a more favorable course in our international relations.

This article is not intended as a biography, but rather a glimpse of various aspects of Thomas Jefferson's life and work. First of all, we will look at the impact of his fight for religious freedom in Virginia, culminating in the enactment of the first statute on religious freedom in North America. His ideas on religion, which provided the backdrop for this effort, are also instructive. Second, Jefferson's lifestyle and ethics provide some insight into how he lived and the extent to which his life exhibited the principles of true public service. Third, his views on the legitimate purposes of government, the Constitution and public debt are full of insight. Finally, his national defense and foreign policy ideas are worth examination. They underscore what are the truly vital national interests of this nation or any other.

Religious Freedom and Ideas on Christianity

From the earliest days of his involvement in politics, Jefferson established a record of opposition to state-supported churches. In his day this meant he opposed the generally accepted practice of providing public funds to maintain the official, state-sanctioned churches and their clergy. Furthermore, Jefferson sought to protect the rights of those of any creed. Jefferson considered one of his greatest achievements his authorship of the Virginia Statute for Religious Freedom. The statute, passed in 1786 by the Virginia General Assembly, provided a model for the protection of religious liberty, which was later guaranteed to all Americans in the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution. The final clause of Jefferson's statute recognized and protected this freedom of conscience.

Be it therefore enacted by the General Assembly,

That no man shall be compelled to frequent or support any religious worship, place or ministry whatsoever, nor shall be enforced, restrained, molested, or burthened in his body or goods, nor shall otherwise suffer on account of his religious opinions or belief; but that all men shall be free to profess, and by argument to maintain, their opinions in matters of religion, and that the same shall in no wise diminish, enlarge, or affect their civil capacities.

The First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, which was ratified in 1791, captured this same concept in its own language.

Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof . . .

The significance of establishing religious freedom is that our nation, for the most part, has protected the right to study and teach the Bible, God's Word, and thereby secured the true foundation of freedom.

In 1799 Jefferson wrote of his support for religious freedom.

I am for freedom of religion, & against all manœuvres to bring about a legal ascendancy of one sect over another.¹

In the presidential election campaign of 1800, Jefferson's record on religious freedom prompted the rival party, the Federalists, to label Jefferson an atheist and attack him for what was perceived to be his disbelief of the Scriptures. They thought that because he defended the rights of all to worship as they chose, and did not appear to be deeply religious, he was an infidel. In defending him, the Republican Party urged that he not be subject to such criticism just "because he is not a fanatic, nor willing that the Quaker, the Baptist, the Methodist, or any other denomination of Christians, should pay the pastors of other sects...He does not think that a [Roman] Catholic should be banished for believing in transubstantiation, or a Jew, for believing in the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob."²

What did Jefferson believe about God and His Word? As we will see, he did search the Scriptures at times, thought deeply about them, and also made certain biblical principles part of his lifestyle. Thought-provoking insights on his interest in biblical matters can be garnered from a biography entitled *In Pursuit of Reason: The Life of Thomas Jefferson* by historian Noble Cunningham, and a volume by Norman Cousins, *In God We Trust*, which deals with the religious beliefs of the Founding Fathers.

Jefferson was deeply affected by the harsh accusations of the campaign of 1800 and, once elected to the presidency, studied the Bible with considerable diligence so as to clarify his own spiritual beliefs. In an interesting insight on his private life, Cunningham notes that Jefferson accepted no social invitations in the evening, but rather devoted that time to paperwork and personal study. His study included extensive review of the gospels, from which he clipped selected passages to produce an essay entitled *The Philosophy of Jesus*. Based on this research, he later compiled a more extensive work called *The Life and Morals of Jesus of Nazareth*, also known as *The Jefferson Bible*. To answer the charges that he was irreligious, he wrote an essay giving a summary description of his faith, "Syllabus of an estimate of the merit of the doctrines of Jesus, compared with those of others."

It is noteworthy that a president would reflect so deeply on the Scriptures during his term of office. Although his interest in the Word of God and belief in parts of it was commendable, his understanding of the Bible as a whole was not accurate. His apparent disbelief of miracles and supernatural events in the life of Christ is revealed by his omission of them in *The Jefferson Bible*. While he was fascinated by Jesus' ethics and wisdom, it appears that he did not believe everything God's Word teaches about Jesus Christ.

It is quite possible that Jefferson's study of the Bible was not confined to the gospels, but included the Book of Acts, given his awareness of the first century church. Among Jefferson's writings was praise of "the pure and unsophisticated doctrines, such as those professed and acted on by the unlettered Apostles, the Apostolic fathers, and **the Christians of the first century.**"

According to Cunningham, Jefferson was convinced that the early Christians held a unitarian concept of God, not a trinitarian one. In 1822, he wrote, "No historical fact is better established, than that the doctrine of one God, pure and uncompounded, was that of the early ages of Christianity; and was among the efficacious doctrines which gave it triumph over the polytheism of the ancients."³ This belief in one God was compatible with Jefferson's own views.

Jefferson had the highest regard for what he considered the "authentic" teachings of Jesus, but he clearly did not subscribe to the church teaching that Jesus Christ was God. He once referred to the Trinity as "an unintelligible proposition of Platonic mysticisms that three are one, and one is three; and yet one is not three, and the three are not one." He wrote on another occasion, "the . . .paradox that one is three, and three but one, is so incomprehensible to the human mind, that no candid man can say he has any idea of it, and how can he believe what presents no idea?" He wrote further that a man who follows this logic surrenders his reason and "has no remaining guard against absurdities the most monstrous, and like a ship without rudder is the sport of every wind. With such persons, gullibility, which they call faith, takes the helm from the hand of reason, and the mind becomes a wreck."⁴ On one occasion he declined to be a godfather at the baptism of friends' children because the Anglican service called for participants to recite the Apostles' Creed, which professes belief in the Trinity.

Jefferson also wrote the following:

When we shall have done away the incomprehensible jargon of the Trinitarian arithmetic, that three are one, and one is three; when we shall have knocked down the artificial scaffolding, reared to mask from view the simple structure of Jesus; when, in short, we shall have unlearned everything which has been taught since his day, and got back to the pure and simple doctrines he inculcated, we shall then be truly and worthily his disciples."⁵

Jefferson summed up what he called the "doctrines of Jesus" in three principles and contrasted them with his view of Calvinism:

1. That there is one only God, and He all perfect.
2. That there is a future state of rewards and punishments.
3. That to love God with all thy heart and thy neighbor as thyself is the sum of religion. . .

But compare these with the demoralizing dogmas of Calvin.

1. That there are three Gods.
2. That good works, or the love of our neighbor, are nothing.
3. That faith is everything, and the more incomprehensible the proposition, the more merit in its faith.
4. That reason in religion is of unlawful use.
5. That God, from the beginning, elected certain individuals to be saved, and certain others to be damned; and that no crimes of the former can damn them; no virtues of the latter save.⁶

Jefferson stated in one of his letters,

*"I am a real Christian, that is to say, a disciple of the doctrines of Jesus, very different from the Platonists, who call me infidel and themselves Christians and preachers of the gospel, while they draw all their characteristic dogmas from what its author never said nor saw. They have compounded from the heathen mysteries a system beyond the comprehension of man. . ."*⁷

We were not able to determine whether Thomas Jefferson was born again of God's spirit. His interest in Jesus Christ appears to be out of admiration of Jesus as a "religious reformer," and most of Jefferson's mention of Jesus concerns his approach to moral and ethical questions, not Jesus Christ's accomplishments as man's redeemer and our lord and savior. We were not able to find, in the materials we researched, much more than a casual mention of Christ's resurrection and ascension. One reference in a letter is Jefferson's description of what some people believed about Jesus, that he "reversed the laws of nature at will [an apparent reference to Jesus Christ's resurrection], and ascended bodily into heaven."⁸ It is not clear from the context whether Jefferson believed these events occurred or not.

Jefferson's Lifestyle

Jefferson's lifestyle showed a high commitment to moral and ethical standards. His life appears to have been an example of honesty and uprightness. Although he enjoyed entertaining and did so extensively during his presidency (and throughout his life), his expenses were paid from his own household budget, and not the public treasury. His annual salary was \$25,000; yet his expenses for wine alone during one year of his presidential term were \$2,800, with household and office expenses totaling \$16,000. He considered entertaining essential to the governmental process, and would often use it as a means of reconciling congressmen and others with divergent views.

While Jefferson's ethics regarding public finances and frugal government are well known, it should be mentioned that he was not the most skillful manager of his personal financial affairs. When he retired from public office, he was in debt. The Library of Congress was begun with a portion of Jefferson's personal library that he sold to the government to pay off several large debts. He continued to be plagued by debt, however, due to the expenses of constructing his mansion at Monticello and other estate projects.

During his presidency, Jefferson worked heartily, as evidenced by his daily schedule. Jefferson

typically rose at 5 a.m., and did paperwork until 9 a.m. He then received Cabinet members, members of Congress and others—without an appointment—until noon, when Cabinet meetings were usually held. Jefferson was dedicated to a daily horseback ride, his principal form of exercise, at 1 p.m., followed by dinner at 3:30 p.m. He often invited guests, and these occasions served as his main social activity. Dinner was served at an oval table, with no "head of the table," and rules of formal diplomatic etiquette were abandoned. Everyone was expected to leave by 6 p.m. so Jefferson could continue with his work until 10 p.m.

Jefferson was fastidious about his personal surroundings. He moved around a great deal during his career, but was always concerned about having a comfortable home environment for himself, his family and visitors—even if he was living in a rented house. A library for his extensive collection of books was of the utmost importance to him.

Jefferson exercised extraordinarily good judgment and foresight as president. For example, one of his first acts as president was to hire Meriwether Lewis, an army captain knowledgeable of the western territories, as his personal secretary. In a remarkable diplomatic feat, Jefferson later arranged to buy the western territory from France at an incredibly low price in what became known as the Louisiana Purchase. Lewis was part of the Lewis and Clark expedition sent by Jefferson to explore the vast new territory.

Jefferson's leadership abilities served the nation well. But God was watching over the new nation also, and because of this, in at least one instance, the diabolical plans of dishonest men were thwarted. Aaron Burr, Jefferson's first vice president, had initially stood by Jefferson and assisted him in his first administration. Later, Burr led a conspiracy to separate the western territories from the rest of the nation and turn them over to the British in the years leading up to the War of 1812. Somehow Jefferson learned of the plot and put a stop to it. Even at this time, God was watching over our nation. God knew that His Word would live in the hearts of many in our nation and that the western territories would someday comprise the heartland of America, an area vital to the nation's success. God knew that these western territories would supply an abundance of our nation's food supplies and natural resources, which were necessary to our development as a nation.

In 1807, events occurred that shattered much of the national harmony Jefferson had encouraged in the young United States. For several years, the British had been boarding U.S. naval and commercial ships on the high seas and seizing sailors the British claimed were deserters from their own vessels. In numerous instances, the arrogance of the well-armed British led them to take U.S. sailors captive. In one instance, a U.S. Navy vessel, the *Chesapeake*, was destroyed by a British warship when its captain refused to be boarded. To complicate matters, Britain and France, who were at war, both declared naval blockades of each other's coasts and declared their right to search offending vessels for contraband cargo. In order to punish Great Britain and France and to protect American vessels and seamen, Congress passed and Jefferson signed into law an economic embargo.⁹

The embargo was a disaster. Thriving commerce along the Atlantic seaboard was shut down, except for domestic shipping. Numerous Yankee smugglers carried on transatlantic trade, however. Public outrage was directed at Jefferson, and divisive and sometimes violent unrest infected the nation. Some states spoke of secession.¹⁰ Congress repealed the hated embargo shortly before Jefferson left office.

In 1809 Jefferson finished his second term as president, concluding eight years of service as our nation's chief executive. Including his presidency, he had served nearly thirty years in public service. His other offices included Virginia legislator, Continental Congress delegate, governor of Virginia, American minister (ambassador) to France, U.S. Secretary of State, and Vice President of the United States. Upon returning to his beloved country estate, Monticello, to retire from public life, his friends and neighbors gave him a warm welcome. According to one account, he was moved with emotion. He spoke to the group about leaving public service and concluded his short speech by quoting the prophet Samuel from I Samuel 12:3.

Returning to the scenes of my birth and early life, to the society of those with whom I was raised, and who have been ever dear to me, I receive, fellow citizens and neighbors, with inexpressible

pleasure, the cordial welcome you are so good as to give me. Long absent on duties which the history of a wonderful era made incumbent on those called to them, the pomp, the turmoil, the bustle and splendor of office, have drawn but deeper sighs for the tranquil and irresponsible occupations of private life, for the enjoyment of an affectionate intercourse with you, my neighbors and friends, and the endearments of family love, which nature has given us all, as the sweetener of every hour. For these I gladly lay down the distressing burthen of power, and seek, with my fellow citizens, repose and safety under the watchful cares, the labors, and perplexities of younger and abler minds. The anxieties you express to administer to my happiness, do, of themselves, confer that happiness; and the measure will be complete, if my endeavors to fulfil my duties in the several public stations to which I have been called, have obtained for me the approbation of my country. The part which I have acted on the theatre of public life, has been before them; and to their sentence I submit it; but the testimony of my native country, of the individuals who have known me in private life, to my conduct in its various duties and relations, is the more grateful, as proceeding from eye witnesses and observers, from triers of the vicinage. Of you, then, my neighbors, I may ask, in the face of the world, "whose ox have I taken, or whom have I defrauded? Whom have I oppressed, or of whose hand have I received a bribe to blind mine eyes therewith?" On your verdict I rest with conscious security. Your wishes for my happiness are received with just sensibility, and I offer sincere prayers for your own welfare and prosperity.¹¹

Jefferson's quote illustrates how hard he had worked to be an honest and frugal steward of the resources of the United States government while serving in office. Certainly his manner of life, his personal ethic of avoiding extravagance, and his method of paying some of the White House's expenses from his personal funds are testimony to his giving nature and respect with which he conducted the public's business.

Limited Government, the Constitution and Public Debt

The ideas for which Jefferson fought during his life were the ideas of classical liberalism, which—for the most part—are based on the biblical truth that man has freedom of will and that this freedom should be protected. This school of thought attaches great value to the liberty of the individual, the rights of the citizen, and the rights of property. Classical liberalism was championed by such thinkers as English philosopher John Locke, whose writings Jefferson had read and studied. Classical liberalism viewed the state as the servant of man, who was endowed by his Creator with free will. Classical liberals sought to protect the individual from the abuses of state power.

These classical liberal ideas are still relevant today. They form much of the basis for what has come to be called "modern conservatism." Jefferson's first Inaugural Address is an excellent statement of these principles of limited government, the powers of the states and its citizens, and the rights of individuals. The following excerpt illustrates this:

. . . what more is necessary to make us a happy and a prosperous people? Still one thing more fellow-citizens—a wise and frugal Government, which shall refrain men from injuring one another, shall leave them otherwise free to regulate their own pursuits of industry and improvement, and shall not take from the mouth of labor the bread it has earned. This is the sum of good government, and this is necessary to close the circle of our felicities [satisfaction, or contentment].

The welfare statists of the twentieth and twenty-first century would make Thomas Jefferson cringe, especially those in the Democratic Party who trace their political lineage back to Jefferson and the party he founded. How could any Democrat who is committed to the growth of governmental power (arguably, not every Democrat is) honestly say that he or she was of the party of Jefferson? But the public has let them get away with it. The so-called "party of Jefferson" certainly was not the same Democratic Party on which Franklin Delano Roosevelt relied for political support when he launched the welfare state with his New Deal. Nor is it the same Democratic Party that resists the shrinking of the welfare state or the rollback of federal spending today. And although the Republican Party may claim Jefferson's legacy of limited government today, it has not done much better in recent years to shrink the size and influence of the federal government.

Jefferson was one of the first proponents of the "strict constructionist" view of the Constitution. This view affirms that any powers not explicitly delegated to the federal government by the Constitution, nor prohibited to the states, should be reserved to the states and to the people. This is the essence of the Tenth Amendment, which was part of the Constitution Jefferson swore to uphold in his oath of office. Jefferson defended the rights of the common man over the prerogatives of the state. His view on the subject is stated succinctly in a letter to Elbridge Gerry, a signer of the U.S. Constitution and one-time governor of Massachusetts. The letter was dated 1799, a year before Jefferson won election to the presidency.

I am for preserving to the States the powers not yielded by them to the Union, & to the legislature of the Union [Congress], its constitutional share in the division of powers; and I am not for transferring all the powers of the States to the general government, & all those of that government to the Executive branch.¹²

In his first Inaugural Address, Jefferson also touched on this subject when he listed his "essential principles of our government."

. . . the support of the state governments in all their rights, as the most competent administrations for our domestic concerns and the surest bulwarks against anti-republican tendencies. . .

Jefferson would start another revolution were he alive today, for what he opposed occurred in the twentieth century. The federal government assumed more and more authority in every area of government policy, from building roads to educating children. These domestic matters Jefferson would have left at the state level; he would not have enlarged the federal government to administer them in Washington. Executive branch departments, such as the Department of Health and Human Services, or so-called independent agencies, such as the Federal Trade Commission, control all of the program delivery systems and administrative rule-making powers that define federal policy today. Meanwhile, state officials must go to Washington, D.C. and lobby, horse-trade, and beg for federal money and federal programs.

The states should tell the "feds" to keep their programs and their money, but that would be tough politically and financially. States would have to raise state and local taxes to make up for the loss in federal funds and the federal government would lose control over the states and the populace. Of course, this would mean the federal budget could be balanced and the national debt retired, over time. This is the program of reform that Congress would enact if it really wanted to serve the people and carefully steward the taxpayers' money.

Jefferson's strict constructionist view put him at odds with Alexander Hamilton, who advocated the opposing doctrine of implied powers, which gave the federal government a much more expansive field of authority. Jefferson and Hamilton were both members of the Cabinet during George Washington's presidency. Jefferson served as Secretary of State (1790-93) and Hamilton served as Secretary of the Treasury (1789-95). The two men sharply disagreed over the desirability of a national central bank that would have broad powers to direct the economy. Hamilton did prevail in this argument, however, and the First Bank of the United States (the precursor to today's central bank, the Federal Reserve) was established in 1791, headquartered in Philadelphia, and given the powers to issue national currency and serve as fiscal agent for the Treasury.

One of Hamilton's motives for setting up the Bank was to spur commercial expansion. The bank would make loans, he surmised, and give the business community a stake in the success of the new nation. Hamilton believed a national debt to be a blessing. Jefferson, however, was of a different mind. He wrote to James Madison in 1789 regarding the nation of France, ". . . would it not be wise and just for that nation to declare in the constitution they are forming that neither the legislature, nor the nation itself can validly contract more than they may pay within their own age, or within the term of 19 years?"¹³

In his 1799 letter to Elbridge Gerry, Jefferson commented on frugal government and eliminating public debt.

I am for a government rigorously frugal & simple, applying all the possible savings of the public revenue to the discharge of the national debt; and not for a multiplication of officers & salaries merely to make partisans, & for increasing, by every device, the public debt, on the principle of its being a public blessing.¹⁴

In a letter to Samuel Kercheval, written in 1816, seven years after he had left the presidency, Jefferson, the elder statesman, exhibited his long-held opposition to government debt.

I am not among those who fear the people. They, and not the rich, are our dependence for continued freedom. To preserve their independence, we must not let our rulers load us with perpetual debt. We must make our election between *economy and liberty*, or *profusion and servitude*. If we run into such debts, as that we must be taxed in our meat and in our drink, in our necessaries and our comforts, in our labors and our amusements, for our callings and our creeds, as the people of England are, our people, like them, must come to labor sixteen hours in the twenty-four, give the earnings of fifteen of these to the government for their debts and daily expenses; and the sixteenth being insufficient to afford us bread, we must live, as they do now, on oatmeal and potatoes; have no time to think, no means of calling the mismanagers to account; but be glad to obtain subsistence by hiring ourselves to rivet their chains on the necks of our fellow-sufferers. Our land-holders, too, like theirs, retaining indeed the title and stewardship of estates called theirs, but held really in trust for the treasury. . . This example reads to us the salutary lesson, that private fortunes are destroyed by public as well as by private extravagance. And this is the tendency of all human governments. A departure from principle in one instance becomes a precedent for a second; that second for a third; and so on, till the bulk of society is reduced to mere automatons of misery, to have no sensibilities left but for sinning and suffering. . . And the forehorse of this frightful team is public debt. Taxation follows that, and in its train wretchedness and oppression.¹⁵

In getting Congress to accept all Revolutionary War debts at face value, Hamilton obligated the government to pay for years on the principal and interest. Hamilton convinced Congress that it was necessary to have the government assume all of the debt to establish good credit for the United States. In order to make payments on the debt, several new taxes were necessary. These early taxes were mostly from tariffs or import duties and excise taxes on such things as alcohol, refined sugars, auctions, and licenses. Once in office, Jefferson and his allies in the Congress worked to repeal the excise taxes, which were internal taxes, as opposed to tariffs, which were taxes on imports.¹⁶

During his presidency, Congress, at Jefferson's request, abolished the internal revenue service, which had been established to collect the excise taxes. This branch of the Treasury Department should not be confused with the modern Internal Revenue Service. The agency in Jefferson's day consisted of about five hundred employees who were involved in collecting excise taxes. (The income tax had not yet been established.) With the excise taxes repealed, there was no need for this tax-collecting agency. Jefferson and Albert Gallatin also persuaded Congress to cut government spending and make substantial payments to reduce the war debt.¹⁷

National Defense and Foreign Policy

The times in which Thomas Jefferson lived were quite different than ours. As the third President of the United States, Jefferson was very concerned with establishing the credibility of the federal government and domestic stability and harmony within the nation. The British Navy dominated the oceans of the world. This shielded the U.S. from other European powers but led to conflicts with the British over U.S. freedom to trade with other nations.

By 1803, Napoleon had stirred Europe to war. The Napoleonic wars went on until 1815. The U.S. had no interest in becoming engaged in conflicts with well-trained professional armies who fought wars for political advantage or colonial acquisition. The new nation's citizens were interested in caring for their farms and families and living in freedom. Jefferson and his immediate successors in the White House

were determined to keep the U.S. out of Europe's hostilities.

The only logical course for the young United States to pursue was one that protected its interests. This meant a policy that focused on establishing a strong, national government capable of protecting individual liberty, ensuring domestic stability, and establishing a small navy to protect U.S. coasts. Such objectives would not support the "luxury" of wars to serve the whims of a politician. To a certain extent, the state of the new nation dictated its foreign policy.

In his 1799 letter to Gerry, Jefferson stated his approach to defense and foreign policy.

I am for relying, for internal defence, on our militia solely, till actual invasion, and for such a naval force only as may protect our coasts and harbors from such depredations as we have experienced; and not for a standing army in time of peace, which may overawe the public sentiment; nor for a navy, which, by its own expenses and the eternal wars in which it will implicate us, will grind us with public burthens, and sink us under them.¹⁸

Jefferson knew a strong national defense was necessary to maintain liberty. He was, however, suspect of a standing army, perhaps rightly so. History is filled with examples of powerful generals who, with the backing of the army, assumed the position of head of state by force or intimidation, as opposed to popular election. Certainly at times, the "military-industrial complex," of which President Dwight Eisenhower warned, has exercised unwarranted influence over the policies of our government. Most of the growth of our modern military establishment, however, was motivated by the realities of the twentieth century, chiefly the military adventurism and aggression of first Adolf Hitler and the Japanese and then the Soviet Union. It became necessary, particularly with the rise of Soviet communism after World War II, to maintain a standing army.

Even though the Soviet Union no longer exists, the leaders of the nations that have replaced Russia and the other former Soviet republics are not beyond reproach. They will act out of their own self-interests, which could be contrary to our own national interest. We must be prepared to defend our interests both here at home and abroad. In addition, the rise of China's military prowess and the proliferation of nuclear arms and other weapons of awesome power by several nations require us to stay strong militarily. And of course, the increasing potency of international terrorism makes it necessary for us to continue to maintain not only our current conventional and nuclear forces and capabilities, but also to develop new strategies that will protect our nation from a wide range of threats and challenges.

Jefferson conducted a "non-interventionist" foreign policy and opposed wars for the sake of geopolitical aspirations.

I am for free commerce with all nations; political connection with none; & little or no diplomatic establishment. And I am not looking for linking ourselves by new treaties with the quarrels of Europe; entering that field of slaughter to preserve their balance, or joining in the confederacy of kings to war against the principles of liberty.¹⁹

In his first Inaugural Address Jefferson stated his foreign policy approach, part of his "essential principles."

. . . peace, commerce, and honest friendship with all nations—entangling alliances with none.

Since the first World War, some of our political leaders have been obsessed with the lust to bring the U.S. under the domination of a world government. President Woodrow Wilson tried it with the League of Nations, which the U.S. Senate at the time wisely rejected. President Franklin Delano Roosevelt and his wife later brought us the United Nations. The Senate ratified the United Nations treaty and the U.S. began a diplomatic intrigue with numerous governments from around the world, many of which did not rule by consent of the governed and still do not to this day.

Both Wilson and Roosevelt claimed as their political home the political party of Thomas Jefferson, but

they both advanced the ideas of world dominion. Since the end of World War II, our policymakers have involved us in a number of new entanglements, which have included a number of military adventures abroad. One wonders if our leaders, at the time, considered whether these undertakings fulfilled what would have been Jefferson's requirements for sending our nation's armed services to engage hostile forces.

In marked contrast to our current mode of operation, Jefferson, who had been a diplomat himself, had contempt for diplomacy. He once wrote a friend, "I have ever considered diplomacy as the pest of the peace of the world, as the workshop in which nearly all the wars of Europe are manufactured."²⁰

Jefferson subtly demonstrated this contempt by ignoring all elaborate protocol when entertaining foreign diplomats when he was President. This infuriated the diplomats, which was part of what Jefferson had in mind. He wanted to contrast what he would refer to as American "republican virtues" of the common man with the pomp and show of Europe, and, to some extent, of the previous Federalist Administration of John Adams.²¹

Conclusion

Jefferson's principles, his quality of life, and his contributions to our nation certainly rank above that of just about anyone in public life today. His life was not a perfect one, yet he allowed few of his faults to significantly impact his public service. His public life was one of honest service to his countrymen. The ideas for which he fought—religious liberty, frugal and limited government, and a non-interventionist foreign policy—he never abandoned.

Jefferson had a suggestion for future political leaders in his first Inaugural Address. After detailing in his address his "essential principles of our government," he said the following:

. . .these principles form the bright constellation which has gone before us, and guided our steps through an age of revolution and reformation. The wisdom of our sages and the blood of our heroes have been devoted to their attainment. . . should we wander from them in moments of error or alarm, let us hasten to retrace our steps and to regain the road which alone leads to peace, liberty and safety.

If our political leaders of today would make an effort to retrace their steps along the lines of Jeffersonian principles, we would be better for it. The student of the Bible will recognize the heart of many of these Jeffersonian principles to be, at their root, biblical ones, even though Jefferson may not have identified them as such himself. Among those principles are these obviously biblical ones:

- Individual liberty, which is based on the concept of free will
- Economy and frugality in government, which is an application of good stewardship and diligence
- Avoiding entangling alliances, which was a standard for Israel in the Old Testament
- Avoiding public debt, which is another principle from the Old Testament law
- Honest work in order to provide a genuine service, which is a principle found in the Old and New Testaments

These principles once helped to provide a sound foundation for the freest and most prosperous nation in the world, our United States. They would rescue our ship of state today if used again with wisdom and courage.

Thomas Jefferson was one of those unique men of good character and right principle who has occasionally walked onto the stage of history. Although far from perfect, men like Jefferson have left us much for which to be thankful. Jefferson's fight for the concepts of individual freedom, especially religious liberty, expanded liberty in his day and still benefits us today. A true statesman expands liberty; a tyrant expands government. May God bless our nation with some true statesmen in the years ahead, and show us how to recognize the tyrants before they do us harm.

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1. Thomas Jefferson, *Writings* (New York: Literary Classics of the United States, 1985), p. 1057.
 2. Noble E. Cunningham, Jr., *In Pursuit of Reason: The Life of Thomas Jefferson* (Baton Rouge, Louisiana: Louisiana State University, 1987), p. 225.
 3. Letter to James Smith as quoted in *In God We Trust*, by Norman Cousins (New York: Harper and Brothers Publishers, 1958), p. 159.
 4. Cousins, pp. 159-160.
 5. Letter to Timothy Pickering as quoted in Cousins, p. 157.
 6. Letter to Benjamin Waterhouse as quoted in Cousins, pp. 160-161.
 7. Letter to Charles Thomson as quoted in Cousins, p. 145-46.
 8. Letter to Peter Carr as quoted in Cousins, p. 128.
 9. Page Smith, *Thomas Jefferson: A Revealing Biography* (New York: American Heritage Publishing Co., Inc., 1976), pp. 276-283.
 10. Smith, pp. 282-284.
 11. *Writings*, p. 550.
 12. *Writings*, p. 1056.
 13. *Writings*, p. 962.
 14. *Writings*, p. 1056.
 15. *Writings*, p. 1400-1401.
 16. Clarence B. Carson, *A Basic History of the United States, Volume 2: The Beginning of the Republic* (Wadley, Alabama: American Textbook Committee, 1984), pp. 174-76.
 17. Cunningham, pp. 247-248.
 18. *Writings*, p. 1056.
 19. *Writings*, p. 1056-57.
 20. Smith, p. 270.
 21. Smith, pp.267, 270.

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