The Twelve Pillars of Freedom

The American Creed consists of the principles that form the foundation for the United States of America, including the foundation for its Constitution, its system of law, and its overall purpose and vision as a nation. The American Creed is stated in the first founding document of the United States, that being the Declaration of Independence.

President John Quincy Adams gave recognition to these principles as forming the foundation of the United States Constitution when he said:

The virtue which had been infused into the Constitution of the United States was no other than ... those abstract principles which had been first proclaimed in the Declaration of Independence-namely, the self-evident truths of the natural and unalienable rights of man ... This was the platform upon which the Constitution of the United States had been erected.

Abraham Lincoln similarly made reference to the importance of these foundational principles when he said: "I have never had a thought politically which did not spring from the sentiments embodied in the Declaration of Independence."

The Declaration contains 12 such sentiments, or principles. These principles are also called, "The Twelve Pillars of Freedom." The principles are the following:

Principle number 1: National Sovereignty. The Declaration of Independence begins by saying:

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 Nature's God entitle them ...

This declaration that "one people" will now "assume among the Powers of the earth the separate and equal station" is a clear statement of national sovereignty. The Declaration of Independence begins with national sovereignty. It also ends with national sovereignty. Indeed, the Declaration of Independence could just as well be called the "Declaration of National Sovereignty" because that is what the Declaration means.

Principle number 2: Natural Law. Our Declaration of Independence says, as noted above, that the United States has become an independent nation based on the "**Laws of Nature and Nature's God.**" That is, our

nation is based on natural law. Natural law is the universal moral code that governs all people. Its precepts include equality, justice, the Golden Rule, the unalienable rights of life, liberty and property, and the Ten Commandments.

A college-level American government textbook, *American Government: Roots and Reform,* (1993 Edition) provides a good description of natural law as it states:

Where Did our Ideas of Government Come From? ... classical and medieval writers such as St. Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274) argued that ...governments were ordained by natural law--basic and God-given rules that do not have to be written as much as discovered. Individual rights to life and liberty were a part of the natural law created by God. [Karen O'Connor and Larry J. Sabato (New York: Longman Publishing) p. 6]

(Because natural law is so important to the United States and to all civilized life, and because natural law is not well understood, Cmod #4 will provide a detailed description of it.)

Principle number 3: Self-evident truth. The third pillar of freedom asserted in the Declaration of Independence is self-evident truth. The Declaration states: "We hold these **truths to be self-evident** ..." That is, the Declaration views truth as genuine, knowable and fundamental to the basic principles of government—in contrast to the modern and radical view of truth which see it as a mere "construct" in the minds of individuals (called "constructivism" and/or postmodernism).

Principle number 4: Equality. The Declaration of Independence says: "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are **created equal**..." The Declaration states that all people are equal because they were created that way by God. As a consequence, all people are to be equal before the law, that is, the legitimate claims of all people shall have equal standing including their legitimate claims of life, liberty and property.

The term "men" is here used in the generic sense and means human beings regardless of race, gender, social standing, income, disability and the like. The liberal interpretation of the Declaration which asserts that it is a racist and sexist document is blatantly false.

Principle number 5: Inalienable Rights. The Declaration of Independence states: "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are **endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights** ..." Our forefathers understood that our rights have

been given to us by God, and for that reason these rights are "unalienable." Today we say "inalienable." Our forefathers recognized that the fundamental human rights, such as life, liberty and property, are not granted by government; they have been granted by God. The role of government, then, is to protect these God-given rights.

In this way the founders of our nation clarified that government had a lower level of authority than the inalienable rights of its people. Governments do not grant rights, nor do rights depend on government. On the contrary, government rests on the human rights, some of which are allocated to government by the people for the sake of good order.

Principle number 6: The inalienable Right to Life. The Declaration of Independence states: "... they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are **Life**, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness ..." The first right mentioned is that of life since other rights mean nothing without the right to life.

Principle number 7: The Inalienable Right to Liberty. The Declaration of Independence states: "... they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, **Liberty**, and the pursuit of Happiness ..." Liberty, or freedom, is the second listed right. In this way the colonists declared their independence from Great Britain and also stated in principle their opposition to slavery. This principle was not fully put into effect until the Civil War, the reason being that the Southern states would not have joined the union otherwise.

Principle number 8: The Inalienable Right to Private Property. The Declaration of Independence uses the term "pursuit of happiness" for this right. Amendments 5 and 14 to the United States Constitution state that no person may be deprived of "life, liberty, or property" without due process of law. That is, the Constitution clarifies that "pursuit of happiness" refers primarily to the right of personal property. The founding fathers defined "property" broadly so as to include much more than physical property, but also time, talents, opportunities, freedom and life itself.

Principle number 9: The primary purpose of government is the protection of the inalienable rights. The Declaration of Independence states it this way: "That, to secure these Rights, Governments are instituted among Men ..." That is, government has one over-arching purpose--protecting the inalienable rights of all people.

Principle number 10: Popular Sovereignty. The Declaration of Independence states this principle with the words: "That to secure these Rights, Governments are instituted among Men, **deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed**." That is, the people have a

higher level of authority than government, and government has only those powers delegated to it by the citizens (as guaranteed by Amendments nine and ten to the Constitution). For this reason, the Constitution of the United States was created to be a social contract by which the states and the people designated some of their powers to the federal government for the sake of good order and national defense.

Principle number 11: Federalism and States' Rights. The last paragraph of the Declaration of Independence says: "That these United States are, and of Right ought to be, Free and independent states; that they are Absolved from all Allegiance to the British Crown, and that all political connection between them and the State of Great Britain is, and ought to be totally dissolved; and that as Free and Independent States, they have full Power to levy War, conclude Peace, contract Alliances, establish Commerce and do all other Acts and Things which Independent States may of right do."

In this way the Declaration of Independence emphatically affirmed the sovereignty of the federal United States and the sovereignty of the separate states. The Declaration envisioned a federal system of government with the states delegating some of their power to the federal government while retaining other powers for themselves. The federal system of government is explained in the Tenth Amendment to the Constitution which stipulates that any powers not specifically delegated to the federal government by the Constitution are reserved for the states and the people respectively.

Principle number 12: Divine Providence. The Declaration of Independence ends with this sentence: "And for the support of this Declaration, with a firm reliance on the Protection of Divine Providence, we mutually pledge to each other our Lives, our Fortunes and our sacred Honor." That is, the colonists stated their conviction that there is a God in the Heavens who governs in the affairs of men. The signers of the Declaration were convinced that their cause was just and that the just God, earlier in the Declaration referred to as the "Supreme Judge of the world," would be on their side.

It was largely because of this conviction that they believed they would be successful against what was arguably the most powerful military force in the world at that time.