

A Christian Patriot

by Rev. Christopher Lensch
WRS Assoc. Prof. of OT

John Jay (1745-1829) was a thinker who was heavily involved in America's fight for independence, and when freedom was won, God put John Jay into critical positions of leadership to help lay a Christian foundation in setting America's course.

In the early stages of struggle with mother England, this founding patriot was a reluctant revolutionary. As an attorney, he had every hope that reasonable men on both sides of the Atlantic could settle their differences through dialogue under the rule of law. But when America's grievances continually were rebuffed and when American blood began to be shed, he cast his family fortunes behind the cause of independence.



Jay the Revolutionary

John Jay's leadership abilities and negotiating talents were quickly recognized during the struggle for American liberty. New York sent him as a delegate to both the first and second Continental Congresses, and he served a term as president of the latter Congress. Toward the end of the War, he secured a loan from Spain before heading to Paris to help Franklin and Adams negotiate the final peace treaty with England.

Jay the Constitutionalist

Jay's singular labors were so crucial in achieving American sovereignty that President George Washington offered him his choice of being either the first Secretary of State or the first Chief Justice of the U.S. Supreme Court. Justice Jay chose the Supreme Court, and there he resisted efforts to make the court a partisan tool of politicians.

Before taking office, he collaborated with Hamilton and Madison on the "Federalist Papers" in an effort to promote a strong, constitutional republic. Following his service on the court, he served as governor of the state of New York and also ran for the U.S. Presidency.

Jay the Christian

John Jay was a life-long member of the Episcopal Church, and he was active in his home church as a trustee. Even before he was governor of New York state, he was pressing for legislation to ban slavery in his state. Short of that possibility, he founded the New York Manumission Society that lobbied against slavery, and he even bought slaves who were at risk in order to release them later. Finally toward the end of his term

as governor, he was able to sign a compromise bill ensuring "the gradual abolition of slavery." Thirty years later and just before Jay died, he saw his hope realized in the full emancipation of all slaves in New York.

One telling interest of John Jay reveals where his sympathies lay. His writings include many Bible passages and allusions, but in this particular extract from 1816 he asserts that America is a Christian nation and that Christians make the best rulers:

"It certainly is very desirable that a pacific disposition should prevail among all nations. The most effectual way of producing it is by extending the prevalence and influence of the gospel. Real Christians will abstain from violating the rights of others and therefore will not provoke war. Almost all nations have peace or war at the will and pleasure of rulers whom they do not elect and who are not always wise or virtuous. Providence has given to our people the choice of their rulers and it is the *duty as well as the privilege and interest of our Christian nation to select and prefer Christians for their rulers.*"

While ever so active in federal and state offices before 1800, John Jay retired from public office around the time of his wife's death. In his remaining years, he invested his time and reputation in the American Bible Society of New York City. America's first Chief Justice was the first vice-president of the ABS, and then its president, because he wanted new emigrants in the land of opportunity to be able to own and read the Book that he believed was the bedrock of our nation's freedoms.

Conclusion

The roots of John Jay's family tree are deep in the soil of the Dutch who had settled along the fertile Hudson River valley. His paternal grandfather, however, was a Huguenot who had come to America after 1685 when France revoked the Edict of Nantes in a crackdown on French Protestants.

John Jay's values and religious convictions were shaped by the consistently Calvinistic outlook inherited from his godly forebears. When his grandfather was fleeing persecution in France for a haven of escaped Huguenots at New Rochelle, the future looked uncertain. But God was planting a godly seed in the New World in preparation for the "grand experiment" of American freedom where people could serve the Lord and hear the gospel. God raised up John Jay to help secure freedoms and values that continue to bring divine blessings on America.

Seminary Resources: WRS course notes are available on our website to aid your Bible study. See "Course Descriptions" under www.wrs.edu/academics/

WESTERN REFORMED SEMINARY

Five South G St. Tacoma, WA 98405 • (253) 272-0417 • www.wrs.edu