

First Place: Abigail Readlinger

“God Bless America”

Why Liberty Needs God to Stand Beside Her and Guide Her

It is the Sunday before Fourth of July, and the Jersey Shore is calling. The seemingly endless early morning church service is nearly over, and I am more than ready to go. As I look eagerly towards the exit, my pastor halts the congregation. He requests everyone to stay and sing “God Bless America” in honor of the holiday. I stop, sigh, and half-heartedly join in:

*God bless America, land that I love
Stand beside her and guide her
Through the night with the light from above*

Looking back, I realized that two minute deterrent to my beach vacationing has provided tremendous insight into the beautiful structure of our nation. If America is the land we love, if we stand for the ideals of liberty and self-governance, God must must be present to stand beside us and guide us.

Liberty is the strength to restrain one’s own desires and freely follow the will of God. In *Democracy in America*, Tocqueville writes that “freedom sees in religion the divine source of its rights.”¹ In other familiar words, liberty is “endowed by [the] Creator.”² We are given the freedom to choose and act for ourselves — a gift only repaid by choosing and acting for our God. Laura Ingalls Wilder further states that we *must* keep the law of God, “for God’s law is the only thing that gives us a

¹ Tocqueville, [*Democracy in America*](#). pg. 44

² The Declaration of Independence

right to be free.³” In short, religion is fundamental to liberty, and liberty fundamental to America. We cannot be advocates of freedom, if at first we are not advocates of our Father.

The preservation of self-governance in America will always be dependent on individual liberty and restraint. Because the Founders acknowledged liberty as a God-given right, men were largely responsible to rule themselves and obey the dictates of their own consciences. In his letter to the Massachusetts Militia, John Adams stresses the need of a “moral and religious people⁴” when creating a system based on self-governance. When men have the freedom to rule, it is crucial that they rule themselves right. Adams, Tocqueville, and C.S. Lewis had all seen the dangers of a free and irreligious society in the French Revolution.⁵ They did not want the same for their own nations. As long as the natural right of self-governance is applicable to Americans, liberty and religion will be as well.

The secularization of American society will only lead to the fall of self-rule and the rise of government power. Religion provides men with the unalienable right to rule themselves. Take it away, and there is no right. The ruler of man is no longer himself or his God. Rather, it is the new deity: his Government. If Americans continue to fall away from religion, they not only become slaves of the government, but they also lose the fundamental right of what it means to be truly human.

From the mountains and the prairies to the oceans white with foam, God has given us liberty and she calls America home. To keep our freedom, we must remember from whom she came. God has given us America. He stands beside her and guides her. Perhaps the best place to be on the Sunday

³ Laura Ingalls Wilder, *Little Town on the Prairie*. pg. 76

⁴ John Adams, *Letter to the Massachusetts Militia*.

⁵ C.S. Lewis, *Screwtape Proposes a Toast*, pg. 13-14

before Fourth of July was not the beach as I had imagined. Perhaps, instead, it was that small church, filled with the echoing voices of those who believed in liberty and self-governance and, most of all, in the fact that God had blessed them with it.