



Faith of our Forefathers



Declaration of Independence, July 4, 1776 (John Trumbull)

As we celebrate our freedom on Independence Day, I am reminded of our country's [Declaration of Independence](#) and the writings of Thomas Jefferson and John Adams. Letters exchanged by Jefferson and Adams some forty years after the drafting of the Declaration provide insight on the importance of Christianity and their personal faith in the founding of our republic.

Adams to Jefferson on June 28, 1813

The *general Principles*, on which the Fathers Atchieved Independence, were the only Principles in which that beautiful Assembly of young Gentlemen could Unite.... And what were these *general Principles*? I answer, the general Principles of Christianity, in which all those Sects were United: And the *general Principles* of English and American Liberty, in which all those young Men United, and which had United all Parties in America, in Majorities sufficient to assert and maintain her Independence. Now I will avow, that I then believed, and now believe, that those general Principles of Christianity, are as eternal and immutable, as the Existence and Attributes of God; and that those Principles of Liberty, are as unalterable as human Nature and our terrestrial, mundane System. I could therefore safely say, consistently with all my then and present Information, that I believed they would never make Discoveries in contradiction to these *general Principles*.

Jefferson to Adams on October 12, 1813

In extracting the pure principles which he [Jesus] taught, we should have to strip off the artificial vestments in which they have been muffled by priests, who have travestied them into various forms, as instruments of riches and power to them.... We must reduce our volume to the simple evangelists, select, even from them, the very words only of Jesus, paring off the Amphibologisms into which they have been led by forgetting often, or not understanding, what had fallen from him, by giving their own misconceptions as his dicta, and expressing unintelligibly for others what they had not understood themselves. There will be found remaining the most sublime and benevolent code of morals which has ever been offered to man. I have performed this operation for my own use, by cutting verse by verse out of the printed book, and arranging, the matter which is evidently his, and which is as easily distinguishable as diamonds in a dunghill. The result is an 8vo. [octavo] of 46. pages of pure and unsophisticated doctrines, such as were professed and acted on by the unlettered apostles, the Apostolic fathers, and the Christians of the 1st. century.

Amidst the picnics and fireworks on this holiday, I encourage each of us to take a moment to reflect on the wisdom and faith of our forefathers and to offer thanks to our Creator for this great nation. May God bless you and may you celebrate a joyous Fourth of July.

You may view these and additional letters exchanged by Adams and Jefferson at the [National Humanities Center](#).

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