

Letters to Various Religious Denominations

George Washington
President of the United States

These three letters are representative of Washington's great pride in the decision of the American people to recognize the natural right of every citizen to the free exercise of religion. Under our Constitution, all religious believers are to have equal protection under the law and none is to be excluded from positions of authority in political office.

To the Roman Catholics
of the United States

Gentlemen:

While I now receive with much satisfaction your congratulations on my being called, by an unanimous vote, to the first station in my country; I cannot but duly notice your politeness in offering an apology for the unavoidable delay. As that delay has given you an opportunity of realizing, instead of anticipating, the benefits of the general government, you will do me

Readings in American Deism

the justice to believe, that your testimony of the increase of the public prosperity, enhances the pleasure which I should otherwise have experienced from your affectionate address.

I feel that my conduct, in war and in peace, has met with more general approbation than could reasonably have been expected and I find myself disposed to consider that fortunate circumstance, in a great degree, resulting from the able support and extraordinary candour of my fellow-citizens of all denominations.

The prospect of national prosperity now before us is truly animating, and ought to excite the exertions of all good men to establish and secure the happiness of their country, in the permanent duration of its freedom and independence. America, under the smiles of a Divine Providence, the protection of a good government, and the cultivation of manners, morals, and piety, cannot fail of attaining an uncommon degree of eminence, in literature, commerce, agriculture, improvements at home and respectability abroad.

As mankind become more liberal they will be more apt to allow that all those who conduct themselves as worthy members of the community are equally entitled to the protection of civil government. I hope ever to see America among the foremost nations in examples of justice and liberality. And I presume that your fellow-citizens will not forget the patriotic part which you took in the accomplishment of their Revolution, and the establishment of their

Selections by the American Deist

government; or the important assistance which they received from a nation in which the Roman Catholic faith is professed.

I thank you, gentlemen, for your kind concern for me. While my life and my health shall continue, in whatever situation I may be, it shall be my constant endeavour to justify the favourable sentiments which you are pleased to express of my conduct. And may the members of your society in America, animated alone by the pure spirit of Christianity, and still conducting themselves as the faithful subjects of our free government, enjoy every temporal and spiritual felicity.

George Washington
March 15, 1790

To the Hebrew Congregation at Newport, Rhode Island

Gentlemen:

While I received with much satisfaction your address replete with expressions of esteem, I rejoice in the opportunity of assuring you that I shall always retain grateful remembrance of the cordial welcome I experienced on my visit to Newport from all classes of citizens.

The reflection on the days of difficulty and danger which are past is rendered the more sweet from

Readings in American Deism

a consciousness that they are succeeded by days of uncommon prosperity and security.

If we have wisdom to make the best use of the advantages with which we are now favored, we cannot fail, under the just administration of a good government, to become a great and happy people.

The citizens of the United States of America have a right to applaud themselves for having given to mankind examples of an enlarged and liberal policy — a policy worthy of imitation. All possess alike liberty of conscience and immunities of citizenship.

It is now no more that toleration is spoken of as if it were the indulgence of one class of people that another enjoyed the exercise of their inherent natural rights, for, happily, the Government of the United States, which gives to bigotry no sanction, to persecution no assistance, requires only that they who live under its protection should demean themselves as good citizens in giving it on all occasions their effectual support.

It would be inconsistent with the frankness of my character not to avow that I am pleased with your favorable opinion of my administration and fervent wishes for my felicity.

May the children of the stock of Abraham who dwell in this land continue to merit and enjoy the good will of the other inhabitants — while every one shall sit in safety under his own vine and fig tree and there shall be none to make him afraid.

Selections by the American Deist

May the father of all mercies scatter light, and not darkness, upon our paths, and make us all in our several vocations useful here, and in His own due time and way everlastingly happy.

George Washington
August 18, 1790

To the 'New Church' (Swedeborgians) in Baltimore

Gentlemen:

It has ever been my pride to mind the approbation of my fellow citizens by a faithful and honest discharge of the duties annexed to those Stations to which they have pledged to place me; and the dearest rewards of my Services have been those testimonies of esteem and confidence with which they have honored me. But to the manifest interpretation of an over-ruling Providence, and to the patriotic exertions of United America, are to be ascribed those events which have given us a respectable rank among the nations of the earth.

We have abundant reason to rejoice that in this land the light of truth and reason has triumphed over the power of bigotry and superstition and that every person may here worship God according to the dictates of his own heart. In this enlightened Age & in this Land of equal liberty it is our boast, that a man's religious tenets, will not forfeit his protection of the Laws, nor deprive him of the right of attaining

Readings in American Deism

& holding the highest offices that are known in the United States.

Your Prayers for my present and future felicity were received with gratitude; and I sincerely wish, Gentlemen, that you may in your social and individual capacities, taste those blessings which a gracious God bestows upon the Righteous.

George Washington
January 27, 1793