



"The less justified a man is in claiming excellence for his own self, the more ready he is to claim all excellence for his nation, his religion, his race or his holy cause."  
—Eric Hoffer

**05-Jul-24**

## **The American Faith**

Unlike any other country, America came into [the world](#) with a message for mankind—that all are created equal, and all are meant to be free. There is no American race; there's only an American creed: We believe in the dignity and rights of every person. We believe in equal justice, limited government, and in the rule of law. We believe in personal responsibility, and tolerance toward others.

This creed of freedom and equality has lifted the lives of millions of Americans, of citizens by birth and citizens by choice. This creed draws our friends to us. It sets our enemies against us, and always inspires the best that is within us. In this 226th year of our independence, we have seen that American patriotism is still a living [faith](#). We [love](#) our country; only more when she's threatened.

President George W. Bush spoke these words in his Independence Day speech to the citizens of Ripley, West Virginia, in 2002. His choice of words exudes a religious tone well known in the speeches of wartime presidents, which he was, as this speech occurred on the first July 4 after 9-11.

Particularly striking is Bush's assertion that "American patriotism is still a living faith." Maybe he did not intend it to mean this, but he asserts that when Americans recite the Pledge of Allegiance, fly their Stars and Stripes, affix their "Proud to Be an American" bumper stickers, and belt out the national anthem, they are practicing the religion of America.

Most people do not consider patriotism a kind of faith, a religion of sorts, but it has every possibility of being or becoming one, especially to those who have become disaffected with "traditional religion." The nation itself becomes "[God](#)," and the Constitution is its Bible. The Declaration of Independence is its creed (to use President Bush's term), and the various national holidays—Presidents Day, Memorial Day, Independence Day, Labor Day, Flag Day—become sacred, inviolate days of worship. As strange as it sounds, Washington, D.C., becomes the holy city, and the White House, Capitol, Supreme Court, Jefferson and Lincoln Memorials, and Washington Monument are shrines of American greatness and righteousness.

It can be taken further. The President is its high priest. The Supreme Court becomes a kind of Sanhedrin, while Congress functions as Nazirites, under a vow to serve their God for a set time. Public service—from voting in elections to serving on juries to joining the armed forces—is a sacred duty, and any who would not participate are worthy of shame and disgrace as infidels.

Finally, we would be remiss not to mention America's missionary responsibility to proselytize, convert, and aid the whole world to accept our glorious system of freedom and democracy so that all people can benefit from the bounties Americans enjoy and cherish. If only the Palestinians, the Iranians, the North Koreans, the Chinese, and all our other enemies would just try democracy, free markets, and equal rights, there would be [peace](#) on earth and goodwill toward men. It would bring about the Millennium of *Pax Americana*.

Of course, this description is exaggerated, but patriotism sometimes takes this tone.

A concise definition of *idolatry* is "putting anything before the true God" ([Exodus 20:3](#)). "Anything" could mean a pagan god, another person, wealth, prestige, a job, a possession, an idea or ideal, and even a nation. The true God wants nothing to come between Him and one of His children. No matter how "good" an idol is, it cannot compare to God's [goodness](#), and it is, therefore, dangerous to the individual and to his relationship with God.

Back in 2002, just a week before President Bush's speech, Americans were buzzing with indignation over the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals' declaration of "under God" in the Pledge of Allegiance to be unconstitutional, infringing on the separation of church and state. We, however, must remember what the phrase "one nation under God" means: Our primary allegiance is to God. If we worship America, its Constitution, democracy, liberty, equality, justice, law, tolerance, or any other good thing, we still fall short of the glory of God ([Romans 3:23](#)).

It all comes down to answering a simple question: Are we Christians or Americans first?

Remember, "our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord [Jesus Christ](#), who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body, according to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself" ([Philippians 3:20-21](#)). His side is the winning side.

Yes, we can love this country, the land of our birth or naturalization. We can cheer its victories and grieve for its losses. We can enjoy its plenty, its freedom, and its beauty. Ultimately, however, we answer to a Higher Power for whom we should reserve our worship.

- Richard T. Ritenbaugh

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**From the Archives: Featured Sermon**

## **Flee From Idolatry (Part Two): Faithfulness**

by Richard T. Ritenbaugh

Multiple studies have affirmed that boxing is the world's toughest sport in terms of endurance, hand-eye coordination, durability, coordination, and self-discipline, allowing no trust in luck, truly a full spectrum endeavor. Perhaps this intense demand is why the apostle Paul chose this athletic metaphor (I Corinthians 9:24-27) as a spiritual allegory, describing God's saints striving for an imperishable crown, insisting that they must be totally in it to win it, demanding excelling in a broad spectrum of skills, including the fruits of the spirit (Galatians 5:22-23), the Beatitudes (Matthew 5), Peter's list of virtues (II Peter 1:5-7), and the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20). Using these tools we must exert ourselves with a broad spectrum of skills to subdue our carnal bodies, mortifying the flesh (Romans 8:13) with maximum self-discipline for the rest of our mortal lives, resisting the carnal pulls which pull us toward idolatry, lust, and sexual immorality which destroyed our forebears on the Sinai (I Corinthians 10:1-10) and is destroying all who have rejected God's public revelation today (Romans 1:21-28) stupidly exalting things that have been created over the Creator, especially the self-centered worship of the self. Human idolatry stems from deliberate ignorance and willful suppression of the truth, such as the clueless philosopher Aldous Huxley, having a toxic anti-God bias throughout his writings, preferring to worship self. All of society's horrible problems stem from idolatry just as our forebears experienced on the Sinai, providing an admonitory warning not to follow their example. We are warned not to yield to 1.) lusting or craving evil things, 2.) idolatry, 3.) sexual adultery, 4.) tempting Christ, and 5.) chronic complaining and murmuring. We are admonished to flee from these practices, trusting in God's faithfulness.

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## **From the Archives: Featured Article**

### **The First Commandment**

by John W. Ritenbaugh

Idolatry is probably the sin that the Bible most often warns us against. John

Ritenbaugh explains the first commandment, showing that we worship the source of our values and standards. God, of course, wants our values and standards to come from Him and Him only, for there is no higher Source in all the universe!

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