

The thirteen colonies all began with covenants to God — some even naming Christ and the advancement of His gospel as their purpose. Yet less than two centuries later, the nation's highest law spoke no such name at all. Was this silence wisdom or compromise, providence or betrayal? The answer lies in the pivot from covenant to Creator, and in whether that choice was the seed of liberty — or the beginning of forgetting.



From Covenant to Creator: America's Founding Pivot



When we ask whether America was founded as a Christian nation, we must begin not with the debates of today, but with the undeniable record of the thirteen original colonies. From Virginia's charter in 1606 to Georgia's in 1732, every colony grounded its laws and governance in God — and many named Jesus Christ and the advancement of His gospel as their explicit purpose.

The Mayflower Compact of 1620 was signed "for the glory of God, and advancement of the Christian faith." The Massachusetts Bay Charter pledged to win the natives to "the knowledge and obedience of the only true God and Savior of mankind." Connecticut's Fundamental Orders of 1639 began by thanking "the Almighty God" for their settlement, while the Articles of Confederation of the United Colonies of New England (1643) declared their united aim "to advance the kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ."

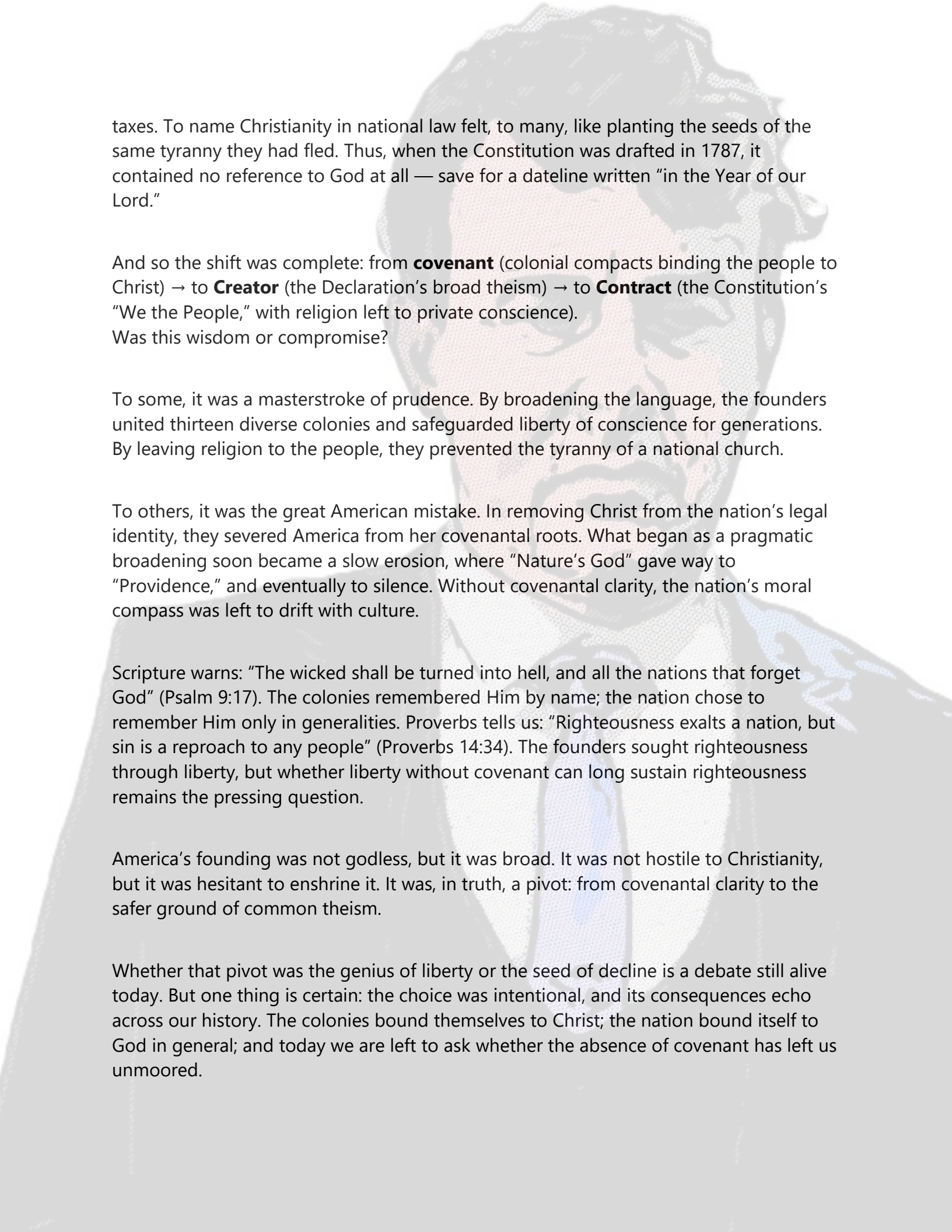
Taken together, these documents formed a chorus. Whether Puritan or Anglican, Quaker or Catholic, the colonies assumed that public life was framed within a Christian order. Civil covenants echoed biblical Israel: the people bound themselves to God in their corporate identity. **Christianity was not an accessory; it was the atmosphere.** And yet, when we turn from the colonial charters to the Declaration of Independence in 1776, the tone changes. Gone is the language of Christ and covenant. In its place are broader references: "Nature's God," "Creator," "Supreme Judge of the world," and "Divine Providence." These were not careless substitutions. They were deliberate choices.

Why the pivot?

First, religious diversity. By the mid-eighteenth century, New England Puritans were no longer the only voice. Virginia was Anglican, Maryland Catholic, Pennsylvania Quaker, New York Dutch Reformed, with Baptists, Lutherans, and Jews also present. A revolution that named Jesus Christ in its charter might have fractured before it began.

Second, Enlightenment philosophy. Thinkers like Locke and Montesquieu reframed rights not as gifts of Scripture but as self-evident truths written into nature itself. Jefferson and Franklin, steeped in this tradition, preferred to speak of "laws of nature and of nature's God" rather than quote chapter and verse. This made America's case for independence persuasive to Europe, but at the cost of covenantal clarity.

Third, the memory of state-church tyranny. Colonists remembered well the persecutions of Europe: dissenters fined, Catholics outlawed, Baptists jailed for refusing to pay church



taxes. To name Christianity in national law felt, to many, like planting the seeds of the same tyranny they had fled. Thus, when the Constitution was drafted in 1787, it contained no reference to God at all — save for a dateline written “in the Year of our Lord.”

And so the shift was complete: from **covenant** (colonial compacts binding the people to Christ) → to **Creator** (the Declaration’s broad theism) → to **Contract** (the Constitution’s “We the People,” with religion left to private conscience).
Was this wisdom or compromise?

To some, it was a masterstroke of prudence. By broadening the language, the founders united thirteen diverse colonies and safeguarded liberty of conscience for generations. By leaving religion to the people, they prevented the tyranny of a national church.

To others, it was the great American mistake. In removing Christ from the nation’s legal identity, they severed America from her covenantal roots. What began as a pragmatic broadening soon became a slow erosion, where “Nature’s God” gave way to “Providence,” and eventually to silence. Without covenantal clarity, the nation’s moral compass was left to drift with culture.

Scripture warns: “The wicked shall be turned into hell, and all the nations that forget God” (Psalm 9:17). The colonies remembered Him by name; the nation chose to remember Him only in generalities. Proverbs tells us: “Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people” (Proverbs 14:34). The founders sought righteousness through liberty, but whether liberty without covenant can long sustain righteousness remains the pressing question.

America’s founding was not godless, but it was broad. It was not hostile to Christianity, but it was hesitant to enshrine it. It was, in truth, a pivot: from covenantal clarity to the safer ground of common theism.

Whether that pivot was the genius of liberty or the seed of decline is a debate still alive today. But one thing is certain: the choice was intentional, and its consequences echo across our history. The colonies bound themselves to Christ; the nation bound itself to God in general; and today we are left to ask whether the absence of covenant has left us unmoored.

From Covenant to Creator — and Now to Culture

The pivot from Christ to Creator was a gamble. The founders hoped that liberty itself would safeguard faith — that by leaving religion free from government compulsion, Christianity would flourish on its own strength. For a time, it did. The Great Awakenings swept through the land, and churches multiplied without state support.

But over centuries, the covenantal clarity of the colonies gave way to cultural Christianity, and then to a secular order where even “Nature’s God” is often too specific to name. From schools to courts to public squares, America has gone from covenant → Creator → contract → and now, too often, to culture without God at all.

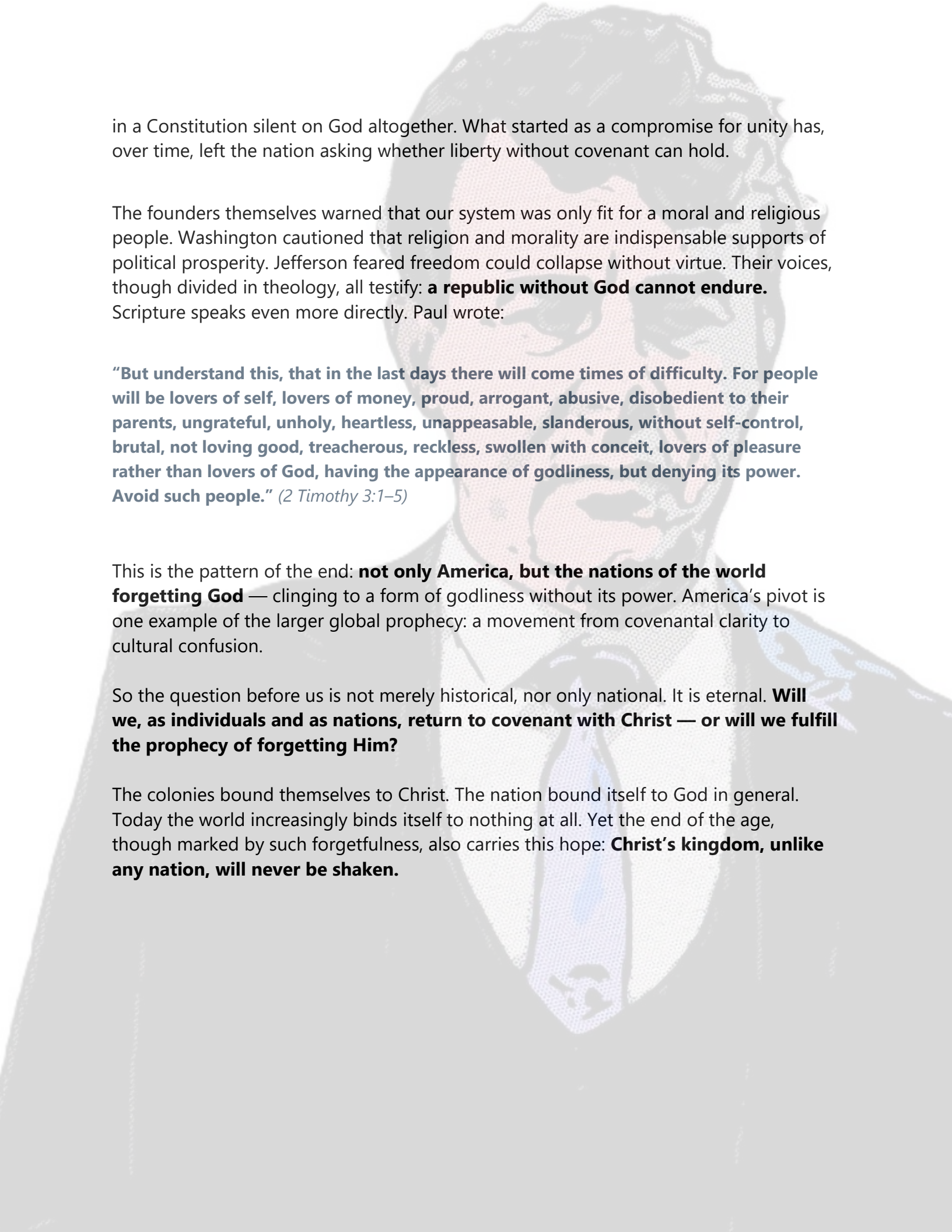
What would the founders say if they saw this trajectory?

- **John Adams** once warned: *“Our Constitution was made only for a moral and religious People. It is wholly inadequate to the government of any other.”* If he were alive today, he might look at our moral confusion and say: *“This is what happens when you keep the Constitution but abandon the covenant.”*
- **George Washington**, in his Farewell Address, insisted that *“religion and morality are indispensable supports”* of political prosperity. Seeing the collapse of shared morality in public life, he might say: *“You have preserved liberty but cut down its pillars. How long do you think the roof can stand?”*
- **Thomas Jefferson**, who wrote of “Nature’s God” and “unalienable rights,” feared both tyranny and irreligion. He might look at modern America’s culture wars and caution: *“You sought freedom from religion, and now you risk freedom from virtue.”*

Even the most Deist-leaning founders assumed a society shaped by Christian ethics. None imagined a secularism that would try to erase God altogether.

Final Closing

The American story began with colonies covenanted in Christ, shifted to a nation founded upon broad appeals to “Nature’s God” and “Creator,” and eventually enshrined



in a Constitution silent on God altogether. What started as a compromise for unity has, over time, left the nation asking whether liberty without covenant can hold.

The founders themselves warned that our system was only fit for a moral and religious people. Washington cautioned that religion and morality are indispensable supports of political prosperity. Jefferson feared freedom could collapse without virtue. Their voices, though divided in theology, all testify: **a republic without God cannot endure.** Scripture speaks even more directly. Paul wrote:

“But understand this, that in the last days there will come times of difficulty. For people will be lovers of self, lovers of money, proud, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, heartless, unappeasable, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not loving good, treacherous, reckless, swollen with conceit, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having the appearance of godliness, but denying its power. Avoid such people.” (2 Timothy 3:1–5)

This is the pattern of the end: **not only America, but the nations of the world forgetting God** — clinging to a form of godliness without its power. America’s pivot is one example of the larger global prophecy: a movement from covenantal clarity to cultural confusion.

So the question before us is not merely historical, nor only national. It is eternal. **Will we, as individuals and as nations, return to covenant with Christ — or will we fulfill the prophecy of forgetting Him?**

The colonies bound themselves to Christ. The nation bound itself to God in general. Today the world increasingly binds itself to nothing at all. Yet the end of the age, though marked by such forgetfulness, also carries this hope: **Christ’s kingdom, unlike any nation, will never be shaken.**