

The focus of this lesson is on the role played by religion and the clergy in the discussions of ratification of the Constitution.

Background: Students would be sophomore in the course Foundations of American Government. This required course includes students of all educational backgrounds (public and parochial grade schools), all skill levels (a minimum reading level of 4<sup>th</sup> grade), and all interests. Course work is designed both to introduce students to the basic structures, functions and practices of our Republic, but the philosophical and historical frameworks making it possible. As such, the American Revolution, ideas of the Enlightenment and creation of the Constitution are explored.

Lesson Objectives:

- To examine the ratification discussion using primary sources.
- To write their own opinions using supporting examples.
- To introduce students to the language used by individuals and groups using a religious context.
- To critically evaluate the language used in persuading communities to support or oppose Ratification of the Constitution.

**Prior to the lesson** (homework or a class writing warm up activity) students will be asked to journal on the following question. “What do you think or believe about the concept of Separation of Church and State? Explain”

**Journal commentary:** Have the students exchange journals (if you have a class conducive to this). Students should read and write a response to the original writer. You may steer this to have them comment on particular issues.

**Discussion:**

What do you imagine people thought at the time of the discussions religion and its role in the discussion of ratification of the Constitution?

Create context for evaluating the documents. Establish the lack of an established religion in the Constitution in contrast to established official Catholic or Protestant governments in Europe. Remind them of the lack of religious tests to hold office. Remind them of the diversity of Christianity present in the early US and of the role of the clergy in these religions. (Perhaps review Quakers and basics of Catholic, Episcopalian, Presbyterian—and their similarities.)

**Introduction of primary sources:** Students will work with documents from the CSAC website or printouts of them (or sections of the documents) found in the section under Ratification and Religion. You may have several groups of students examine different documents, you could have each group evaluate two documents, you might have all of the groups evaluate the same documents. Your call.

**Documents to use:**

From The Constitution as an Instrument of National Salvation

- Mathew Carey: The Prayer of an American Citizen, Philadelphia American Museum, 7 November 1787
- Benjamin Rush: Observations on the Fourth of July Procession in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania Mercury, 15 July 1788

From The Constitution as an Instrument of National Damnation

- Samuel, Boston Independent Chronicle, 10 January 1788

Could include additional docs depending on class....Consider from The Constitution as an Instrument of National Salvation

- Cassius VI, Massachusetts Gazette, 25 December, 1787 (No religious test for political office)
- Virginia Herald, 10 January 1788
- The New Litany, Virginia Herald, 21 February 1788

Students would be asked to do the following in groups of three for each document:

- 1) Identify the creator of the document. (Writer? Any info on that writer?)
- 2) Identify the type of source. (Letter? Editorial? News? Audience?)
- 3) What is the writer's position on ratification of the Constitution? What tells you this?
- 4) What language related to God or religion or Christianity is used? List examples.
- 5) What connection is made or implied between God, religion, and/or Christianity and ratification of the Constitution?
- 6) Do you find the document(s) persuasive? Explain.
- 7) Do you believe this religious language was helpful, damaging, a combination of the two, or something else in evaluating the adoption of the Constitution?
- 8) Does anything surprise you about these sources?
- 9) Are there any issues today in the political world that are discussed in connection with religion or God?
- 10) Is religious language helpful, damaging, a combination of the two, or something else in evaluating political issues?

Once students have evaluated the material have a focused discussion. Go through one or two of the first five questions. Ideally students should determine that religious language permeates these documents. The extent to which they find the language persuasive will depend on their interpretations. Go over the larger context of these documents in the discussions of ratification. Be sure to discuss the dangers of broad conclusions based on a handful of documents. Continue the discussion with connections to the present and connections between religion and politics. Careful!

**Wrap up** the lesson by having students return to their journal writing from the beginning of class (or assign as homework). Ask them to add a summary of their understanding of the role played by religious language and religion in discussion of the ratification of the Constitution and any questions or observations they have about this.

Logical follow up class would consider the First Amendment and religion.

Alternatively could examine the debates around slavery, the 3/5 Compromise and the moral and religious issues raised by support of an "immoral" document.