



CENTER FOR THE STUDY OF THE AMERICAN CONSTITUTION

csac.history.wisc.edu > Document Collections > Religion and Ratification > The
Constitution as an Instrument of National Salvation

The People

New Haven Gazette, 11 October 1787 (excerpts)¹

To the Honorable the Representatives of the State of Connecticut, in General Assembly convened.

Respected Sirs: We your constituents, confiding in your wisdom and integrity, are happy that the consideration of the national, as well as separate interests, falls at a period when so much unanimity and harmony prevail in our councils, as we have good reason to hope we are blessed within this present instance. . . .

Your constituents will not wish to see their political interest more secure than they are confident they will be, when in oneness of sentiment and pursuit, they observe their rulers studying those methods of national security which, according to the integrity of their hearts, appear to be the ordinance of Heaven. In this, they are willing to confide, trusting that the same power, which hath placed their feet upon dry land, will not suffer them to perish while following the pointings of His Providence.

To determine what are the positive pointings of Providence in regard to the duties of men, either in a national or single capacity, requires, perhaps, a stretch of wisdom more than we can always fathom. In such an uncertain case, we can only determine the will of Heaven by comparing our present situation with some former one similar in kind, in which we followed the dictates of our own wisdom with a conscious dependence on infinite wisdom for further direction, and thus resting the event. If there are any such instances wherein the God of Heaven hath, either in a public or private capacity, crowned our pious endeavors and amply rewarded the confidence we placed in His supremacy, need we fear again to follow the same path which He hath thus sanctified with His blessing? Unless infinite wisdom errs, or under the same circumstances, follows different steps, or lastly, unless the arm of the Almighty is shortened that He cannot save, we may receive this method of instruction as an infallible guide. This gives us a key to the movings of Providence, which in every other view look dark and mysterious. Experience is allowed to be the most infallible teacher. And if in any subsequent transactions we are confident that the same genuine principles of integrity direct our steps, as in former times, we may no doubt expect the same favorable answer from above. Though the Almighty may order events different at different times, even when the outward circumstances of a people are the same; yet we are warranted to say that sameness of genuine principles, under the same circumstances, will warrant sameness of success. In the present state of political uncertainty, would it not be wise to search for some similar instance in which following the steps of our own wisdom, with a pious dependence and solemn appeal to Heaven, we have received the reward of our hopes? Is there

no such instance? Are there not many instances parallel to the present by which we may, by a serious and unprejudiced attention, learn our present duty? Did not our Revolution commence? Hath it not been continued ever since upon the same plan? Have we not encountered dangerous scenes, the issue of which our own wisdom could not fathom, but which, being recommended by those entrusted with our political concerns, we have encountered and, in a dependence on the divine blessing, have found our labor crowned with ample success? We trust there are none of you so ignorant of the movings of our political system, during the present Revolution, as to say *that we have never trusted Providence in the dark*, and if you remember such instances, you cannot say that we were in any instance disappointed. Our Revolution is yet but half completed; we have escaped the evils which threatened us from a foreign quarter, but we have not attained the positive blessings which we promised ourselves from the establishment of a free and independent empire. The truth is, such an empire is not yet established. In vain have we, for four years, pursued a phantom, a shadow without substance, an effect without a cause. We have sought the blessings of freedom without being free. No matter whether we are shackled at home or abroad; so be our feeble efforts are always frustrated and our fetters so riveted that we cannot use our strength in our own defense. We are, in a national capacity, shackled both at home and abroad. And the propensities of designing men wait only to be loosed, and we should become an easy prey. But this Revolution is still to be pushed—it must be perfected—the prospects which warmed our breasts, while pursuing this Revolution through the field of Mars, must be brought home to our quiet possession. Until this is done, our object is but half attained; our hopes are but half fulfilled; and we are but too moderately grateful for the deliverance which hath been already wrought in our behalf. We will not grate your understandings so much as to recite the thousand inconveniencies, losses, and disappointments we sustain through want of a perfection of this mighty fabric. The God of Heaven hath crowned our labors and rewarded our enterprise thus far. If Canaan's rest is to bound our march, shall we, who have done mighty deeds, be affrighted back because it is reported giants and Anakims dwell there? We choose not to stand aghast and be affrighted from our right because of ill reports. Are we, the people who have thrown down the walls of Jericho, to be afraid of giants? If such there are, they are but images of our own forming, and if, on nearer view, they prove too mighty, the same that made them can make them less. We have thrown down one mighty form of gigantic force; and it is a task too hard for man to say, when a creature of our own forming can arise to equal height. 'Tis children's play to be affrighted in the dark with images which imagination only paints.

Was there a voice from Heaven forbidding to go forward, well might we, trembling, retire; but when that voice, which has ever to us interpreted the will of Heaven, gently bids us go forward, may we not pursue?

1. It is possible that Joel Barlow, one of the Connecticut Wits, wrote this essay, since it resembles his oration before the Connecticut Society of the Cincinnati on 4 July 1787.

CITE AS: John P. Kaminski et al., eds., *The Documentary History of the Ratification of the Constitution*, Vol. III: Delaware, New Jersey, Georgia, and Connecticut (Madison, Wis.: Wisconsin Historical Society Press, 1978), 360–62.