

Evy Krombein



Americanism

“Without God there could be no American form of government, nor an American way of life. Recognition of the Supreme Being is the first, the most basic, expression of Americanism. Thus, the founding fathers of America saw it, and thus with God’s help, it will continue to be.”

President Dwight D. Eisenhower

In 1620, a group of religious and social outcasts sailed to colonies ruled by England in the New World. They left for religious freedom and the ability to worship God without the pomp and circumstance of the Catholic Church or the monarch-led beliefs of Anglicanism. They cultivated a home in the New World, which would be come to be called America, and based their lives on devotion to God and His Law. One hundred and fifty years later, they were still fighting. The freedom they longed for was challenged, and they retaliated, claiming their rights to worship freely and govern themselves independently of the nation they had come from. When they declared themselves united in the States of America, they drafted the Constitution, stating religious freedom and the belief that they were given these rights by God. Because of their struggles with England, they treasured the freedom to create laws that protected faith, and wrote that protection into the Constitution. This faith, as Eisenhower stated, shaped Americanism.

What is Americanism? As defined by the Merriam-Webster dictionary of 1828, Americanism is “the love which American citizens have to their own country, or the preference of its interests.” Over the years, all the people who have lived in America have claimed it as the superior nation. Full of opportunities and jobs, America was seen to many European immigrants in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century as a promised, golden land. Men like Jacob Riis, Joseph Pulitzer, and Irving Berlin fled from impoverished European countries and came to America, searching for freedom and fortune. They pledged loyalty to America and the values for which it stood: freedom and tolerance. As Eisenhower recognized, Americanism cannot exist without a belief in God, because that belief shapes how we live, how we serve, and how we view our country.

Belief in God shapes how we live. Understanding that America was founded in the belief in God implies that we must understand who God is and what He has done. That knowledge should make us more ready to forgive, trust, and accept others’ opinions. We don’t have to believe what they do. But we don’t have to attack them and completely dismiss them as utter fools either. In Matthew 22:39, Jesus states that the second greatest commandment is to love your neighbor as yourself. Loving your neighbor means treating them as you would want them to treat you, a common moral even in today’s society. It means loving them despite their flaws. In this present day and age, we have forgotten how to interact thoughtfully and graciously with others. We are so quick to attack and blame-shift that we can’t acknowledge our own faults. A belief in God should shape us to be more thoughtful and empathetic, even when people don’t deserve that empathy.

The way we serve others is also shaped by our belief in God. He served selflessly, so we should serve selflessly as well. Before Jesus died, he washed His disciples' feet, taking the place of a common servant to show them how much He loved them. That should be our standard of servanthood: to serve selflessly and sacrificially, regardless of the status or beliefs of the people we are serving. In this modern day and age, we are so quick to take the option that is best for us, and only us, without considering anyone else in the bargain. But belief in God should make us do the opposite. It should commit us to the good of many, not just our own good, and by seeking the good of others, we will find our own good, as stated in Jeremiah 29.

How we view our country is shaped by belief in God. The government is set in place by God to help, guide, and lead us. James 1:17 says, "Every good gift is from above," and we should recognize the gift of our country that God has given us and treat it with gratefulness. We should value our country more, because we are grateful. We are to support and obey our government, since it was placed over us by God, as long as it does not contradict God's law (Romans 13). However, if our government strays from the morals that it was founded on, we have the right to replace it. We should view our country as the early colonists did, as a "city on a hill," and live as though the whole world is watching (Matthew 5:14). If we are truly the superior nation that we and many others coming to America think we are, then we must act like it.

However, many people would disregard God entirely as the crucial point of Americanism. They would say that He is not important, that no one worships, and barely even acknowledges that He exists. People worship their own desires of money, power, fame, and sex, not stopping to consider that there might be more beyond the material things of this world. But just because we do not acknowledge Him does not mean that He doesn't exist, it merely means

we have forgotten what America was founded on. We worship anything we want, regardless of what it is, to satisfy our own desires, but these other things never fulfill. Worship of the true God is crucial to understanding proper order—understanding what the government is supposed to be for us, and what America should be. If we are truly “one nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all,” then we must act like “one nation under God” (the Pledge of Allegiance). Belief in God is, as Eisenhower knew and proclaimed, the first, most basic expression of Americanism.

Many people also disregard God because they believe He is not relevant or important to the state or the government, but this claim is utterly false. Without God, we have no state and no government, no country and no nation. He is the one who raises up and cuts down leaders and nations, and the wise know and understand this. He raised up Babylon as a world power to bring judgement to Israel, and raised up great leaders like George Washington and Winston Churchill to bring justice, freedom, and peace to their respective peoples. We need a government because we do not know how to exist without a leader—because God made us to be led. Without God, we would be, and are, a stumbling, uncertain people, wandering around, seeking our own desires, and trying to do everything ourselves. But there is no American way of life without God, as Eisenhower states. Without the basis and foundation of a belief in God, America is just like all of the other nations, who exist for their own glory.

Americanism cannot exist without a belief in God, because belief in God shapes how we live, how we serve, and how we view our country. As Americans, knowing, understanding, and believing this is the most essential part of our American heritage and life. We should strive to

live by the beliefs that founded and created this country: one nation, under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.