



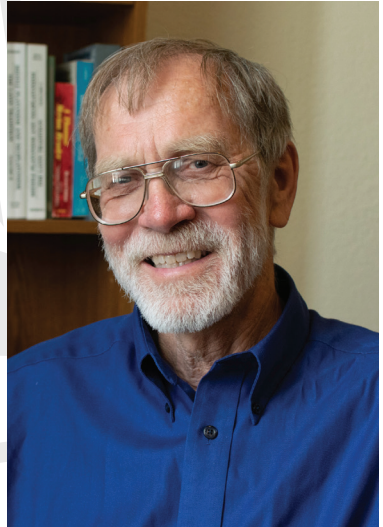
# INTEGRITAS

Wyoming Catholic College

## WE HOLD THREE TRUTHS: Celebrating The American Constitution with James Madison and John Paul II

Pope John Paul II once said, "The Founding Fathers of the United States asserted their claim to freedom and independence on the basis of certain 'self-evident' truths about the human person: truths which could be discerned in human nature built into it by 'nature's God.'" The Pope described the freedom intended by the Founding Fathers as freedom that would enable men to fulfill their duties and responsibilities toward the family and toward the common good; freedom that would include moral responsibility and accountability; and freedom that would respect "the natural units or groupings through which people exist, develop, and seek the higher purposes of life in concert with others." Then he added:

*The American democratic experiment has been successful in many ways. Millions of people around the world look to the United States as a model, in their search for freedom, dignity, and prosperity. But the continuing success of American democracy depends on the degree to which each new generation, native-born and immigrant, make its own the moral truths on which the Founding Fathers staked the future of [the] Republic.*



**Dr. Hon. J. Leon Holmes**  
Visiting Professor of  
Political Philosophy  
Former Federal  
District Court Judge

In this lecture, I will make three claims as to the truths on which the Constitution is founded. I will confess in advance that these three truths are simple and basic. My defense for presenting such simple, basic truths—apart from my inability to offer more advanced, more complex ideas—is that foundations often are basic. First principles, and principles proximate to them, usually are simple. But we often overlook them precisely because they are simple and basic.

My first claim is that the Constitution is based on a true understanding of human nature. Men are prone to assume authority to which they are not entitled. Men are prone to murder, rob, or enslave others when it is in their self-interest to do so. Government is necessary to prevent men from committing such evil deeds. In the terms of the Declaration, men are prone to deprive others of their natural rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. Government is therefore necessary to protect those rights. Yet government itself may become a threat to those rights.

**“...the Constitution is based on a true understanding of human nature.”**

The Framers wrote the Constitution in light of this understanding of human nature. At the heart of the Constitution is the doctrine of separation of powers and checks and balances, which Madison explained in *Federalist* 47: “The accumulation of all powers legislative, executive and judiciary in the same hands, whether of one, a few or many, and whether hereditary, self-appointed, or elective, may justly be pronounced as the very definition of tyranny. Were the federal constitution really chargeable with this accumulation of power or with a mixture of powers having a dangerous tendency to such accumulation, no further arguments would be necessary to inspire a universal reprobation of the system.” Again, in *Federalist* 51, Madison wrote that it was essential to the preservation of liberty that the powers of government be separated into different departments. If the power of making laws were to be combined with the power of executing and interpreting those same laws, liberty, Madison said, would not long survive.

In *Federalist* 55, Madison summarized the view of human nature upon which the Constitution is based: “As there is a degree of depravity in mankind which requires a certain degree of circumspection and distrust: So there are other qualities in human nature, which justify a certain portion of esteem and confidence. Republican

Editor-In-Chief  
Dr. Glenn Arbery  
Executive Editor:  
Joseph Susanka  
Circulation:  
Katelyn Hiatt

COPIES AVAILABLE  
UPON REQUEST



government presupposes the existence of these qualities in a higher degree than any other form." Thus, the Framers recognized that men have a propensity to evil, particularly when their conduct is the effect of passion and self-interest rather than reason; but they also recognized that men have the capacity to achieve some level of wisdom and virtue; and they recognized that good and wise men are needed for good government.

Here is my second claim: the founders believed that good and evil, right and wrong, justice and injustice, are realities independent of the human mind, not creations of the human mind; goodness and justice are prior to and transcend the political order; they represent standards by which the political order—or any human conduct—can be judged.

***"...good and evil, right and wrong, justice and injustice, are realities independent of the human mind."***

Whereas the Articles of Confederation required approval of all thirteen States for any amendment, the Constitution provided that it would go into effect when ratified by nine States.

***"...the safety and happiness of society are the objects at which all political institutions aim, and to which all such institutions must be sacrificed."***

In response to the question of how the Confederation could be superseded without unanimous approval of the thirteen States, Madison, in *Federalist 43*, appealed to the same principle that the Declaration invoked to justify the Revolution. The question, he said, "is answered at once by recurring to the absolute necessity of the case; to the great principle of self-preservation; to the transcendent law of nature and of nature's God, which declares that the safety and

happiness of society are the objects at which all political institutions aim, and to which all such institutions must be sacrificed."

Later in *Federalist 43* Madison addressed this question: if nine or more States but less than thirteen were to ratify the Constitution—which would in effect dissolve the Confederation, leaving some in the Union and some out—what would be the relationship between the States that were in the Union and those that were not? In Hobbes's terms, the States that ratified the Constitution and therefore were members of the Union would be in a state of nature with those which had not ratified the Constitution and were not members of the Union. There would be no common power and therefore no law between them, which would mean, according to Hobbes,

that there would be no justice or injustice in their relations with one another. Madison said, however, that “Although no political relations can subsist between the assenting and dissenting States, yet the moral relations will remain uncanceled. The claims of justice, both on one side and on the other, will be in force, and must be fulfilled.” Madison’s statement that the claims of justice would subsist between the States that ratified the Constitution and

***“...the claims of justice subsist among men as men; they predate and transcend the political order.”***

those that did not directly contradicts Hobbes on this point. According to Madison—and I think all the founders would agree—the claims of justice subsist among men as men; they predate and transcend the political order.

One of the purposes of the Constitution, according to the preamble, is “to establish justice.” But we must recognize that justice was not and has not been perfectly established. The Constitution was and is imperfect. The Framers recognized as much, which brings me to my third claim: The Constitution is a product of temperance in the zeal for justice and prudence in accepting imperfection. Our Constitution came into existence, in part, because the Founders possessed, in an important measure, the virtue of humility.

***“The Constitution is a product of temperance in the zeal for justice and prudence in accepting imperfection.”***

On the last day of the convention—September 17, 1787—Benjamin Franklin, who was too weak to read his own speech, asked James Wilson to read the speech for him. Here is what he said:

*I confess that there are several parts of this constitution which I do not at present approve, but I am not sure I shall never approve them: for having lived long, I have experienced many instances of being obliged by better information, or fuller consideration, to change opinions even on important subjects, which I once thought right, but found to be otherwise. It is therefore that the older I grow, the more apt I am to doubt my own judgment, and to pay more respect to the judgment of others.*

• • •

*In these sentiments ... I agree to this Constitution with all its faults, if they are such; ... I doubt ... whether any other Convention we can obtain, may be able to make a better Constitution. For when you assemble a number of men to have the advantage of their joint wisdom, you inevitably assemble with those men, all their prejudices, their*

*passions, their errors of judgment, their local interests, and their selfish views. From such an assembly can a perfect production be expected? It therefore astonishes me ... to find the system approaching so near to perfection as it does; and I think it will astonish our enemies. ... Thus I consent ... to this Constitution because I expect no better, and because I am not sure, that it is not the best. The opinions I have had of its errors, I sacrifice to the public good. I have never whispered a syllable of them abroad. Within these walls they were born, and here they shall die.*



*I cannot help expressing a wish that every member of the Convention who may still have objection to it, would with me, on this occasion, doubt a little of his own infallibility, and to make manifest our unanimity, put his name to this instrument.*

Earlier, we noted the connection between reason and justice. It is by the use of our reason that we ascertain what is just. But our reason is fallible. We endeavor to ascertain what is just in each given situation, but often we see through a glass darkly. For each of us, the eye of our soul is clouded by the cataracts of sin. Our minds are finite, and our reason influenced by our passions, our prejudices, and our self-interest. The Founders recognized as much and said so; and not only those who participated in drafting the Constitution.

***“It is by the use of our reason that we ascertain what is just.”***

I have made three claims: first, that the Constitution is based on a true understanding of human nature; second, that the Constitution presupposes that good and evil, right and wrong, justice and injustice, are realities independent of the human mind, which is to say that goodness and justice are prior to and transcend the political order; and, third, that the Constitution is the product of temperance and prudence, as well as humility, in the pursuit of justice.

***“Ignorance of the fact that man has a wounded nature inclined to evil gives rise to serious errors in the areas of education, politics, social action, and morals.”***

Now, I want to say a word about why these three claims are important. The Catechism of the Catholic Church, citing Pope John Paul II’s encyclical, *Centesimus Annus*, says, “Ignorance of the fact that man has a wounded nature inclined to evil gives rise to serious errors in the areas of education, politics, social action, and morals.”

In *Centesimus Annus*, Pope John Paul II noted that in *Rerum Novarum* Leo XIII had presented “the organization of society according to the three powers—legislative, executive and judicial—something which at the time represented a novelty in Church teaching. Such an ordering,” Pope John Paul said, “reflects a realistic vision of humankind’s social nature, which calls for legislation capable of protecting the freedom of all. To that end, it is preferable that each power be balanced by other powers and by other spheres of responsibility which keep it within proper bounds. This is the

***“...it is preferable that each power be balanced by other powers and by other spheres of responsibility which keep it within proper bounds.”***

principle of the ‘rule of law,’ in which the law is sovereign, and not the arbitrary will of individuals.” Pope John Paul’s logic here is precisely Madison’s logic in the *Federalist Papers*, particularly numbers 10 and 51.

In addition, “When people think they possess the secret of a perfect social organization that makes evil impossible, they also think they can use any means,

including violence and deceit, in bringing that organization into existence.”

If I read them correctly, the Catechism and Pope John Paul II have said that limited government—government that is not totalitarian—needs three things: first, a true understanding of human nature; second, a recognition that standards of morality transcend the political order; and, third, a recognition that perfection cannot be achieved in this fallen world. These are the truths on which the United States Constitution was founded.

In closing, let us return to the preamble to the Constitution. The preamble specifies six purposes for which the Constitution was ordained and established. The sixth and final purpose of the Constitution is “to secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity.” Blessings come from God. God can, and usually does, work through secondary causes, such as the Constitution; but the fact that God works through secondary causes when he bestows blessings does not change the fact that He is their ultimate source. By using the term, “the blessings of liberty,” the Constitution recognizes, implicitly, that God is the ultimate source of our liberty.

We who are gathered here tonight are among the posterity for whom the Constitution secured the blessings of liberty. Wyoming Catholic College owes its existence, in part,

***“...the Constitution recognizes, implicitly, that God is the ultimate source of our liberty.”***



to the blessings of liberty secured by the United States Constitution. For those blessings—the blessings of liberty to which this College is indebted for its existence—let us praise God, from whom all blessings flow. †

**Dr. Hon. J. Leon Holmes** received his Bachelor of Arts from Arkansas State University in 1973, his Master's from Northern Illinois University in 1976, and his Doctorate from Duke University in 1980. In 1982, he earned a juris doctor from the University of Arkansas, graduating first in his class. Starting in 1983, Judge Holmes practiced law privately, except for a two-year break from 1990 to 1992, during which time he served as a member of the teaching faculty at Thomas Aquinas College. In 2004, President George W. Bush nominated him to the United States District Court for the Eastern District of Arkansas where he served with distinction until his retirement in February 2020. Judge Holmes came to Wyoming Catholic College as a visiting professor in the Fall of 2020. He joined his son, Professor Jeremy Holmes, and co-taught classes on political philosophy. Judge Holmes and his wife Susan have five children and 17 grandchildren.

## KNOW A YOUNG PERSON WHO COULD BENEFIT FROM A WYOMING CATHOLIC COLLEGE EDUCATION?

### Spirit



**95 to 1**  
Student to  
Priest Ratio



**Two-thirds  
of Students**  
attend Daily Mass



**5% of Students**  
go on to  
Religious Orders  
and seminary



**Daily Mass  
& Confession**  
by Roman Catholic  
and Byzantine  
Chaplains

### Body



**21 Day  
Freshman  
Orientation**  
in the Mountains



**Horsemanship  
Program**  
during your  
sophomore year



**Two-thirds  
of Students**  
participate in  
intramural sports



**14 Days  
Each Year**  
spent in the  
Wyoming  
backcountry

### Mind



**11 to 1**  
Student to  
Professor Ratio



**Thriving  
Great Books  
Curriculum**  
focused on  
developing  
the whole person



**Zero Teaching  
Assistants**  
at WCC; all classes  
taught by professors



**1 to 1**  
Student to  
Professor Thesis-  
Advisor Ratio

**Please contact our admissions office  
at 877-332-2930 to learn more**