

UNITY

Hats Off To Franklin

Benjamin Franklin was the oldest delegate to the Constitutional Convention of 1788. He came as a short, fat, trunched old man in plain Quaker dress, bald pate . . . short white socks . . . an 82-year-old body and brilliant mental energies of a 25-year-old youth.

During these dark days following the war, the threat of anarchy was a constant reality and the formation of a constitution had therefore become a national imperative. During 17 days of heated debate Mr. Franklin maintained a virtual silence, but on June 28 he arose to suggest that each session be initiated with prayer. He deemed their lack of progress to that point as "proof of the imperfection of human understanding." He then reviewed their fruitless search through history and their frustration with the constitutions of contemporary Europe . . . then turning to Washington he said,

"How has it happened, Sir, that we have not hitherto once thought of humbly applying to the Father of lights to illuminate

our understanding? . . . I have lived, Sir, a long time and the longer I live the more convincing proofs I see of this truth: that God governs in the affairs of men, and if a sparrow cannot fall to the ground without His notice, is it probably that an empire can rise without His aid? . . . I believe that without His concurring aid we shall succeed in this political building no better than the builders of Babel. We shall be divided by our little partial local interests; our projects will be confounded; and we ourselves shall become a reproach and by-word down to future ages. And, what is worse, mankind may hereafter from this unfortunate instance despair of establishing governments by human wisdom and leave it to chance, war, and conquest."

Three political theories were particularly dear to Franklin. The first involved the danger of paying high salaries to government officials. The second advocated a plural executive body with little power — his philosophy was, "the least government possible is the greatest possible good." The third dealt with the justice of state representation which Franklin felt needed improvement. He was beaten on all three points.

Monday, September 17, was the final day of the convention. Here are a few of Franklin's words which stand as a classic example of conciliatory love.

"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 attention to the judgment of others. Most men, indeed, as well as most sects in religion think themselves in possession of all truth . . . but though many private persons think almost as highly as their infallibility as that of their sect, few express it so naturally as a certain French lady who in a dispute with her sister said, 'I don't know how it happens, sister, but I meet with nobody but myself that's always in the right.'

In these sentiments, Sir, I agree to this Constitution with all its

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faults if they are such; because I think a general government necessary for us, and there is no form of government but what may be a blessing to the people if well administered; and believe farther that this is likely to be well administered for a course of years and can only end in despotism, as other forms have done before it, when the people shall become so corrupt as to need despotic government, being incapable of any other. I doubt too 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 prejudices, their passions, their errors of opinion, their local interests, and their selfish views . . . from such an assembly can a perfect production be expected? It, therefore, astonishes me, Sir, to find this system approaching so near to perfection as it does. . . . Thus I consent, Sir, 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. . . . On the whole, Sir, I cannot help expressing a wish that every member of the Convention who may still have objections to it would, with me, on this occasion doubt a little of his infallibility and, to make manifest our unanimity, put his name to this instrument."

Adapted from *Benjamin Franklin*
by Carl Van Doren
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Pontifex Maximus

The name "Pontifex Maximus" means "supreme bridge builder." It was assumed by Octavian, who ruled in Rome. Since the Roman Republic had become an empire, he was also called "Emperor." He further assumed the name "Augustus" which signifies that which is magnificent and inspires awe. Since he had been the driving force in the establishment of the Empire he also called himself "princeps" or "first citizen."

Octavian was the adopted son of Julius Caesar. Perhaps you will recall that Caesar was assassinated on March 15, 44 B.C. His death has been described as one of the most senseless political murders in history.

Little did Caesar's political enemies dream that his adopted son, Octavian, would come to power. Though only recently adopted, he was, in fact, the legal heir. Thus at the tender age of only 19, he returned from his studies in Greece, and with cool audacity claimed his father's inheritance.

The Roman world was seething with bitterness and civil war broke out. In 42 B.C. Octavian and Antony defeated the remnant of Caesar's senatorial opponents at Philippi, only to discover that in the meanwhile Parthia had rebelled.

It was at this juncture that Cleopatra intervened and formed her infamous alliance with Antony. The forces of Antony and Cleopatra were defeated in 31 B.C. at the battle of Actium and peace was temporarily restored to a troubled world. Since Octavian won the battle this reinforced his self-image of "Pontifex Maximus."

Actually the title, Pontifex Maximus, was nothing new. As a matter of fact it had even been used prior to the founding of the Republic in 509 B.C. At this time the "Pontifex Maximus" was the head of the college of pontiffs, whose business it was to supervise all the religious affairs of the State, and to give judgment in every religious cause. These "pontiffs" were attorneys and counselors in

religious law, and they were also officials of the State with great power. Thus when Octavian assumed the title of "Pontifex Maximus", he was claiming to be the "Supreme bridge builder" in matters both civil and religious.

This man, who also assumed the title of "Caesar Augustus" sent out a decree that all the world should be taxed (Luke 2:1). In order that they might more accurately keep track of the population, each family was required to pay these taxes in their ancestral city.

Thus the Scriptures teach that Joseph and Mary left Nazareth and journeyed to Bethlehem to pay their taxes, because they were of the house and lineage of David.

And it came to pass that while they were there the days were accomplished that she should be delivered, and she brought forth her firstborn son and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.

In conjunction with the birth of this baby the Scriptures teach that the heavens were opened and a multitude of the heavenly host praised God and announced that now there could be peace on earth.

Thus we have Augustus Caesar and Jesus converging on the pages of human history, each claiming to be a "peacemaker". One was a human king in royal splendor and the other was a humble carpenter. One exalted himself with grandiose titles, and the other humbled himself as the lowest slave. One surrounded himself with servants that he might live, and the other exposed himself to his enemies that He might die. The message of Caesar is buried in the dusty archives of the past, and the message of Jesus is alive and fresh.

Caesar Augustus died in A.D. 14 and the legacy of peace which he left for mankind is dubious to say the least. He was succeeded by his adopted son Tiberius who was noted for cruelty and injustice. He not only murdered the famous General Germanicus in a fit of jealousy, but also became suspicious of his good friend Sejamus. In an attempt to protect his power he

ordered that Sejanus and his family . . . and his friends be put to death. On March 16, A.D. 37 Tiberius lapsed into a coma and was believed to be dead. Caligula eagerly seized the throne. When Tiberius came out of his coma and recovered he was later suffocated on his bed.

Caligula had a short and troubled reign over the Roman world. Eight months after becoming Emperor he was seized by a disorder and became demented and deranged. His cruel and despotic tyranny was cut short by a band of assassins in A.D. 41.

After the murder of Caligula his uncle Claudius was proclaimed the Emperor . . . but he was poisoned in A.D. 54 by his second wife, Agrippina. As a point of interest it was Claudius who commanded that all Jews be expelled from Rome (Acts 18:2).

The next Emperor was the infamous Nero who ordered the murder of his brother, the assassination of his mother, the murder of his first wife, and also the deaths of thousands of innocent Christians. He also has the dubious distinction of ordering the destruction of Jerusalem and the deaths of Peter and Paul. He died a suicide on June 9, A.D. 68.

I think it not necessary to weary you with further repetitions of bloodshed and betrayal. Caesar Augustus tried to be a Pontifex Maximus with force. He tried to conform the world with outward pressure and threats of physical violence. He failed! Those who take the sword perish with the sword. The cycle of physical violence experienced by the Caesars has not diminished . . . it is worse now than it has ever been.

Jesus, by contrast, offers a different kind of peace than the world experiences or expects. His Kingdom is not of this world . . . that is why His servants do not behave like worldly people. He said:

Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid (John 14:27).

The words "Pontifex Maximus" means "Supreme Bridge