

# **An American Catechism**

## ***11 Brief Questions and Answers About the American Republic***

### **1. What form of government was established by our founders and the Constitution?**

After much deliberation, the founders of our nation decided upon a republic. Article IV, Sec. 4 of the U.S. Constitution guarantees to all the states a republican form of government.

### **2. What is a republic?**

In a republic, representatives are elected by the people to govern according to established law. The founders of America were very adamant about clearly defining a republic. This is seen in the following excerpt from a letter written by Noah Webster to English theologian and philosopher, Joseph Priestly.

"Sir, ... You call the Constitution of this country a democracy, and every man who is not a Democrat, an enemy of this Constitution. But whatever you may call the true meaning of these words, the practice of our country has annexed to them and established a different signification... By republicans, we understand ... that no influence whatsoever should be exercised in a state which is not directly authorized by the Constitution and laws."

### **3. How does a republic differ from a democracy?**

In a democracy the people exercise their will directly by the vote of a majority. Though our government maintains the form of a republic by electing representatives, the essence of the republic is lost and it essentially operates as a democracy when the representatives are influenced by polls, popular opinion, and lobbyists instead of leading by the principles found in established law.

### **4. Why did the founders consider democracy a bad and unstable form of government?**

The founders understood that humans, by nature, are fickle and capricious. Moods of the people change as often as the direction of the wind because they are easily influenced by propaganda, selfish desires, deception, or he who has the loudest megaphone. Below are just two of the many quotes reflecting the view of the founders.

"A simple democracy... is one of the greatest of evils." -Dr. Benjamin Rush

"Democracies have ever been spectacles of turbulence and contention; have ever been found incompatible with personal security or the rights of property; and have, in general, been as short in their lives as they have been violent in their deaths."  
-James Madison

### **5. Where did the founders get the idea for a republican form of government?**

Most honest researchers agree that the founders gleaned the general idea of a representative republic from the Bible. Exodus, Chapter 18, shows the selection of representatives for different segments of the population. Moses' father-in-law gave him the following advice which was essentially a decentralization of governmental authority:

"Moreover you shall select from all the people able men, such as fear God, men of truth, hating covetousness; and place such over them to be rulers of thousands, rulers of hundreds, rulers of fifties, and rulers of tens. And let them judge the people at all times. Then it will be that every great matter they shall bring to you, but every small matter they themselves shall judge. So it will be easier for you, for they will bear the burden with you." -Exodus 18:21-22

### **6. What sets the American republic apart from other republics?**

Though a republic means "ruled by law," not all laws are good laws. A republic with bad laws is a shortcut to despotism. What sets the American republic apart is the source of its principles and laws. The Declaration of Independence reveals this source when it says that our rights come from the Creator and the purpose of government is to secure those rights. Noah Webster, the father of American Education, said, "...our citizens should early understand that the genuine source of correct republican principles is the Bible, particularly the New Testament, or the Christian religion." Only where true Christian values are upheld do people have the ability to be self-governing which eliminates the need for most government oversight. This is why the American republic produced limited government and more freedom than any government in history.

### **7. Why is federal government divided into three branches?**

The founders were well aware of the flaws in human nature. So instead of consolidating power in one institution with fewer people, they divided the powers and spread the power among more people. The idea of three branches of government came from the Bible. Isaiah 33:22 says: "For the Lord is our Judge, the Lord is our Lawgiver, The Lord is our King..." In this we find the basis for the Judicial Branch, the Legislative Branch, and the Executive Branch.

- Congress is inherently more powerful because more people are involved. Congress is made up of 100 Senators and more than 430 Congressmen. This is intended to be a safeguard against fast changing laws.

- The Executive Branch (President) is designed primarily for carrying out or executing legislation.
- The Judicial Branch should be the weakest of the three. Its job is to interpret the laws and is advisory in nature and should never legislate or execute political agendas.

### **8. Which produces more freedom and economic stability, a republic or a democracy?**

Good law, as found in the original American republic, always produces more freedom and economic stability. But planning for a secure future is difficult in a democracy due to the fact that laws can change almost daily. In a republic, people can plan and lay the foundation for a secure stable future because they are more confident that laws will remain consistent.

### **9. Why does democracy degenerate toward socialism, poverty, and despotism?**

A quote often attributed to Benjamin Franklin says: "When people find that they can vote themselves money; that will herald the end of the republic." Though the accuracy of this quote has been questioned, the factuality of it is indisputable. History has shown that democracies always produce socialism and dependent people who feel entitled to provision. Margaret Thatcher, the former Prime Minister of Great Britain said is well: "The problem with socialism is that you eventually run out of other people's money." Instead of the southern cotton plantations of the 18th and 19th centuries where slaves were dependent upon the plantation owners, socialistic democracies produce "urban plantations" where people are dependent upon government programs. Dependence upon government locks people of all races into minimal existence with no hope or future. Whenever government takes from those who work, and gives to those who do not, the groundwork is laid for class warfare. When this happens, those economically considered the "middle class" decrease or disappear and the result is poverty with a class of ruling elite. The tension between the classes escalates until chaos ensues and government has to step in to forcefully bring order resulting in the loss of freedom and despotism.

### **10. Which is intended by the Constitution to have broader powers, Federal Government or State government?**

State government is intended to have broader power than Federal government. The Constitution was originally designed to restrict and limit the powers of Federal government while leaving much more latitude to the states. In recent times, we see an alarming increase in centralized federal power. The purpose of the Bill of Rights (the first 10 amendments to the Constitution) was to restrict federal government even more than the original Constitution. The Preamble to the Bill of Rights says:

"The Conventions of a number of the States having at the time of their adopting the Constitution, expressed a desire, in order to prevent misconstruction or abuse of its powers, that further declaratory and restrictive clauses should be added..."

As we can see the Bill of Rights was an effort to prevent abuse of federal power. The tenth amendment in the Bill of rights says:

"The powers not delegated to the United States by the Constitution, nor prohibited by it to the States, are reserved to the States respectively, or to the people."

### **11. How do we restore the American Republic?**

Thomas Jefferson provides a clear answer to this question - educate the people.

"I know of no safe depository of the ultimate powers of society but the people themselves; and if we think them not enlightened enough to exercise their control with a wholesome discretion, the remedy is not to take it from them, but to inform their discretion by education. This is the true corrective of abuses of constitutional power." - Thomas Jefferson

Supporting republican principles is much bigger than any one candidate or party. We must educate the people with the original principles of the American republic. This will empower them to elect representatives who most closely align with those principles. This document is a start.

### **A Closing Thought**

In early America, Noah Webster published a brief federal catechism that was so widely distributed that the vast majority of Americans had a basic working knowledge of the American Republic. Times have changed and not all of Webster's points apply today. Nevertheless, American needs this type of basic foundation again. You can help restore this backbone of knowledge by sharing this document with as many people as possible.

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