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Laws of Nature & Nature's God

A DENVER CONSISTORY ORATION

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As a topic for this Oration I was thinking of an interesting time in our country's history and looking for a thread. A time of change in the 1700's when the way of thinking of things was in flux.

For perspective, I quote, "Before the enlightenment movement took hold, the majority of academics were theologians. The study of God was at the center of intellectual inquiry; theology was considered the mother of sciences. Throughout the Middle Ages, and even into the eighteenth century in some parts of Europe, all study of morals, psychology, law, justice, and epistemology were carried out as an extension of the study of God.

"...The study of God and his revelation and the study of natural, or human sciences, had up until the seventeenth century been completely intertwined." ⁱ

In the 1700's direction of thought moved to the Natural Scientific schools of testing and reproducing results in a predictable way. An age of science and discovery had begun. There began a separation of theology from the Natural and Human Sciences. The Age of Enlightenment Where did I start? That was easy.

"When in the course of human Events it becomes necessary for one people to dissolve the Political Bands which have connected them with another, and to assume among the powers of the earth, the separate and equal Station to which the Laws of Nature and of Nature's God entitle them, a decent Respect to the Opinions of Mankind requires that they should declare the causes which impel them to the separation." The opening words to the Declaration of Independence.

One phrase keeps drawing my attention and that being the separate and equal Station to which the Laws of Nature and of Nature's God entitle them. How did this phrase find itself in a secular document in an age where the division or separation of church and state was a major focus, in this nation the colonies were about to create?

Were the words "Laws of Nature and Natures God" a phrase for the times or did it have deeper roots?

So, this is my presentation tonight. The first stop was to define Natural Law. Could this be a common thread of Truth that runs among all peoples, this Law of Nature, and the tread I'm looking for? It has been referenced as far back as 500 BCE. By the: Greek philosopher Heraclitus (circa 500 B.C.) declared, "All the laws of human beings are nourished by the one divine [law]." This universal principle was independent of human opinion or agreement, but rather was regarded as the justification for human laws.

Quoting the University of Oklahoma Professor Rufus Fears, "Cicero defines natural law as right reason in agreement with nature, derived from God, universal, consistent, and eternal." ii

Rufus continues, "The concept of natural law was born in the Athenian democracy, took root in the age of Alexander the Great and flourished in the Roman Empire. Accepted by St. Paul and incorporated into Roman law, it was fundamental to the political ideas of the Middle Ages and was introduced into the English Common Law. Justifying the right to revolution, natural law was critical to the colonies' movement for independence and the foundation stone of the new republic. The idea of natural law is the greatest single contribution of Greece and Rome to the United States." And, interestingly enough, "The United States is the only nation founded upon a statement of principles. Other nations are the result of historical circumstances or have been founded on the basis of ethnicity."

So, can Laws of Nature and of Natures God be the thread that Truly runs through history, that can unify free peoples from varying diverse backgrounds and class structures? What kind of organization could enable such a common denominator? We all know the stories of the builder masons that had free roam across boundaries. Peoples specialized skills and talents followed the work and the masters who recruited and welcomed masons from all countries, cultures and religions and accepting them for their skills.

As in the colonies what was the common thread; that string of truth that bound an uncommon mix of people within the colonies together. That allowed this new nation to be founded. Br. George Washington was knowledgeable as history has shown.

One example. There is no surprise that George Washington knew the power of unifying a collection of differences and how to best create a common denominator to level the field and build loyalty in all his ranks. A quote from Christopher Hodapp, (Solomon's Builders), referring to the Military Lodges of the Revolution, "There were

at least 10 military lodges at work in the American forces. Washington encouraged membership in the lodges, believing it brought a greater bond between the men, especially his close officers. They were a melting pot. Quakers, Anglicans, Virginia plantation owners, Connecticut shopkeepers, Germans, Frenchmen, Scots, and Americans – all could find common ground in the military Lodges."

The Declaration of Independence, the age of Enlightenment and Masonry acknowledged that all Men were created equal, Talents and Skills varied, yet they could meet on the level. As referenced in the 3rd degree, the tools require. for those who can work and best agree. Natural Law is also referenced in the Second Degree [which] speaks of the law of nature through Geometry.

Those who focused on the Enlightenment were following a compass of tolerance and acceptance of others as the Stone Masons of the past, Founders of this country and the Masonic Lodges and Masons within. Providing an example of ethical character for others to strive for.

For myself I found a much deeper meanings in the words written in the Declaration of Independence in just that one phrase. Laws of Nature and of Nature's God entitle them, were not just noble words on a page but the concept has survived the test of time. A surviving truth passed to us through the ages, a thread that connects all of us as one.

I will leave you with: another important and familiar statement of natural law within the Declaration of Independence, "we hold these truths to be self-evident: that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these rights are; Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of happiness."

Thank you!!

ⁱ Hourly History – Age of Enlightenment, a History from Beginning to End

ⁱⁱ Natural Law and the Declaration, The Teaching Company, 2001