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# PIETAS

A Journal of Tradition, Place, and Things Divine



## The Declaration of Independence at 250

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by Michael Driscoll

On the Philosophical Significance of Mary as New Eve  
by Marco A. Andreacchio

Logos, Law, and Longing: Tarzan as Natural Man  
by Justin Lyons

Armies on the March: two poems (while following the imperial army at Phoenix Flight)  
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# The Declaration and the World at 250: The Challenge of Globalization

John W. Grant

## FOUNDING PRINCIPLES

The 250th anniversary of American independence provides a fitting occasion to consider the fate of America's founding principles in relation to the world. After all, the Declaration was written out of a "decent respect to the opinions of mankind...." The founders thought it necessary to explain to the world the causes of the "separation," the dissolution of the "political bands" or "political connection" between the now "free and independent states" and Great Britain. They held that the laws of nature and nature's God allowed America to assume a "separate and equal station" among the nations of the world. In our globalized time, the separate and equal status of nations is denied in principle and in practice.

A summary view of the founding principles is needed to understand the principled ground that the founders held and which justified the dissolution of the political relationship with England. The enumeration of self-evident truths in the Declaration of Independence begins with the assertion "that all men are created equal" and "are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights." It follows that "Governments are instituted among Men" in order "to secure these rights." Governments derive their "just powers" from "the consent of the governed."

Other important founding-era documents elaborate on these fundamental principles. In the Virginia Declaration of Rights of 1776, equality is described thusly: "All men are by nature equally free and independent, and have certain inherent rights, of which when they enter into a state of society, they cannot, by any compact, deprive or divest their posterity." The Massachusetts Constitution of 1780 asserts that "All men are born free and equal, and have certain natural, essential, and unalienable rights." The residents of Northampton, Massachusetts, discussing the proposed state constitution in the Return of Northampton from 1780, explained that the meaning of "born free and equal ... is true only with respect to the right of dominion, and jurisdiction over one another." In other words, equality means that all human beings are born free of the non-consensual political rule of other human beings; all men are naturally equal in their power and dominion. This natural equality of

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jurisdiction and political power is the foundation of the requirement for the consent of the governed.

Equality necessarily entails the consent of the governed: equal human beings freely come together to form a government that will secure their inalienable natural rights. The people must have the right to ongoing consent in the form of representation and, if government fails in its duty to secure rights, the right to revolution. The Massachusetts Constitution of 1780 provides a clear articulation of this doctrine. “The body-politic is formed by a voluntary association of individuals: It is a social compact, by which the whole people covenants with each citizen, and each citizen with the whole people, that all shall be governed by certain laws for the common good.” The “common good” was understood to be the “protection, safety, prosperity, and happiness of the people ... not ... the profit, honor, or private interest of any one man, family, or class of men.... Each individual of the society has a right to be protected by it in the enjoyment of his life, liberty, and property, according to standing laws.” All the powers of government are “originally in the people, and being derived from them, the several magistrates and officers of government ... are at all times accountable to them.” None of the “property of any individual, can with justice, be taken from him ... without his own consent, or that of the representative body of the people: In fine the people ... are not controlable by any other laws, than those to which their constitutional representative body have given their consent.” Just government requires the ongoing consent of the governed through representation as well as the security of rights brought about by the enforcement of impartial laws. It should be noted that the social compact is exclusive. All human beings have rights which must be respected, but the obligation to secure rights applies only to the members of the social compact.

If government fails to secure the common good, “The people alone have an incontestable, unalienable, and inalienable right to ... reform, alter, or totally change the same, when their protection, safety, happiness, and prosperity require it.” In the Declaration of Independence, this same idea is expressed more boldly. When government fails in its end of securing rights through the consent of the governed, “It is the Right of the People to alter or abolish it, and to institute new Government ... as to them shall seem most likely to effect their Safety and Happiness.” When ongoing consent in the form of representation cannot secure rights, consent may be withdrawn through the exercise of the right to revolution.

The natural equality of individuals has an analogue in foreign affairs—the equality of nations. In the Declaration of Independence, this concept is expressed in the idea that the “powers of the earth” are entitled to a “separate and equal station” according to the “Laws of Nature and of Nature’s God.” We have seen that individual equality means that human beings are by nature free and independent of non-consensual political rule. The Declaration teaches that the equality of states means that “Free and Independent States ... have full Power to levy War, conclude Peace, contract Alliances, establish Commerce, and to do all other Acts and Things which Independent States may of right do.” States are “separate” in terms of their business and especially their concern for what Washington calls their “primary interests.” The separate character of nations is required for their independence from one another. In short, states are rightly free, equal, and independent; they may not justly be subjected to the rule of other states in determining how to best secure their rights.

#### KEY POLICIES: INDEPENDENCE AND NON-INTERVENTION

The key foreign policies that follow necessarily from the principles of the social compact theory are freedom of action and non-intervention in the purely internal affairs of other nations. Freedom of action is required if nations are to follow their obligation under the law of nature and nature’s God to maintain their separate and equal station in the world. It is also practically necessary as a matter of policy to make judgments relating to war, peace, and commerce that are not subordinated to the interests of another sovereign power.

George Washington, in a well-known passage in his Farewell Address, advised Americans of the importance of maintaining freedom of action in foreign affairs. “The great rule of conduct for us in regard to foreign nations is in extending our commercial relations, to have with them as little *political* connection as possible.” Minimizing political connections with other nations is another way of saying nations must be separate. A crucial reason to avoid political connections is that other nations have “primary interests, which to us have none, or a very remote relation.” Following Washington’s advice is essential if the United States is to be free to “choose peace or war, as our interest guided by our justice shall Counsel.” Washington understood that America must not become involved with interests not our own through political connections with other nations; eschewing political connections is essential to maintaining independence and hence the freedom to pursue American

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interests constrained only by the requirements of justice. Famously, Washington condemned having inveterate hatred or affection for a foreign nation; this is another key means of compromising American sovereignty and the freedom of action required to secure American rights effectively.

Non-intervention is obviously related to freedom of action; intervening in the internal affairs of other nations is a form of political connection to primary interests not connected to the security of rights or independence of the interfering nation. The Monroe Doctrine further illustrates the importance of policies pursuing independence and non-intervention for the founders and their successors. The Monroe administration declared, in language reflecting the social compact theory of the founding, that as a “principle in which the rights and interests of the United States are involved, that the American continents, by the free and independent condition which they have assumed and maintained, are henceforth not to be considered as subjects for future colonization by any European powers.” Since the European nations had a “political system” that was “essentially different” from that of the United States, any expansion of European power in the Americas would be a threat to the newly independent nations as well as “dangerous to our peace and safety.” While the ban on future European colonization was due to the recent expansion of independent nations in the Americas and the threat that European powers might seek to re-establish lost colonial possessions, Monroe acted only because the rights and interests of the United States were involved. Our policy was not driven by the belief that America had either the right or the duty to secure the rights and independence of other nations.

The Monroe Doctrine was not only intended to protect the independence of the United States. It was also aimed at clarifying the importance and meaning of non-intervention in American foreign policy. “Our policy in regard to Europe ... is, not to interfere in the internal concerns of any of its powers; to consider the government *de facto* as the legitimate government for us.” Washington’s distinction between the primary interests of America and those of other nations is intrinsically tied to non-intervention. “In the wars of the European powers in matters relating to themselves we have never taken any part, nor does it comport with our policy so to do.”

It is clear that “internal concerns” has the same sense as “matters relating to themselves.” The internal concerns of other powers, internal because they are not American concerns,

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are most importantly the primary interests of the concerned nation. The internal concerns of other nations include their form of government; this is why America is to consider the existing government as legitimate, even when it does not conform to our principles. “It is only when our rights are invaded or seriously menaced that we resent injuries or make preparation for our defense.” The interests of other nations become American concerns when our rights or our independence of action are threatened; in all other instances the United States should respect the independence and rights of other powers and not interfere in their internal affairs.

This respect for the freedom of action of other nations when they are not invading or seriously menacing American rights is a natural, necessary consequence of the social compact theory of the founding. Equal human beings form nations which are in turn equal to one another in their rights; all nations are entitled to a separate and equal station, bound only by the laws of nature and nature’s God. The equality of nations under the laws of nature and nature’s God can have no meaning if one nation may intervene in the purely internal affairs of another nation; such interference violates the equality of other nations as well as their right to a separate station in the world, to be determine how to secure their own rights. Nations cannot be equal if they are not also separate.

### **GLOBALISM AND THE SEPARATE AND EQUAL STATION OF NATIONS**

The meaning and genealogy of globalism is hotly contested. For my purposes, I simply mean the ideological and geopolitical situation that has existed for at least 125 years where the goal is to have one ideology and a corresponding geopolitical and economic system determine the meaning of the earth. This goal follows from the lack, or the perceived lack, of transcendent guidance. Man guided by only values or what is merely esteemed by man will attempt to create meaning and order and impose it on others.

Various systems with vastly different aims have sought to fulfill the common goal of erecting a world-wide standard of justice and one political and economic order. The goals promulgated in the Atlantic Charter are a useful example. In addition to self-determination, equal access to the means of economic prosperity, “improved labor standards, economic advancement, and social security” for “all nations,” the great democratic powers wished “to see established a peace which will afford to all nations the means of dwelling in safety within

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their own boundaries, and which will afford assurance that all men in all lands may live out their lives in freedom from fear and want....” Social security and freedom from fear and want are needed everywhere and for everyone. The defeat of the Axis powers is a necessary preliminary step to a world free of fear, want, and aggression. Two decades later, John F. Kennedy pledged to help “the many who are poor” in that “half of the globe struggling to break the bonds of mass misery....” Kennedy wanted “the citizens of the world” to ask “what together can we do for the freedom of man.” Similar pronouncements can be found in the speeches of presidents from Theodore Roosevelt to Barack Obama.

Responsibility for promoting the freedom of man in general and freedom from fear and want in all nations is incompatible with separate and equal nations. Oversight of the production of such a world does not allow for nations to have distinct “primary interests;” nations cannot choose peace or war as their understanding of justice and interest dictate. In sum, nations cannot be sovereign. They must be judged and guided by those nations who are civilized or discern the arc of history.

Most recently, the COVID situation illustrated how powerful this aim for one standard can be. As Giorgio Agamben has masterfully demonstrated in *Where Are We Now?: The Epidemic as Politics*, authoritarian and democratic nations, federal and unitary regimes, presidential and parliamentary systems almost all tended in the same direction of embracing a state of exception that crushed ordinary life under the weight of biopolitical management that has transformed the right to live into a “juridical-religious obligation that must be fulfilled at any cost.”

On the other hand, the conflicts in the Ukraine, Iran, and Venezuela initially seem to show a divided world. It appears we are still in what James Burnham termed a “struggle for the world” in his book of that name. We see disagreements whose seriousness is demonstrated by the shedding of blood and the expending of vast amounts of treasure. But the conflict is always over which party will enforce universal or global values, and the contesting powers tend to appeal to the same global gods or highest standards. For instance, the Ayatollah Khamenei’s professed concerns for women’s rights and anti-racism are instructive. Both sides in the conflict in the Ukraine vie to label their opponent as fascist, on the wrong side of history. These claims might very well be cynical, but it is important that the different parties feel compelled to appeal to common or at least startlingly similar standards.

It would be morally obtuse to think that the desire for a common moral, political, and economic order means there are no meaningful differences between the competing blocs of nations. In practice it usually makes a very great difference who wins in these situations. In the Cold War, both sides claimed to wish to produce a world free of fear and want and intended to eradicate the old European imperialism. But one would have to be blind to fundamental moral and political realities to think that similarity in the most general goals means there would be no meaningful difference in the means effecting the rights and prosperity of hundreds of millions or even billions of people.

The two distinct trends seen in the overwhelming unity of the COVID response and the conflicts raging in various areas of the world are both opposed to the existence of nations that are meaningfully separate and equal. The demand that all nations conform to newly minted biosecurity measures, and armed conflict between different nations or groups of nations fighting over who will best oversee a world order and give meaning to the earth, are both inimical to separate and equal nations.

The different universalisms do not admit, at least in principle and often in practice, the right to a separate and equal station under the laws of nature and nature's God. The universal ideals of the founders, as we have seen, demanded a separate and equal place for nations in relation to one another.

Whether it is even possible to have a world of separate and equal nations is a very great problem. It is not obvious that the effects of 125 years of globalization can be easily undone. If such a change is possible, it might require a great deal of time and a number of intermediate steps. Avoiding wars aiming at regime change in favor of the current understanding of democracy and human rights would be one such step; pursuing economic policies that allow for relative independence in key matters such as defense and energy would be another.

Doubts about globalization have risen to prominence in the last decade. We will have to see if these doubts can lead us back to a world of separate and equal nations.