

THE CONSTITUTION AND MR. BELLARMINE. – The Feast Day of Greats, September 17

An event from history celebrated today is pondered by many people, yet it is one occurrence among a very short list of events—number one being the life and death of Jesus Christ—in the millennia of humankind that has changed the world and *our* lives. This is true for Americans but also others in the world that love freedom and know that ideas have consequences.

Today is U. S. Constitution Day, and it was 236 years ago, September 17, 1787, that members at the Constitutional Convention, gathered at Independence Hall in Philadelphia, signed the proposed Constitution of the United States of America, which was promptly ratified by the States on June 21, 1788. It is upon this founding document that law and order in our Nation is grounded, and upon these ideas that we deeply treasure.

It is binding upon us to understand that, in the history of humankind, this is a rare and opportune blessing, to live in Western Civilization under the promise of such a system of government that seeks perfection on the principles of freedom, human dignity, natural law, limited government, and individual rights. Many students of the Constitution understand that the foundation of our constitutional government is based on a deep antiquity of historical texts that our Founding Fathers had studied, read, and used. Below is a link to the National Constitution Center, that includes an inexhaustive litany of sources of writings for our Constitution, inclusive of the Holy Bible, Josephus, Suetonius, Cicero, St. Augustine, St. Thomas Aquinas, and several others including Aristotle (ca. 350 B.C.).

Another person involved in this unfolding of facts is St. Robert Bellarmine (1542-1621 A.D.) who died on September 17, 1621. We celebrate his Feast Day the same day as U.S. Constitution Day—September 17th!

St. Robert was born in Tuscany, Italy, studied philosophy and theology, and was a man of letters as a distinguished professor and preacher, often attracting an ecumenical crowd. The poor reality is that he was not a Dominican but a faithful Jesuit. He is one of my favorite saints. He was an author, preacher, and philosopher, and understood politics and society. He wrote a book called *De Laici*, which included among other things, the concepts that all *persons are created equal*, on *consent of the governed* and on the *right of the people* to change the form of government. These concepts are clearly captured in the founding documents of the United States, including the Declaration of Independence and the Virginia Declaration of Rights, both authored by Thomas Jefferson.

Nearly two hundred years before the forming of the United States in 1776, Bellarmine wrote: “*All men are equal*, not in wisdom or grace, but in the essence and nature of mankind.” [Chapter 7]; and, “Political power emanates from God. Government was introduced by divine law, but the divine law has given this power to no particular man. ... Men must be governed by someone, lest they be willing to perish. It is impossible for men to live together without someone to care for the common good. Society must have power to protect and preserve itself. It depends upon the consent of the multitude to constitute over itself a king, consul, or other magistrate. ... For legitimate reasons the people can change the government to an aristocracy or a democracy or vice versa.” [Chapter 6]. (*See the following links for more information: “[Bellarmine, Jefferson and the Declaration of Independence](#);* “[St. Robert Bellarmine’s Influence on the Writing of the Declaration of Independence ...](#);” and, “[De Laici – Saint Bellarmine’s Treatise on Civil Government](#).”

Is it a mere coincidence that St. Bellarmine’s feast day is celebrated on the same date that the U.S. Constitution was signed by the Founders, a document that reflects so many of St. Robert’s principles set out in the Declaration of Independence? No, there are no coincidences, but it is something to be thankful for especially during this season of political campaigns, civil unrest, and continued threats to the unborn children.

Pray for our country, for our system of government, for law and order, for justice and peace, and for the return to Christ of the American people and our civil and ecclesial leaders!

[National Constitution Center](#)

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