



“Introduction to the Constitution” Series

Lecture 1: “The Declaration of Independence and the Constitution”

Presented by Larry Arnn, President, Hillsdale College

In his first lecture, Dr. Arnn discusses the Declaration of Independence, its key terms, how one is to understand them, and their relation to the United States Constitution.

The study guide below is designed to aid in the comprehension of the first lecture, as well as provide a basis of discussion for group learning.

Lecture notes:

Comprehension Questions

1. What was the idea in the Declaration of Independence that was controversial during the Civil War?
2. What was the main concern of the Anti-Federalists about the Constitution?
3. What are the four references to God in the Declaration?
4. What are the two main principles of the Declaration?
5. What are the three key arrangements of government underlying the Constitution?

Discussion Questions

1. In what ways does the Declaration of Independence address the arrangements of government?
2. How do the charges against the King in the Declaration relate to separation of powers questions today?
3. Can representative government exist apart from a strong, independent society? Why or why not?
4. In what sense can it be said that if the principles of the American founding are true, the arrangement of government in the Constitution will follow, and if those arrangements do not follow, then the principles are not true?

Comprehension Question Answers

1. All men are created equal.
2. That the Constitution would make the federal government too powerful and centralized.
3. “Nature’s God,” “Creator,” “Supreme Judge of the World,” and “divine Providence.”
4. Nature and Equality.
5. Representation, Separation of Powers and Limited Government.

Additional Notes: