



Session 3: America's Christian
Heritage

Objectives:

1. To gain an understanding of Providential History.
2. To gain an understanding of America's Christian Heritage

Providential History

- “The more thoroughly a nation deals with its history, the more decidedly will it recognize and own an overruling Providence therein, and the more religious a nation will it become: while the more superficially it deals with its history seeing only secondary causes and human agencies, the more irreligious will it be...” Rev. S. Foljambe, 1876

Providential History

- Most historians who wrote before 1900 viewed history from a **providential view**.
- Most young Christians want to have a goal toward which they can work with God's help: they want to have a purpose and a hope. This requires being taught to see the Providential Hand of God in their lives.

Providential History

- Neglecting to teach America's history from a providential view, which sadly has been the case for nearly one hundred years in our nation, leads the citizenry into a non-Christian or secular interpretation of history, and leaves it without hope for the future.

Providential History

This neglectful approach is a “superficial approach”. It is today’s social studies approach, -- the result is to make us an “irreligious” people. Our students are unable to see that all history is related to the unfolding of His Story of liberty, both internal and external, religious and civil.

Providential History

- Rosalie Slater also observes: “The failure to recognize the importance of the Providential Approach has resulted in educating Christians to live in two worlds – a spiritual world and a secular world. This was not the way of the Pilgrim, who lived in one world, the world created by God, ruled and directed by God, for God’s purpose and glory.” (RJS, *The Journal*, Vol.1, 1989, p.22)

Providential History

- It presents the whole view of history from eternity's perspective and answers for the student of history:

Providential History

- Who? God – His sovereignty, nature, character, and purpose.
- What? Events, individuals, and nations
- Where? Geography, the stage for man's activities
- Why? The Gospel -- the message of the Good News of Jesus Christ – the message of Liberty!

The Ten Links of the Timeline of America's Christian History

- How men are governed
- How did God use individual character to forward Christ, His Story?

- Tool for teaching the Providential Hand of God in our history - Christ: His Story!
- Traces the flow of liberty for the individual (internal and external)
- Shows the Chain of Christianity moving westward through time
- Focuses on key individuals, key documents, and key events
- Nothing “sacred” about the 10 links
- Provide pockets into which to place the rest of history
- Provide springboards to other areas of history and/or other subjects

Connecting Providential History to the Seven Principles

1. **God's Principle of Individuality**—everything in God's universe is revelational of God's infinity, God's diversity, God's individuality.
2. **The Christian Principle of Self-Government**—government must first be internal, then external. This is true for the individual, the family, the community, and the nation.
3. **America's Heritage of Christian Character**—America has a rich heritage of a Christian founding, which includes a gospel purpose, the founding of Christian self-government, and the value of the individual.

4. Conscience, the most sacred of all property

5. The Christian Form of Our Government—each religion/worldview has a form of government. A Constitutional Republic comes from a Christian worldview.

6. How the Seed of Local Self-Government is Planted—government must be first internal, then external. Self-rule must work its way up from the bottom, not the other way around.

7. The Christian Principle of American Political Union—We must have union with unity.

The Pilgrims

- The Scrooby Congregation
- Leyden, Holland
- The *Mayflower* Voyage
- The Mayflower Compact
- Peace with the Natives and the First Thanksgiving



The Providential Planting of America

“The hour of American colonization was the fittest one, in modern times, for the New World to receive the best which the Old World had to give.”

–Connected in time and space with the Reformation

–Served as a bulwark and reserve for the Protestant Church

–Held until there was a “people of the Book” sufficiently matured to build a civil government on biblical principles

“That was high strategy in the warfare for the advancement of the kingdom of God in the earth.”

-- Galloway, C. B., (1898) *Christianity and the American Commonwealth*.

Alexis de Tocqueville—*Democracy In America*

- Colonial founding original charters

–French jurist Alexis de Tocqueville visited America in the 1830’s. He recorded his observations in the lengthy work titled *Democracy in America*.

Some of his comments on religion in America:

“...Greatest part of English America peopled by men who were escaping religious persecution and settled into a Christianity described best as ‘democratic’ and ‘republican’”

“From the beginning, politics and religion were in accord, and they have not ceased to be so since... next to each religion is a political opinion that is joined to it by affinity”

Colonial Foundings

Virginia—Jamestown—economic and evangelical

“...We, greatly commending and graciously accepting of, **their desires for the furtherance of so noble a work which may, by the providence of Almighty God hereafter tend to the glory of his divine majesty in propagating of Christian religion to such people as yet live in darkness and miserable ignorance of the true knowledge and worship of God...”**

(from First Charter of Virginia, April 10, 1606, by King James I)

Dedication Day

April 29, 1607, Cape Henry, Virginia, North American continent is dedicated to Christ in solemn prayer of consecration by Pastor Robert Hunt.



Colonial Foundings

- Nearly all of the original colonies had distinctly Christian purposes in their charters—Freedom of religion and evangelization of the Natives
- Beyond their founding charters, most of them set up laws that were based on a strict moral code
- Also, many of them had been given freedom by the king to be self-governed..so for 3-4 generations, they had been left alone (more or less) to govern themselves

Colonial Churches

Again, from de Tocqueville—*“Christian morality is found in all sects; they all differ in their worship, but all agree on the duties of men toward one another”*

New England

Anglican—Puritan—to establish a true Anglican church in America as a model and solution to the corrupted church of England

—Very Calvinistic

—Very Scripture-based

—Similar to the Separatists/Pilgrims except that they believed in purifying the church from within

—Responsible for Harvard College and free schooling (Ole Deluder Satan Act of 1647)

Congregationalists

—The Separatists/Pilgrims whose main difference from Puritans was not having a central church authority. Rather, each church is under the authority of God and is more autonomous, like the New Testament home churches

—The Puritans would eventually become more like their Congregational brothers from Plymouth

Middle & Southern Colonies

- Presbyterian—largely responsible for Americans’ “governmental thinking.”
- Episcopalian
 - The mission church plant of the Church of England
 - Either civil authorities read from the *Book of Common Prayer* or the Church of England would appoint a minister
- Quakers
 - –Main founders of PA, some of DE
 - –No pastors, rather everyone has an inner light
 - –Free trade with Indians, equality of women, plain dress, separate from world
- Others: Baptists, Lutherans, Methodists

De Tocqueville comments on the “Indirect influence religious beliefs exert on political society”

–“Religious aspect of the country that first struck my eye...as I prolonged my stay, I perceived the great political consequences that flowed from these new facts.”

–“Religion best teaches the American the art of being free”

–“Religion does not directly exert an influence on the laws or political opinions, rather it directs mores and regulates the family, which regulates the state”

–“While the law permits them to do everything, religion prevents them from conceiving everything and forbids them to dare everything”

–“Religion never mixes directly in government of society, but it is the first of their political institutions for it facilitates their use of freedom”

–“Who can know what’s in the heart of all Americans? But, we can see that they all believe religion necessary to the maintenance of republican institutions”

–“Americans confuse Christianity and freedom in their minds so that it is almost impossible to have them conceive of one without the other”

–“Religious zeal constantly warms itself at the hearth of patriotism...we have an interest in the new states being religious so that they permit us to remain free”

–“Despotism can do without faith, but freedom cannot”

–“What makes a people master of itself if they have not submitted to God?”

The Colonial American Church's Teaching

- People were taught biblical ideas of man and government
 - All are created equal and in the image of the Divine Creator
 - Man - inherently sinful, needs salvation and needs to have power checked
 - Government - instituted by God to be our earthly authority with its own set of limits
- Pastor's sermons were printed, widely distributed and are now a great source of our historical knowledge

- Sermons as political pamphlets

- Election Sermons (1633-1870s)

- Artillery Sermons

- » “A defensive war in a just cause is sinless”

- » “The sin of cowardice”

- Fast Day and Thanksgiving Sermons

- » In observance of victories, calamities, and special events

- “*The Constitutional Convention and the written Constitution were children of the pulpit.*”

- Historian Alice Baldwin (1879-1960)

The Great Awakening

- Ben Franklin was an enthusiastic supporter by printing many of Whitefield's sermons in his *Gazette*
- This, combined with the Enlightenment played a key role in the development of the democratic mindset of colonial Americans
 - Taught that the Bible espouses that all men are created equal
 - True value of man lies in his moral behavior rather than class
 - All men can be saved
 - Liberty of Conscience is an inalienable right of every reasoning creature
 - No one religious sect could unify the 13 colonies against Britain, but... the shared Christian convictions regarding the nature of sin, virtue, and divine Providence did!
 - The language of **natural law**, of **inherent or inalienable freedoms**, of self-determination mixed with all these colonial religions was the crux of the American Enlightenment

The American Revolution

- Background
- Prayer at The First Continental Congress
- Providential stories
 - Evacuation of Boston
 - The Battle of Long Island

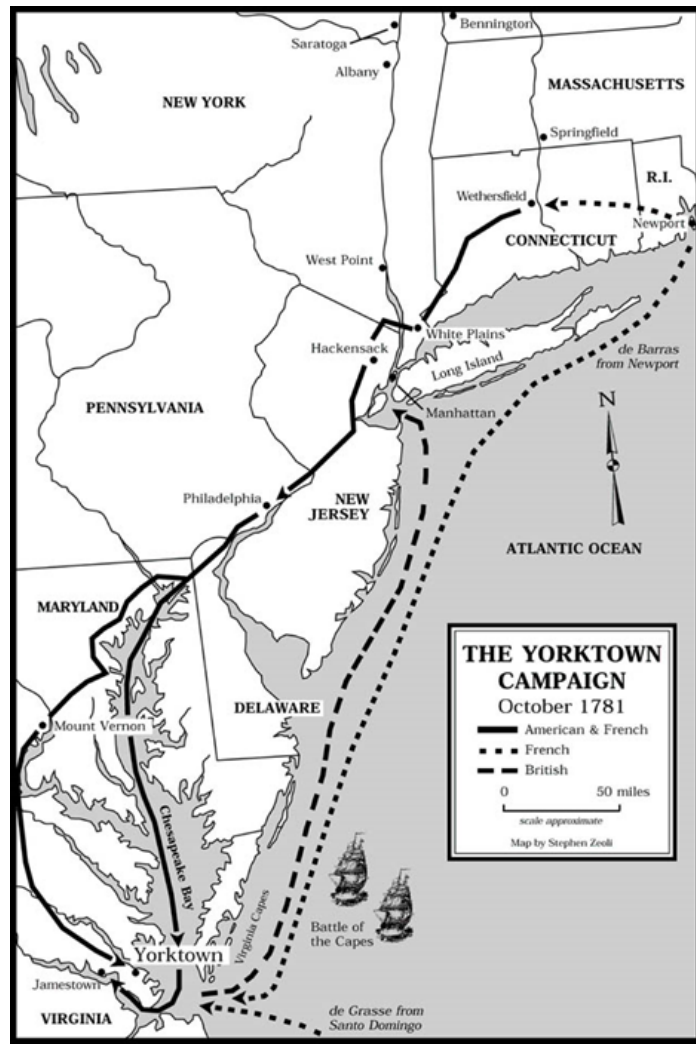


Providential Stories

The Battle of Yorktown



THE SIEGE OF YORKTOWN, APRIL 1781.



The Constitutional Convention



Christian Symbolism

- The President and federal officers swear in on Bible.
 - Washington went to church and took communion after his inauguration.
- There have been numerous Congressional proclamations of thanksgiving/fasting (Washington, Lincoln, Cleveland, Taft, Roosevelt).
- Our military has chaplains. Our Congress has chaplains.
- The U.S. Capitol building was used as a gathering place for church from 1807-1857.
- God and Christian ideas are present in our founding documents.

Christian Symbolism

- “In God We Trust” is on our currency.
- In 1984, Congress endorsed a renewed publication of the Bible.
- There are still yearly National Prayer Breakfasts.
- Many presidents have publicly invoked God’s name for His help and blessing.



Questions?