

Thanksgiving Quiz

Kerby Anderson offers a quiz concerning the origins of American Thanksgiving.

This nation was founded by Christians, and Thanksgiving is a time when we can reflect upon this rich, Christian heritage. But many of us are often ignorant of our country's origins, so we have put together a Thanksgiving quiz to test your knowledge about this nation's biblical foundations. We hope that you will not only take this test and pass it on to others, but we also hope that you will be encouraged to study more about the Christian foundations of this country.

1. What group began the tradition of Thanksgiving?



A day of thanksgiving was set aside by the Pilgrims who founded Plymouth Colony. This colony was the first permanent settlement in New England. The Pilgrims were originally known as the Forefathers or Founders. The term *Pilgrim* was first used in the writings of colonist William Bradford and is now used to designate them.

2. Why did they celebrate Thanksgiving?

Life was hard in the New World. Out of 103 Pilgrims, 51 of these died in the first terrible winter. After the first harvest was completed, Governor William Bradford proclaimed a day of thanksgiving and prayer. By 1623, a day of fasting and prayer during a period of drought was changed to one of thanksgiving because the rain came during their prayers. The custom prevailed in New England and eventually became a national holiday.

3. When did Thanksgiving become a national holiday?

The state of New York adopted Thanksgiving Day as an annual custom in 1817. By the time of the Civil War, many other states had done the same. In 1863 President Abraham Lincoln appointed a day of thanksgiving. Since then, each president has issued a Thanksgiving Day proclamation for the fourth Thursday of November.

4. Why did the Pilgrims leave Europe?

Among the early Pilgrims was a group of Separatists who were members of a religious movement that broke from the Church of England during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. In 1606 William Brewster led a group of Separatists to Leiden (in the Netherlands) to escape religious persecution in England. After living in Leiden for more than ten years, some members of the group voted to emigrate to America. The voyage was financed by a group of London investors who were promised produce from America in exchange for their assistance.

5. How did the Pilgrims emigrate to the New World?

On September 16, 1620, a group numbering 102 men, women, and children left Plymouth, England, for America on the Mayflower. Having been blown off course from their intended landing in Virginia by a terrible storm, the Pilgrims landed at Cape Cod on November 11. On December 21, they landed on the site of Plymouth Colony. While still on the ship, the Pilgrims signed the Mayflower Compact.

6. What is the Mayflower Compact?

On November 11, 1620, Governor William Bradford and the leaders on the Mayflower signed the Mayflower Compact before setting foot on land. They wanted to acknowledge God's sovereignty in their lives and their need to obey Him. The Mayflower Compact was America's first great constitutional document and is often called "The American Covenant."

7. What is the significance of the Mayflower Compact?

After suffering years of persecution in England and spending difficult years of exile in the Netherlands, the Pilgrims wanted to establish their colony on the biblical principles they suffered for in Europe. Before they set foot on land, they drew up this covenant with God. They feared launching their colony until there was a recognition of God's sovereignty and their collective need to obey Him.

8. What does the Mayflower Compact say?

"In the name of God, Amen. We whose names are underwritten, the loyal subjects of our dread sovereign Lord, King James, by the grace of God, of Great Britain, France, and Ireland king, defender of the faith, etc., Having undertaken, for the glory of God, and advancement of the Christian faith, and honor of our king and country, a voyage to plant the first colony in the Northern parts of Virginia, do by these present solemnly and mutually in the presence of God, and one another, covenant and combine ourselves together into a civil body politic, for better ordering and preservation and furtherance of the ends foresaid, and by virtue hereof to enact, constitute, and frame such just and equal laws, ordinances, acts, constitutions and offices, from time to time, as shall be thought most meet and convenient for the general good of the Colony, unto which we promise all due submission and obedience. In witness whereof we have hereunder subscribed our names at Cape Cod the 11th of November, in the year of the reign of our sovereign Lord, King James, of England, France, and Ireland."

9. Why didn't the pilgrims sail to the original destination in Virginia?

The Pilgrims were blown off course and landed at Cape Cod in what now appears to be God's providence. Because their patent did not include this territory, they consulted with the Captain of the Mayflower and resolved to sail southward. But

the weather and geography did not allow them to do so. They encountered “dangerous shoals and roaring breakers” and were quickly forced to return to Cape Cod. From there they began scouting expeditions and finally discovered what is now Plymouth. Had they arrived just a few years earlier, they would have been attacked and destroyed by one of the fiercest tribes in the region. However, three years earlier (in 1617), the Patuxet tribe had been wiped out by a plague. The Pilgrims thus landed in one of the few places where they could survive.{1}

10. What role did the lone surviving Indian play in the lives of the Pilgrims?

There was one survivor of the Patuxet tribe: Squanto. He was kidnapped in 1605 by Captain Weymouth and taken to England where he learned English and was eventually able to return to New England.{2} When he found his tribe had been wiped out by the plague, he lived with a neighboring tribe. When Squanto learned that the Pilgrims were at Plymouth, he came to them and showed them how to plant corn and fertilize with fish. He later converted to Christianity. William Bradford said that Squanto “was a special instrument sent of God for their good beyond their expectation.”{3}

11. Were the colonists dedicated to Christian principles in their lives on days other than Thanksgiving?

The Pilgrims were, and so were the other colonists. Consider this sermon by John Winthrop given while aboard the Arabella in 1630. This is what he said about the Puritans who formed the Massachusetts Bay Colony: “For the persons, we are a Company professing ourselves fellow members of Christ. . . . For the work we have in hand, it is by a mutual consent through a special overruling providence, and a more than an ordinary approbation of the Churches of Christ to seek out a place of Cohabitation and Consortship under a due form of Government both civil and ecclesiastical.” They established a

Christian Commonwealth in which every area of their lives both civil and ecclesiastical fell under the Lordship of Jesus Christ.

12. How did the Pilgrims organize their economic activities?

After the first year, the colony foundered because of the collective economic system forced upon them by the merchants in London. All the settlers worked only for the joint partnership and were fed out of the common stores. The land and the houses built on it were the joint property of the merchants and colonists for seven years and then divided equally.[{4}](#)

When Deacon Carver died, William Bradford became governor. Seeing the failure of communal farming, he instituted what today would be called free enterprise innovations. Bradford assigned plots of land to each family to work, and the colony began to flourish. Each colonist was challenged to better themselves and their land by working to their fullest capacity. Many Christian historians and economists today point to this fundamental economic change as one of the key reasons for the success of the Pilgrims at Plymouth.

13. What has been the significance of the Pilgrims and their legacy of Thanksgiving?

On the bicentennial celebration of the landing of the Pilgrims at Plymouth Rock, Daniel Webster on December 22, 1820, declared the following: "Let us not forget the religious character of our origin. Our fathers were brought hither by their high veneration for the Christian religion. They journeyed by its light, and labored in its hope. They sought to incorporate its principles with the elements of their society, and to diffuse its influence through all their institutions, civil, political, or literary."

The legacy of the Pilgrims and Thanksgiving is the legacy of godly men and women who sought to bring Christian principles

to this nation. These spread throughout the nation for centuries.

14. How were Christian principles brought to the founding of this republic?

Most historians will acknowledge that America was born in the midst of a revival. This occurred from approximately 1740-1770 and was known as the First Great Awakening. Two prominent preachers during that time were Jonathan Edwards (best known for his sermon "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God") and George Whitfield. They preached up and down the East Coast and saw revival break out. Churches were planted, schools were built, and lives were changed.

15. How influential were Christian ideas in the Constitution?

While the Constitution does not specifically mention God or the Bible, the influence of Christianity can plainly be seen. Professor M.E. Bradford shows in his book *A Worthy Company*, that fifty of the fifty-five men who signed the Constitution were church members who endorsed the Christian faith.

16. Weren't many of the founders non-Christians?

Yes, some were. Thomas Jefferson and Benjamin Franklin are good examples of men involved in the drafting of the Declaration of Independence who were influenced by ideas from the Enlightenment. Yet revisionists have attempted to make these men more secular than they really were. Jefferson, for example, wrote to Benjamin Rush that "I am a Christian . . . sincerely attached to his doctrines, in preference to all others." Franklin called for prayer at the Constitutional Convention saying, "God governs the affairs of men. And if a sparrow cannot fall to the ground without his notice, is it probable that an empire can rise without his notice?" While they were hardly examples of biblical Christianity, they nevertheless believed in God and believed in absolute standards which should be a part of the civil order.

17. How important was Christianity in colonial education in America?

Young colonists' education usually came from the Bible, the Hornbook, and the New England Primer. The Hornbook consisted of a single piece of parchment attached to a paddle of wood. Usually the alphabet, the Lord's Prayer, and religious doctrines were written on it. The New England Primer taught a number of lessons and included such things as the names of the Old and New Testament books, the Lord's Prayer, the Apostles' Creed, the Ten Commandments, the Westminster Shorter Catechism, and John Cotton's "Spiritual Milk for American Babies." Even when teaching the alphabet, biblical themes were used: "A is for Adam's fall, we sinned all. B is for Heaven to find, the Bible mind. C is for Christ crucified, for sinners died."

18. How important was Christianity in colonial higher education?

Most of the major universities were established by Christian denominations. Harvard was a Puritan school. William and Mary was an Anglican school. Yale was Congregational, Princeton was Presbyterian, and Brown was Baptist. The first motto for Harvard was Veritas Christo et Ecclesiae (Truth for Christ and the Church). Students gathered for prayer and readings from the Scriptures every day. Yale was established by Increase Mather and Cotton Mather because Harvard was moving away from its original Calvinist philosophy and eventually drifted to Unitarianism. The founders of Yale said that "every student shall consider the main end of his study to wit to know God in Jesus Christ and answerably to lead a Godly, sober life."

19. If Christianity was so important in colonial America, why does the Constitution establish a wall of separation between church and state?

Contrary to what many Americans may think, the phrase

“separation of church and state” does not appear anywhere in the Constitution. In fact, there is no mention of the words church, state, or separation in the First Amendment or anywhere within the Constitution. The First Amendment does guarantee freedom of speech, freedom of assembly, freedom of the press, and freedom of religion.

The phrase is found in a letter Thomas Jefferson wrote to Baptist pastors in Danbury, Connecticut in 1802 in which he gave his opinion of the establishment clause of the First Amendment and then felt that this was “building a wall of separation between church and state.” At best this was a commentary on the First Amendment, from an individual who was in France when the Constitution and Bill of Rights were drafted.

Notes

1. William Bradford, *Of Plymouth Plantation*, ed. Samuel Eliot Morison (New York: The Modern Library, 1967), Chapter XI.
2. Bradford Smith, *Bradford of Plymouth* (Philadelphia and New York: J.B. Lippincott, 1951), 189.
3. Bradford, *Of Plymouth Plantation*, 81.
4. Marshall Foster, *The American Covenant* (Thousand Oaks, CA: The Mayflower Institute, 1992), 86-87.

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Those Admirable English Puritans

Michael Gleghorn corrects a number of misunderstandings and stereotypes about the Puritans, suggesting there is much about

them to admire.

Introducing the Puritans

J. I. Packer begins his book, *A Quest for Godliness: The Puritan Vision of the Christian Life*, by comparing the English Puritans to the California Redwoods. He writes, “On . . . the northern California coastline grow the giant Redwoods, the biggest living things on earth. Some are over 360 feet tall, and some trunks are more than 60 feet round.”[\[1\]](#) A bit later he draws this comparison: “As Redwoods attract the eye, because they overtop other trees, so the mature holiness and seasoned fortitude of the great Puritans shine before us as a kind of beacon light, overtopping the stature of the majority of Christians in most eras.”[\[2\]](#)

Of course, in our day, if people think of the Puritans at all, it’s usually only for the purpose of making a joke of one kind or another. As one author notes, “the Puritans are the only collective stock-in-trade that virtually every cartoonist feels free to use to lampoon society’s ills.”[\[3\]](#)



But who were the Puritans really? When did they live? And, most importantly, why should we care?

Many scholarly studies of English Puritanism begin by noting the variety of ways in which the term “Puritanism” has been used and defined. Christopher Hill begins his book, *Society and Puritanism in Pre-Revolutionary England*, with a chapter entitled, “The Definition of a Puritan.”[\[4\]](#) And John Spurr, in his book on English Puritanism, has an introductory section on “Defining Puritans.”[\[5\]](#) But we’ll leave it to the scholars to haggle over details. For our purposes, it’s good enough to say that the Puritans were English Protestants who were influenced by the theology of the Reformation. They were zealous to “purify” not only the Church of England, but also their society, and even themselves, from all doctrinal, ceremonial,

and moral impurity—and to do so for the glory of God.[{6}](#) The time period of English Puritanism spans roughly the years between 1550 and 1700.[{7}](#)

So that's who the Puritans were, but why on earth should we care? Personally, I think it's because the Puritans can offer us a great deal of wisdom, wisdom that could really benefit the church and society of our own day. As Packer reminds us, "The great Puritans, though dead, still speak to us through their writings, and say things . . . that we badly need to hear at the present time."[{8}](#)

The Puritans and God

Before going any further, we need to come right out and admit that, at least on the popular level, the Puritans really seem to suffer from an "image problem." According to J. I. Packer, "Pillorying the Puritans . . . has long been a popular pastime."[{9}](#) Likewise, Peter Marshall and David Manuel observe that "Nearly everyone today seems to believe that the Puritans were bluenosed killjoys in tall black hats, a somber group of sin-obsessed, witch-hunting bigots."[{10}](#) Of course, like Packer, they regard this view as "a monstrous misrepresentation."[{11}](#) But when a view is so widely held, we seem to be in for an uphill battle if we want to suggest some ways in which the Puritans were admirable!

So where do we begin? Let's briefly consider the way in which Puritans sought to live their lives before God. The *Westminster Shorter Catechism*, a teaching device highly esteemed by many Puritans,[{12}](#) begins by asking, "What is the chief end of man?" That's a great question, isn't it? They answered it this way: "Man's chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy him forever."[{13}](#)

Now what follows if this answer is correct? Well first, it would mean that human life is *objectively* full of meaning, value, and purpose, for God exists and (as General Maximus

asserted in the hit movie, *Gladiator*) “what we do in life echoes in eternity.”[{14}](#) But second, in claiming that “man’s chief end” consists not only in *glorifying* God in the here and now, but also in *enjoying* Him *forever*, we see the potential for the complete and eternal fulfillment of human existence. For what could be better than enjoying God, the greatest good, forever and ever?

It is doubtless for reasons such as this that the Puritan theologian, William Perkins, defined theology as “the science of living blessedly forever”![{15}](#) He understood that theology is not some dry, academic discipline, with no relationship to the rest of one’s life. Rather, theology is all about knowing God personally. And this, according to Jesus, is eternal life, the life of supreme blessedness (John 17:3). So the first reason for seeing the Puritans as admirable is that they sought to live their lives in such a way that they would glorify God and enjoy Him forever—and what could ultimately be wiser, more fulfilling—or more admirable—than that?

The Puritans and Books

Now some may have thought of the Puritans as ignorant, or anti-intellectual—people who either feared or hated learning. But this, claims Leland Ryken, is “absolutely untrue.” Indeed, he says, “No Christian movement in history has been more zealous for education than the Puritans.”[{16}](#) Many leaders of the Puritan movement were university educated and saw great value in the life of the mind. One can list individual Puritans who were interested in things like astronomy, botany, medicine, and still other subjects from the book of nature.[{17}](#)

Above all, however, Puritanism was a movement which prized that greatest of all books, the Bible. Puritans loved their Bibles—and deemed it both their joy and duty to study, teach, believe and live out its promises and commandments. According to Packer, “Intense veneration for Scripture . . . and a

devoted concern to know and do all that it prescribes, was Puritanism's hallmark."[{18}](#)

Indeed, so great was this Puritan veneration for Scripture that even those without much formal education often knew their English Bible exceedingly well. A great example of this can be seen in John Bunyan, the famed author of *The Pilgrim's Progress*. Although he did not have much in the way of formal education, one of his later editors declared (doubtless with some exaggeration) that "No man ever possessed a more intimate knowledge of the Bible, nor greater aptitude in quoting it than Bunyan."[{19}](#)

For Puritans like Bunyan, the Bible was the inspired word of God. It was thus the highest court of appeal in all matters of Christian faith and practice. Indeed, since the Bible came from God, it was viewed as having the same divine authority as God himself. It was therefore worth one's time to know the Bible well, and to be intimately familiar with its contents. As two contemporary scholars of Puritanism remind us, the Bible was both "the mirror before which each person could see the . . . status of one's soul before God, and the guidebook for all human behavior . . ."[{20}](#)

The Puritan stress on knowing, believing, and obeying God's inspired word is refreshing. What might the church in America look like if it *really* recaptured this Puritan vision for the importance of Scripture? Here the writings of the Puritans can still be a valuable resource for the church today, which is yet another reason for seeing them as admirable.[{21}](#)

The Puritans and the Church

Even in our own day, the Puritans remain fairly well-known for their desire to "purify" the Church of England from anything which, in their estimation, smacked of doctrinal, moral, or ceremonial impurity.[{22}](#) The Puritans were passionate about the purity of the church. But how were they to determine if a

particular doctrine or practice was suspect?

For the Puritans, it was only natural that God's inspired word, the Bible, should serve as the final authority in all such matters. If a doctrine was taught in Scripture, then it should also be taught in the church. And if not, then it shouldn't. The same standard would apply to all moral and ceremonial issues as well. Scripture was to have the final word about whether any particular doctrine or practice was, or was not, to be taught or permitted in the church of God.[{23}](#) Of course, this is right in line with what we said above about the Puritan devotion to Scripture.

But once one is committed to judging everything *within* the church according to the standard of Scripture, it probably won't be long before one's view of the church undergoes a similar biblical scrutiny. Such scrutiny soon led Puritans to "the notion that the church is a spiritual reality." The church is not the building in which the redeemed gather to meet, it is rather "the company of the redeemed" themselves.[{24}](#) Doubtless this was one of the reasons why the Puritans were eager to purify not only the church, understood in a corporate sense, but themselves as individuals as well.

It also helps explain the Puritans' devotion to both the fellowship of the saints and the discipline of an erring brother or sister in the faith. The Puritan pastor Richard Sibbes urged God's people "to strengthen and encourage one another in the ways of holiness."[{25}](#) And Robert Coachman reminded his readers that "it is no small privilege . . . to live in . . . a society" where one's brothers and sisters in Christ "will not suffer them to go on in sin."[{26}](#)

But isn't it all too easy to allow Christian fellowship to lapse into something that is superficial, boring, and sometimes even frankly unspiritual? Yes; and this is why the great English Puritans are quick to remind us (sometimes in the most forceful of ways) that we must continually seek, in

our fellowship together, to promote both faith and holiness, along with a deep love and reverent fear of the Lord our God. And isn't that an admirable reminder?

The Puritans on Marriage and the Family

If there's one thing that almost everyone thinks they know about the Puritans it's that they "were sexually inhibited and repressive," right?[{27}](#) But just how accurate is our knowledge about the Puritans on this score? Well according to some scholars, it's wide of the mark indeed.[{28}](#)

Of course, it's certainly true that the Puritans believed, just as the New Testament teaches, that human sexual behavior should be enjoyed only within the marriage relationship between a husband and wife. And naturally enough, they disapproved of any sexual behavior outside of this relationship. But within the union of heterosexual marriage, the Puritans were actually quite vocal proponents of a rich and vibrant sex life. Indeed, one Puritan author described sex as "one of the most proper and essential acts of marriage" and encouraged married couples to engage in it "with good will and delight, willingly, readily and cheerfully."[{29}](#) And need I add that the Puritans thought it important to *practice* what they preached?!

But with Puritan couples so "readily and cheerfully" enjoying their sexual relationships within marriage, they naturally had to give some serious thought to the raising of children and the purpose of the family! So what did they have to say about such matters?

For the Puritans, the family ultimately had the same purpose as the individual; namely, "the glory of God." The reason this is important, notes Ryken, is that "it determines what goes on in a family," by setting "priorities in a spiritual rather than material direction."[{30}](#)

The Puritans rightly saw that if one wants a spiritually healthy church and a morally healthy society, one must first have spiritually and morally healthy individuals and families—for the former are inevitably composed of the latter.^{31} Hence, if we want healthy churches and societies, we must also prize healthy individuals. And such individuals are best produced within spiritually and morally healthy families.

Now I personally find it difficult to argue with the Puritan logic on this point. And although they lived in a different era, Puritan views on the purpose of the family really seem to offer “some attractive possibilities for our own age.”^{32}

And now we’ve reached the end of our discussion of English Puritanism. Of course, the Puritans also had their faults—and I’ve no desire to pretend otherwise.^{33} But I hope you’d agree that there’s much to admire about these oft-maligned and misrepresented giants of the past. And I also hope this might encourage you to read (and profit from) these giants for yourself!

Notes

1. J. I. Packer, *A Quest for Godliness: The Puritan Vision of the Christian Life* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 1990), 11. I should probably note that the California Department of Parks and Recreation gives figures slightly different from those in Packer’s book, but this is really immaterial for my purposes in this article. See, for example, “How Big are Big Trees,” California Department of Parks and Recreation, accessed February 12, 2015, www.parks.ca.gov/?page_id=1146.

2. Packer, *A Quest for Godliness*, 11.

3. Bruce C. Daniels, *New England Nation: The Country the Puritans Built* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 230.

4. Christopher Hill, *Society and Puritanism in Pre-*

- Revolutionary England* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997), 1-15.
5. John Spurr, *English Puritanism, 1603-1689*, ed. Jeremy Black, *Social History in Perspective* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998), 3-8.
6. Definitional help was gathered from the sources cited above, as well as the article by Mark A Noll, "Puritanism," in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Walter A. Elwell (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1984), 897-900.
7. Packer, *A Quest for Godliness*, 11.
8. Ibid., 16.
9. Ibid., 21.
10. Peter Marshall and David Manuel, *The Light and the Glory: 1492-1793*. Revised and expanded edition (Grand Rapids: Revell, 2009), 211.
11. Ibid.
12. According to Packer, the Puritan Richard Baxter used this catechism to help instruct (and encourage) his parishioners in the truths of the Christian faith. See Packer, *A Quest for Godliness*, 45.
13. This catechism can be found many places on the internet. See, for example, "The Westminster Shorter Catechism," The Westminster Presbyterian, accessed February 15, 2015, www.westminsterconfession.org/confessional-standards/the-westminster-shorter-catechism.php.
14. For a philosophical defense of this view, please see the chapter entitled, "The Absurdity of Life without God," in William Lane Craig, *Reasonable Faith: Christian Truth and Apologetics*, 3rd ed. (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2008), 65-90.

15. William Perkins, *A Golden Chain, or The Description of Theology* (1592). In *The Work of William Perkins*, ed. Ian Breward. Courtenay Library of Reformation Classics 3 (Appleford, England: Sutton Courtenay Press, 1970), 177; cited in *Reformed Reader*, ed. William Stacy Johnson and John H. Leith (Westminster John Knox Press, 2002), 7.

16. Leland Ryken, *Worldly Saints: The Puritans as They Really Were* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986), 7.

17. See the brief discussion in Charles Pastoor and Galen Johnson, *The A to Z of the Puritans* (Lanham, MY: Scarecrow Press, 2009), s.v. "Science."

18. Packer, *A Quest for Godliness*, 98.

19. *The Works of John Bunyan: Allegorical, Figurative, and Symbolical*, ed. George Offor, vol. 3 (London: Blackie and Son, 1859), 396.

20. See Pastoor and Johnson, *The A to Z of the Puritans*, s.v. "Scripture."

21. Packer says much the same thing. See *A Quest for Godliness*, 16.

22. For the Puritans, of course, this was typically some vestige of Roman Catholicism. I purposefully chose not to mention this on the radio, however, because I did not want any of our listeners to somehow get the mistaken idea that this was an anti-Catholic program. It's not. My purpose in this program is to extol the virtues of the Puritans—not to vilify some other segment of the Christian community.

23. Leland Ryken has an excellent discussion of this issue in his chapter on "Church and Worship" in *Worldly Saints*, 111-135. See particularly pp. 112-115.

24. This, and the previous quotation, are both taken from Ryken, *Worldly Saints*, 115.

25. Richard Sibbes, “The Church’s Visitation” (London, 1634), cited in Ryken, *Worldly Saints*, 133.
26. Robert Coachman (or Cushman), *The Cry of a Stone* (London, 1642), cited in Ryken, *Worldly Saints*, 133.
27. Ryken, *Worldly Saints*, 39.
28. See, for example, Ryken’s chapter on “Marriage and Sex” in *Worldly Saints*, 39-55.
29. William Gouge, *Of Domestical Duties* (London, 1622), edited, updated and revised by Greg Fox (Puritan Reprints, 2006), 158.
30. Ryken, *Worldly Saints*, 74.
31. Ryken provides numerous examples of this view from the writings of *Puritans in Worldly Saints*, 74-5; 84-7.
32. *Ibid.*, 73.
33. See Ryken’s chapter, “Learning from Negative Example: Some Puritan Faults,” in *Worldly Saints*, 187-203.

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American Indians in American History

Colonial America

Two dark chapters in American history are slavery and the treatment of the American Indian. We have an article on slavery, and in this article we will focus briefly on the

story of the American Indians (or Native Americans).

It is difficult to estimate the number of Indians in the Western Hemisphere. In Central and South America, there were advanced civilizations like the Aztecs in Mexico and the Incas in Peru. So it is estimated there was a population of about twenty million before the Europeans came. By contrast, the Indian tribes north of what is now the Mexican border were “still at the hunter-gatherer stage in many cases, and engaged in perpetual warfare” and numbered perhaps one million.[\[1\]](#)

One of the best-known stories from colonial America is the story of John Smith and Pocahontas. John Smith was the third leader of Jamestown. He traded with the Indians and learned their language. He also learned how they hunted and fished.

On one occasion, Smith was captured by the Indians and brought before Chief Powhatan. As the story goes, a young princess by the name of Pocahontas laid her head across Smith’s chest and pleaded with her father to spare his life. This may have been an act of courage or part of the Indian ceremony. In either case, Smith was made an honorary chief of the tribe.

Although the Disney cartoon about Pocahontas ends at this point, it is worth noting that she later met an English settler and traveled to England. There she adopted English clothing, became a Christian, and was baptized.

Another famous story involves Squanto. He was originally kidnapped in 1605 and taken to England where he learned English and was eventually able to return to New England. When he found his tribe had been wiped out by a plague, he lived with a neighboring tribe. Squanto then learned that the Pilgrims were at Plymouth, so he came to them and showed them how to plant corn and fertilize with fish. He later converted to Christianity. William Bradford said that Squanto “was a special instrument sent of God for their good beyond their expectation.”[\[2\]](#)

These stories are typical of the some of the initial interactions between the Indians and the colonists. Relations between the two were usually peaceful, but as we will see, the peace was a fragile one.

Many of the settlers owed their lives to the Indians and learned many important skills involving hunting, trapping, fishing, and farming. Roger Williams purchased land from the Indians to start Providence, Rhode Island, and William Penn bought land from the Indians who lived in present-day Pennsylvania. Others, however, merely took the land and began what became the dark chapter of exploitation of the American Indians.

Indian Wars in New England

Let's take a look at the history of Indians in New England.

One of the leaders in New England was Roger Williams. He believed that it was right and proper to bring Christianity to the Indians. Unfortunately, "few New Englanders took trouble to instruct Indians in Christianity. What they all wanted to do was to dispossess them of their land and traditional hunting preserves."[\[3\]](#)

Williams thought this was unchristian and argued that title to all Indian lands should be negotiated at a fair price. He felt anything less was sinful.[\[4\]](#)

Because of this, his Rhode Island colony gained the reputation of being a place where Indians were honored and protected. That colony managed to avoid any conflict with the Indians until King Philip's War.

King Philip's War was perhaps the most devastating war between the colonists and the Indians living in the New England area. There had been peace until that time between the Pilgrims and the Wampanoag tribe due to their peace treaty signed in the

1620s.

The war was named for King Philip who was the son of Chief Massasoit. His Indian name was Metacom, but he was called King Philip by the English because he adopted European dress and customs. In 1671, he was questioned by the colonists and fined. They also demanded that the Wampanoag surrender their arms.

In 1675, a Christian Indian who had been working as an informer to the colonists was murdered (probably by King Philip's order). Three Indians were tried for murder and executed. In retaliation, King Philip led his men against the settlers. At one point they came within twenty miles of Boston itself. If he could have organized a coalition of Indian tribes, he might have extinguished the entire colony.

Throughout the summer and fall of 1675, Philip and his followers destroyed farms and townships over a large area. The Massachusetts governor dispatched military against the Indians with the conflict ending in the fall of 1677 when Philip was killed in battle.

The war was costly to the colonists in terms of lives and finances. It also resulted in the near extermination of many of the tribes in southern New England.

The Pequot War in the 1630s developed initially because of conflict between Indian tribes. It began with a dispute between the Pequots and the Mohicans in the Connecticut River area over valuable shoreline where shells and beads were collected for wampum.

Neither the English nor the nearby Dutch came to the aid of the Mohicans. Thus, the Pequots became bold and murdered a number of settlers. In response, the Massachusetts governor sent armed vessels to destroy two Indian villages. The Pequots retaliated by attacking Wethersfield, Connecticut, killing nine people and abducting two others.[\[5\]](#)

The combined forces of the Massachusetts and Connecticut militia set out to destroy the Pequot. They surrounded the main Pequot fort in 1637 and slaughtered five hundred Indians (men, women, and children). The village was set fire, and most who tried to escape were shot or clubbed to death.{6}

Post Revolutionary America

Chief Tecumseh was a Shawnee chief who lived in the Ohio River Valley and benefited from the British. During the War of 1812, the British had a policy of organizing and arming minorities against the United States. Not only did they liberate black slaves, but they armed and trained many of the Indian tribes.{7}

As thousands of settlers moved into this area, the Indians were divided as to whether to attack American settlements. Tecumseh was not one of them. He refused to sign any treaties with the government and organized an Indian resistance movement against the settlers.

Together with his brother Tenskwatawa, who was also known as “the Prophet,” he called for a war against the white man: “Let the white race perish! They seize your land. They corrupt your women. They trample on the bones of your dead Burn their dwellings—destroy their stock—slay their wives and children that their very breed may perish! War now! War always! War on the living! War on the dead!”{8}

Tecumseh and “the Prophet” met with other Indian tribes in order to unite them into a powerful Indian confederacy. This confederacy began to concern government authorities especially when the militant Creeks (known as the Red Sticks because they carried bright red war clubs) joined and began to massacre the settlers.

General William Henry Harrison was at that time the governor of the Indiana Territory (he later became president). While

Tecumseh was recruiting more Indian tribes, Harrison's army defeated fighters led by "the Prophet" at the Tippecanoe River. This victory was later used in his presidential campaign ("Tippecanoe and Tyler too").

American settlers as well as some Indian tribes attempted to massacre the Creeks in the south. When this attempt failed, they retreated to Fort Mims. The Creeks took the fort and murdered over five hundred men, women, and children and took away two hundred fifty scalps on poles.[{9}](#)

At this point, Major-General Andrew Jackson was told to take his troops south and avenge the disaster. Those who joined him included David Crockett and Samuel Houston. Two months after the massacre, Jackson surrounded an Indian village and sent in his men to destroy it. David Crockett said: "We shot them like dogs."[{10}](#)

A week later, Jackson won a pitched battle at Talladega, attacking a thousand Creeks and killing three hundred of them. He then moved against the Creeks at Horseshoe Bend. When the Indians would not surrender, they were slain. Over five hundred were killed within the fort and another three hundred drowned trying to escape in the river. Shortly after this decisive battle, the remaining Creeks surrendered.

Trail of Tears

The Cherokee called Georgia home, and they were an advanced Indian civilization. Their national council went back to 1792 and had a written legal code since 1808. They had a representative form of government (with eight congressional districts). But the settlers moving into the state continued to take their land.

When Andrew Jackson was elected president in 1828, it sealed the fate of the Indians. "In his inaugural address he insisted that the integrity of the state of Georgia, and the

Constitution of the United States, came before Indian interests, however meritorious.”[\[11\]](#)

In 1830, Congress passed the “Indian Removal Act.” This act forced Indians who were organized tribally and living east of the Mississippi River to move west to Indian Territory. It also authorized the president to use force if necessary. Many Americans were against the act, including Tennessee Congressman Davy Crockett. It passed anyway and was quickly signed by President Jackson.

The Indian tribes most affected by the act were the so-called “civilized tribes” that had adopted many of the ways of the white settlers (Choctaw, Chickasaw, Creek, Seminole, and Cherokee). The Cherokees had actually formed an independent Cherokee Nation.

Cherokee leader John Ross went to Washington to ask the Supreme Court to rule in favor of his people and allow them to keep their land. In 1832, Chief Justice John Marshall and the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that the Cherokee Nation was not subject to the laws of the United States and therefore had a right to their land. The Cherokee would have to agree to removal in a treaty (which would also have to be ratified by the Senate).

A treaty with one of the Cherokee leaders gave Jackson the legal document he needed to remove the Indians. The U.S. Senate ratified the treaty by one vote over the objections of such leaders as Daniel Webster and Henry Clay.

In one of the saddest chapters in American history, the Indians were taken from their land, herded into makeshift forts, and forced to march a thousand miles. Often there was not enough food or shelter. Four thousand Cherokees died on the march to Oklahoma. This forced removal has been called “the Trail of Tears.”

The Seminole resisted this forced march. Their leader Osceola

fought the U.S. Army in the swamps of Florida with great success. However, when the Seminoles raised the white flag in truce, the U.S. Army seized Osceola. He died in prison a year later.

Those who made it to Oklahoma did not fare much better. Although Oklahoma was Indian Territory, settlers began to show interest in the land. So the government began to push Indians onto smaller and smaller reservations. The final blow came with the Homestead Act of 1862 which gave one hundred sixty acres to anyone who paid a ten-dollar filing fee and agreed to improve the land for five years.

Indian Wars in the West

Until the 1860s, the Plains Indians were not significantly affected by the white man. But the advance of the settlers and the transcontinental railroad had a devastating impact on their way of life. The railroads cut the Great Plains in half so that the west was no longer the place where the buffalo roam. Prospectors ventured onto Indians lands seeking valuable minerals. So it was inevitable that war would break out. Between 1869 and 1878, over two hundred pitched battles took place primarily with the Sioux, Apache, Comanche, and Cheyenne.

The impact of an endless stream of settlers had the effect of forcing the Plains Indians onto smaller and smaller reservations. Even though the government signed various treaties with the Indians, they were almost always broken. Approximately three hundred seventy treaties were signed from 1778 to 1871 while an estimated eighty or ninety agreements were also entered into between 1871 and 1906.[\[12\]](#)

One of the most famous Indian battles was "Custer's Last Stand." Sioux and Cheyenne warriors, led by Crazy Horse and Sitting Bull, fought against Lieutenant Colonel George

Armstrong Custer. The Battle of Little Big Horn actually wasn't much of a battle. Custer was ordered to observe a large Sioux camp. But he decided to attack even though he was warned they might be greatly outnumbered. It turns out they were outnumbered ten to one. Within an hour, Custer and all his men were dead.

Custer's defeat angered many Americans, so the government fought even more aggressively against the Indians. Many historians believe that the anger generated by "Custer's Last Stand" led to the slaughter of Sioux men, women, and children at Wounded Knee in 1890. After the death of Sitting Bull, a band of Sioux fled into the badlands, where they were captured by the 7th Cavalry. The Sioux were ordered disarmed, but an Indian fired a gun and wounded an officer. The U.S. troops opened fire, and within minutes almost two hundred men, women, and children were killed.

The Apache leader Geronimo led many successful attacks against the army. By 1877, the Apache had been forced onto reservations. But on two separate occasions, Geronimo planned escapes and led resistance efforts from mountain camps in Mexico. He finally surrendered in 1886.

Chief Joseph of the Nez Percé in the Northwest built friendships with trappers and traders since the first expedition by Lewis and Clark. He refused to sign treaties with the government that would give up their homeland. Eventually fighting broke out, so Chief Joseph led his people to Canada. Unfortunately, they were surrounded by soldiers just forty miles from Canada. Chief Joseph died at a reservation in Washington State in 1904.

This is the sad and tragic story of the American Indian in American history. We cannot change our history, and we should not rewrite our history. Neither should we ignore the history of the American Indian in the United States.

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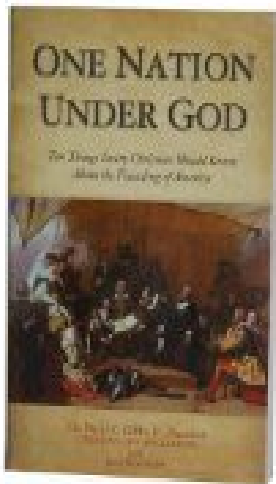
One Nation Under God

The Christian influence in American history has been lost. Kerby Anderson provides an overview of nearly 160 years of our nation's founding history by discussing Ten Things Every Christian Should Know About the Founding of America.



This article is also available in [Spanish](#).

Founders of America: Part One



G.K. Chesterton once said that “America is the only nation in the world that is founded on a creed. That creed is set forth with dogmatic and even theological lucidity in the Declaration of Independence.”[\[1\]](#) We are going to document the origins of this country by looking at a book entitled *One Nation Under God: Ten Things Every Christian Should Know About the Founding of America*.[\[2\]](#)

The first thing every Christian should know is that “Christopher Columbus was motivated by his Christian faith to sail to the New World.” One example of this can be found in his writings after he discovered this new land. He wrote, “Therefore let the king and queen, the princes and their most fortunate kingdoms, and all other countries of Christendom give thanks to our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, who has bestowed upon us so great a victory and gift. Let religious processions be solemnized; let sacred festivals be given; let the churches be covered with festive garlands. Let Christ rejoice on earth, as he rejoices in heaven, when he foresees coming to salvation so many souls of people hitherto lost.”[\[3\]](#)

The second thing every Christian should know is “The Pilgrims clearly stated that they came to the New World to glorify God and to advance the Christian faith.” It could easily be said that America began with the words, “In the name of God. Amen.” Those were the first words of our nation’s first self-governing document—the Mayflower Compact.

The Pilgrims were Bible-believers who refused to conform to the heretical state Church of England and eventually came to America. Their leader, William Bradford, said “A great hope and inward zeal they had of laying some good foundation, or at least to make some way thereunto, for the propagating and advancing the gospel of the kingdom of Christ in those remote parts of the world; yea, though they should be but even as stepping stones unto others for the performing of so great a work.”[\[4\]](#)

Many scholars believe that the initial agreement for self-government, found in the Mayflower Compact, became the cornerstone of the U.S. Constitution. This agreement for self-government, signed on November 11, 1620, created a new government in which they agreed to “covenant and combine” themselves together into a “Body Politick.”

British historian Paul Johnson said, “It is an amazing document What was remarkable about this particular contract was that it was not between a servant and a master, or a people and a king, but between a group of like-minded individuals and each other, with God as a witness and symbolic co-signatory.”[\[5\]](#)

Founders of America: Part Two

The third thing every Christian should know is “The Puritans created Bible-based commonwealths in order to practice a representative government that was modeled on their church covenants.” Both the Pilgrims and the Puritans disagreed with many things about the Church of England in their day. But the Pilgrims felt that reforming the church was a hopeless endeavor. They were led to separate themselves from the official church and were often labeled “Separatists.” The Puritans, on the other hand, wanted to reform the Church of England from within. They argued from within for purity of the church. Hence, the name *Puritans*.

At that time, there had been no written constitution in England. The British common law was a mostly oral tradition, articulated as necessary in various written court decisions. The Puritans determined to anchor their liberties on the written page, a tradition taken from the Bible. They created the Body of Liberties which were established on the belief that Christ's rule is not only given for the church, but also for the state. It contained principles found in the Bible, specifically ninety-eight separate protections of individual rights, including due process of law, trial by a jury of peers, and prohibitions against cruel and unusual punishment.

The fourth thing every Christian should know is that "This nation was founded as a sanctuary for religious dissidents." Roger Williams questioned many of the Puritan laws in Massachusetts, especially the right of magistrates to punish Sabbath-breakers. After he left Massachusetts and founded Rhode Island, he became the first to formulate the concept of "separation of church and state" in America.

Williams said, "The civil magistrate may not intermeddle even to stop a church from apostasy and heresy."[\[6\]](#) In the 1643 charter for Rhode Island and in all its subsequent charters, Roger Williams established the idea that the state should not enforce religious opinion.

Another dissident was the Quaker William Penn. He was the main author of the founding governmental document for the land that came to be known as Pennsylvania. This document was called *The Concessions*, and dealt with not only government matters but was also concerned with social, philosophical, scientific, and political matters. By 1680, *The Concessions* had 150 signers, and in the Quaker spirit, this group effort provided for far-reaching liberties never before seen in Anglo-Saxon law.

Paul Johnson said that at the time of America's founding, Philadelphia was "the cultural capital of America." He also points out: "It can be argued, indeed, that Quaker

Pennsylvania was the key state in American history. It was the last great flowering of Puritan political innovation, around its great city of brotherly love.”{7}

Education and Religion in America

The fifth thing every Christian should know is that “The education of the settlers and founders of America was uniquely Christian and Bible-based.” Education was very important to the founders of this country. One of the laws in Puritan New England was the Old Deluder Act. It was called that because it was intended to defeat Satan, the Old Deluder, who had used illiteracy in the Old World to keep people from reading the Word of God. The New England Primer was used to teach colonial children to read and included the Lord’s Prayer, the Apostle’s Creed, and the text of many hymns and prayers.

We can also see the importance of education in the rules of many of the first colleges. The Laws and Statutes of Harvard College in 1643 said: “Let every student be plainly instructed and earnestly pressed to consider well the main end of his life and studies is *to know God and Jesus Christ which is eternal life* (John 17:3).”{8}

Yale College listed two requirements in its 1745 charter: “All scholars shall live religious, godly, and blameless lives according to the rules of God’s Word, diligently reading the Holy Scriptures, the fountain of light and truth; and constantly attend upon all the duties of religion, both in public and secret.”{9}

Reverend John Witherspoon was the only active minister who signed the Declaration of Independence. Constitutional scholar John Eidsmoe says, “John Witherspoon is best described as the man who shaped the men who shaped America. Although he did not attend the Constitutional Convention, his influence was multiplied many times over by those who spoke as well as by

what was said.”{10}

New Jersey elected John Witherspoon to the Continental Congress that drafted the Declaration of Independence. When Congress called for a national day of fasting and prayer on May 17, 1776, John Witherspoon was called upon to preach the sermon. His topic was “The Dominion of Providence over the Affairs of Men.”

The sixth thing every Christian should know is that “A religious revival was the key factor in uniting the separate pre- Revolutionary War colonies.”

Paul Johnson, author of *A History of the American People*, reports that the Great Awakening may have touched as many as three out of four American colonists.{11} He also points out that this Great Awakening “sounded the death-knell of British colonialism.”{12}

As John Adams was to put it afterwards, “The Revolution was effected before the War commenced. The Revolution was in the mind and hearts of the people: and change in their religious sentiments of their duties and obligations.”

Paul Johnson believes that “The Revolution could not have taken place without this religious background. The essential difference between the American Revolution and the French Revolution is that the American Revolution, in its origins, was a religious event, whereas the French Revolution was an anti-religious event.”{13}

Clergy and Biblical Christianity

The seventh thing every Christian should know is that “Many of the clergy in the American colonies, members of the Black Regiment, preached liberty.” Much of this took place in so-called “Election Sermons” of Massachusetts, Connecticut, New Hampshire, and Vermont. Often the ministers spoke on the subject of civil government in a serious and instructive

manner. The sermon was then printed so that every representative had a copy for himself, and so that every minister of the town could have a copy.

John Adams observed, "The Philadelphia ministers thunder and lighten every Sabbath' against George III's despotism."[\[14\]](#) And in speaking of his native Virginia, Thomas Jefferson observed that "pulpit oratory ran like a shock of electricity through the whole colony."[\[15\]](#)

Some of the most influential preachers include John Witherspoon, Jonathan Mayhew, Samuel West, and Reverend John Peter Muhlenberg. Reverend Mayhew, for example, preached a message entitled "Concerning Unlimited Submission to the Higher Powers, to the Council and House of Representatives in Colonial New England." He said, "It is hoped that but few will think the subject of it an improper one to be discoursed on in the pulpit, under a notion that this is preaching politics, instead of Christ. However, to remove all prejudices of this sort, I beg it may be remembered that all Scripture is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness.' Why, then, should not those parts of Scripture which related to civil government be examined and explained from the desk, as well as others?"[\[16\]](#)

The eighth thing every Christian should know is that "Biblical Christianity was the driving force behind the key leaders of the American Revolution."

In 1772, Samuel Adams created a "Committee of Correspondence" in Boston, in order to keep in touch with his fellow Americans up and down the coast. Historian George Bancroft called Sam Adams, "the last of the Puritans."[\[17\]](#) His biographer, John C. Miller, says that Samuel Adams cannot be understood without considering the lasting impact Whitefield's preaching at Harvard during the Great Awakening had on him.[\[18\]](#) Adams had been telling his countrymen for years that America had to take her stand against tyranny. He regarded individual freedom as

“the law of the Creator” and a Christian right documented in the New Testament.[\[19\]](#) As the Declaration was being signed, Sam Adams said, “We have this day restored the Sovereign to Whom all men ought to be obedient. He reigns in heaven and from the rising to the setting of the sun, let His kingdom come.”

The Founding Documents

The ninth thing every Christian should know is that “Christianity played a significant role in the development of our nation’s birth certificate, the Declaration of Independence.” For example, the Presbyterian Elders of North Carolina drafted the Mecklenburg Declaration in May 1775 under the direction of Elder Ephraim Brevard (a graduate of Princeton). One scholar says “In correcting his first draft of the Declaration it can be seen, in at least a few places, that Jefferson has erased the original words and inserted those which are first found in the Mecklenburg Declaration. No one can doubt that Jefferson had Brevard’s resolutions before him when he was writing his immortal Declaration.”[\[20\]](#)

The relationship between the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution is crucial. The Declaration is the “why” of American government, while the Constitution is the “how.”

Another influence on the Declaration was George Mason’s “Virginia Declaration of Rights.” Notice how similar it sounds to the Declaration: “That 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; namely, the enjoyment of life and liberty, with the means of acquiring and possessing property, and pursuing and obtaining happiness and safety.”

Paul Johnson says, “There is no question that the Declaration of Independence was, to those who signed it, a religious as

well as secular act, and that the Revolutionary War had the approbation of divine providence. They had won it with God's blessing and afterwards, they drew up their framework of government with God's blessing, just as in the seventeenth century the colonists had drawn up their Compacts and Charters and Orders and Instruments, with God peering over their shoulders." [\[21\]](#)

The tenth thing every Christian should know is that "The Biblical understanding of the sinfulness of man was the guiding principle behind the United States Constitution." John Eidsmoe says, "Although Witherspoon derived the concept of separation of powers from other sources, such as Montesquieu, checks and balances seem to have been his own unique contribution to the foundation of U.S. Government." [\[22\]](#) He adds, "One thing is certain: the Christian religion, particularly Rev. Witherspoon's Calvinism, which emphasized the fallen nature of man, influenced Madison's view of law and government." [\[23\]](#)

Notes

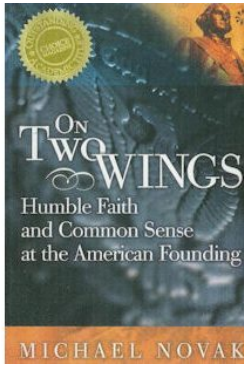
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On Two Wings

Introduction



Michael Novak has been and continues to be one of the most influential intellectuals of our time. Author of more than thirty books, he has been a professor at Harvard, Stanford, and Notre Dame and was awarded the \$1 million Templeton Prize for Progress in Religion.

So it is significant that his recent book, *On Two Wings*, documents the Judeo-Christian foundations of this country and disputes the teaching that the American Founders were secular Enlightenment rationalists. Instead, he persuasively argues that they were the creators of a unique American blend of biblical faith, practical reason, and human liberty.

In his preface, Michael Novak says, "Although I have wanted to write this book for some forty years, my own ignorance stood in the way. It took me a long time, time spent searching up many byways and neglected paths, and fighting through a great deal of conventional (but mistaken) wisdom, to learn how many erroneous perceptions I had unconsciously drunk in from public discussion."[1](#)

Novak believes that "most of us grow up these days remarkably ignorant of the hundred men most responsible for leading this country into a War for Independence and writing our nation's Constitution."[2](#)

The way American history has been told for the last century is incomplete. Secular historians have "cut off one of the two wings by which the American eagle flies." The founding generation established a compact with the God of Israel "and

relied upon this belief. Their faith is an *indispensable* part of their story.”[\[3\]](#)

Historical research by a number of scholars documents the significant influence of the Bible on the founders. Two decades ago, Constitutional scholars and political historians (including one of my professors at Georgetown University) assembled 15,000 writings from the Founding Era. They counted 3154 citations in these writings. They found that the two political philosophers most often quoted were Montesquieu and Blackstone. But surprisingly, the reference most quoted was the Bible. It was quoted 34 percent of the time. This was nearly four times as often as Montesquieu or Blackstone and 12 times more often than John Locke.

While secular historians point to Locke as the source of the ideas embodied in Thomas Jefferson’s Declaration of Independence, they usually fail to note the older influence of other authors and the Bible. “Before Locke was even born, the Pilgrims believed in the consent of the governed, social compacts, the dignity of every child of God, and political equality.”[\[4\]](#) By forcing a secular interpretation onto America’s founding history, these secular historians ignore the second wing by which the American eagle took flight.

Philosophical Assumptions of the Founders of this Country

First, the Bible was the one book that literate Americans in the 18th century could be expected to know well. Biblical imagery was a central part of American life. For example, Thomas Jefferson suggested as a design for the Seal of the United States a representation of the children of Israel in the wilderness, led by a cloud by day and pillar of fire by night.

Second, the founders believed that time “was created for the *unfolding of human liberty*, for human emancipation. This

purpose requires humans to choose for or against building cities worthy of the ideals God sets before them: liberty, justice, equality, self-government, and brotherhood.”{5}

The first paragraph of *The Federalist* describes this important moment with destiny:

It seems to have been reserved to the people of this country, by their conduct and example, to decide the important question, whether societies of men are really capable or not of establishing good government from reflection and choice, or whether they are forever destined to depend for their political constitutions on accident and force.{6}

The founders believed that they could learn from history and put together piece by piece what they called “an improved science of politics.” History, they believed, was a record of progress (or decline) measured against God’s standards and learned from personal and historical experience.

Third, the founders also held that everything in creation was intelligible and thus discernible through reason and rational evaluation. They also believed that God was The Creator and thus gave us life and liberty. Thomas Jefferson said, “The God Who gave us life gave us liberty at the same time.”

Novak concludes that without this philosophical foundation, “the founding generation of Americans would have had little heart for the War of Independence. They would have had no ground for believing that their seemingly unlawful rebellion actually fulfilled the will of God – and suited the laws of nature and nature’s God. Consider the jeopardy in which their rebellion placed them: When they signed the Declaration, they were committing treason in the King’s eyes. If their frail efforts failed, their flagrant betrayal of the solemn oaths of loyalty they had sworn to their King doomed them to a public hanging. Before future generations, their children would be disgraced. To still their trembling, they pled their case

before a greater and wholly undeceivable Judge, appealing to the Supreme Judge of the world for the Rectitude of our Intentions.”[\[7\]](#)

Seven Events in the Founding of this Country

The first event was the first act of the First Continental Congress in September 1774. When the delegates gathered in Philadelphia, their purpose was to remind King George of the rights due them as Englishmen. But as they gathered, news arrived that Charlestown had been raked by cannon shot while red-coated landing parties surged through its streets.

The first motion of the Congress proposed a public prayer. Some of the delegates spoke against the motion because, they argued, Americans were so divided in religious sentiments (Episcopalians, Quakers, Anabaptists, Presbyterians, Congregationalists). Sam Adams arose to say he was no bigot and could hear the prayer from any gentleman of piety and virtue. He proposed that Reverend Duch had earned that character.

The next day, a white-haired Episcopal clergyman dressed in his pontificals pronounced the first official prayer before the Continental Congress. Before this priest knelt men like Washington, Henry, Randolph, Rutledge, Lee, and Jay. The emotion in the room was palpable. John Adams wrote to his wife Abigail that he “had never heard a better prayer, or one so well pronounced.” He went on to say that it was “enough to melt a heart of stone. I saw tears gush into the eyes of the old, grave pacific Quakers of Philadelphia.”[\[8\]](#)

The second event was the sermon by John Witherspoon of Princeton on May 17, 1776. In this pivotal sermon, Witherspoon who had opposed the rebellion went over to the side of independence. His influence cannot be overstated. He was James Madison’s teacher and he is credited with having taught one

vice-president, twelve members of the Continental Congress, five delegates to the Constitutional Convention, forty-nine U.S. representatives, twenty-eight U.S. Senators, three Supreme Court justices, and scores of officers in the Continental Army. His sermons were printed in over 500 Presbyterian churches throughout the colonies.

His message centered on the doctrine of divine providence. He argued that even things that seem harmful and destructive may be turned to the advantage of the patriots. Even the enemies of law and morality cannot escape being the instruments of Providence. Witherspoon argued that liberty is God's gift and all of creation has been contrived so that out of darkness and despair, freedom will come to fruition.

Michael Novak concludes that, "During the years 1770-1776, the fires of revolution were lit by Protestant divines aflame with the dignity of human conscience. 'To the Pulpit, the Puritan Pulpit,' wrote John Wingate Thornton, 'We owe the moral force which won our independence.'" [\[9\]](#)

The third event was the writing of the Declaration of Independence. Its very form was that of a traditional American prayer, similar to the Mayflower Compact. In essence, it was only the latest in a long series of local and regional covenants which put all governmental bodies on notice by establishing a national compact.

The fifty-six signers of the Declaration were mostly Christian and represented mostly Christian people. The four names that these signers gave to God were: Lawgiver (as in "Laws of Nature and Nature's God"), Creator ("endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights"), Judge ("appealing to the Supreme Judge of the World for the Rectitude of our Intentions"), and Providence ("with a firm Reliance on the Protection of divine Providence").

Novak points out that "Three of these names (Creator, Judge,

Providence) unambiguously derive from Judaism and came to America via Protestant Christianity. The fourth name for God, 'Lawgiver,' could be considered Greek or Roman as well as Hebraic. But Richard Hooker showed that long tradition had put 'Lawgiver,' too, in a Biblical context."[\[10\]](#)

The fourth event was a national day of prayer. Only five months after the Declaration, "the pinch and suffering of war and a poor harvest seriously imperiled morale." Congress set aside December 11, 1776 as a Day of Fasting and Repentance.

The fifth event occurred when George Washington became commander of the amateurs who became the Continental Army. He knew he had to prepare them for the adversity to come. "To stand with swollen chests in a straight line, beneath snapping flags, to the music of fife and drums is one thing; to hold your place when the British musketballs roar toward you like a wall of blazing lead, and all around you the flesh of screaming friends and brothers is shredded, is another."[\[11\]](#)

Washington knew there would be bitter winters and hot summers with no pay and little food. Often the soldiers would have to frequently retreat rather than face frontal combat from the enemy. He knew his only hope was to fashion a godly corps whose faith was placed in the Creator not battlefield victories. So Washington gave orders that each day begin with formal prayer, to be led by officers of each unit. He also ordered that officers of every unit "to procure Chaplains according to the decree of the Continental Congress." Washington knew that prayer and spiritual discipline were essential to his army's success.

The sixth event occurred toward the end of the fighting season in late August, 1776. George Washington had assembled 12,000 local militiamen of the Continental Army on Long Island. British Generals Howe, Clinton, Cornwallis, and Percy along with the German Major General von Heister landed a royal detachment twice as large to the rear of the Continental Army.

The British took up positions to march swiftly toward the East River to trap Washington's entire army and put an end to the American insurrection.

Seeing that they might lose everything, Washington put out a call for every available vessel so that he might ferry his troops by cover of night back to Manhattan. All night the men scoured for boats, marched in silence, and rowed. But by dawn, only a fraction had made their escape. The Americans prepared for the worst. As if in answer to their prayers, a heavy fog rolled in and lasted until noon.

By the time the fog lifted, the entire Army escaped. Many gave thanks to God. And Washington and many others considered it one of those "signal interventions" by Divine Providence that saved the army and allowed the revolution to continue.

The seventh event was the establishment of Thanksgiving near the end of the third year of the war. Congress had many reasons to express thanksgiving to God and to seek His continued mercy and assistance. John Witherspoon was called upon to draft a Thanksgiving Day recollection of those events. The Congress urged the nation to "humbly approach the throne of Almighty God" to ask "that he would establish the independence of these United States upon the basis of religion and virtue."

Following the wartime precedent of the Congress, Washington issued his first Thanksgiving Day Proclamation shortly after becoming president in 1789. He reminded the nation of God's protection and provision in the Battle of Long Island all the way to their victory at Yorktown. Years later Abraham Lincoln, after annual presidential proclamations of Thanksgiving waned, reinstituted a national day of Thanksgiving on November 26, 1863 and the tradition has continued ever since.

Conclusion

Michael Novak has provided Americans with a great service in documenting the Christian influence in the founding of this country. This religious influence is the second wing that tapped into the deepest energies of the human spirit and propelled this nation forward through difficult times and great challenges.

It is also fitting that we remember these important religious concepts and their influence on our nation. If we take seriously the words of George Washington in his Farewell Address to the Nation, then our ignorance of our nation's past may yet be our destruction. That is why we must study our history and teach it correctly to the next generation so we may keep the torch of freedom alive for generations to come.

Notes

1. Michael Novak, *On Two Wings: Humble Faith and Common Sense at the American Founding* (San Francisco: Encounter, 2002), 1.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid., 5.
4. Ibid., 6-7.
5. Ibid., 8-9.
6. *The Federalist Papers*, Number 1.
7. Novak, 12.
8. William Federer, ed. *America's God and Country* (Coppell: TX: FAME, 1994), 137.
9. Novak, 17.
10. Ibid., 17-18.

Thanksgiving Roots

We live in an uncertain moment in history when everyone is looking for “Roots.” November, especially, is a time to reflect upon family and traditions. Curiously, we Christians tend to be strangers to what is best in our own tradition. I refer to the Puritans, the historic source of our Thanksgiving heritage and much of what is still good about America.

We can still feel today the impact and the echoes of this robust community upon our own lives—in family, in work, in education, in economics, in worship, and in national destiny. But let them speak for themselves:

On the God-Centered Life: “I was now grown familiar with the Lord Jesus Christ; he would oft tell me he loved me. I did not doubt to believe him; if I went abroad, he went with me, when I returned he came home with me. I talked with him upon my way, he lay down with me, and usually I did awake with him: and so sweet was his love to me, as I desired nothing but him in heaven or earth.” —John Winthrop.

On the Sacred and the Secular: “Not only my spiritual life, but even my civil life in this world, all the life I live, is by the faith of the Son of God: he exempts no life from the agency of faith.” —John Cotton.

On God and the Commonplace: “Have you forgot. . .the milkhouse, the stable, the barn and the like, where God did

visit your soul?" –John Bunyan.

On Spiritual Vitality: "Therefore the temper of the true professor is. . . to advance his religion. . . In the cause of Christ, in the course of religion, he must be fiery and fervent." –Richard Sibbes.

On the Centrality of the Bible: "The word of God must be our rule and square whereby we are to frame and fashion all our actions; and according to the direction received thence, we must do the things we do, or leave them undone." –William Perkins.

On the Family: "The great care of my godly parents was to bring me up in the nurture and the admonition of the Lord: whence I was kept from many visible outbreakings of sin which else I had been guilty of: and whence it was that I had many good impressions of the Spirit of God upon me, even from my infancy." –Cotton Mather.

The Puritans viewed themselves as pilgrims on a journey to God and heaven. That journey led through this world and was not an escape from it. The Puritans saw themselves as participants in a great spiritual battle between good and evil, God and Satan. As warfaring and wayfaring Christians, they were assured of victory because they were on God's side.

Dartmouth, Harvard, Yale, Princeton and many other colonial universities were originally founded for the express purpose of propagating these principles. Perhaps these universities would still be for us objects of thanksgiving rather than uneasiness if the substance of Christian thought which characterized their historic beginnings was still primary in their philosophies and curricula.

But there are still glimmers here and there. And herein is our great task and challenge for the new century: to rekindle the fires and recapture the spirit of the Puritan lifestyle which was fed by the spiritual springs of new life in Christ. These

are roots worth searching for this Thanksgiving. May the Lord find each of us diligently seeking to find and emulate them.

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