

Worldview ~ Part 6

History

by Steve & Carol Ryerson

As Francis Wayland, president of Brown College (now Brown University) from 1827 to 1855, wrote in his classic book *The Elements of Moral Science*: “God has rendered the blessing of freedom inseparable from moral restraint in the individual; and hence it is vain for a people to expect to be free unless they are first willing to be virtuous. It is on this point that the question of the permanency of the present form of government of the United States turns.” (Quoted by Michael Smith, President of HSLDA, *Washington Times*, 5-23-05)

For the Biblical thinker, history is the story of God’s will being worked out in the affairs of men. It is the story of man’s rebellion against God and God’s grace reaching out to man. It is also the story of repeated warnings about the coming Judgement Day.

When President Wayland wrote about the connection between morality and government, he was explaining the practical application of principles that God has created. Because of the sin that is rampant in the heart of man, societies cannot permit freedom unless there is restraint on morality and behavior. Where does restraint come from? And come, it must. Will it come from the outside in the form of strong monarchs or dictators, or will it come from the inside in the form of commitment to God? Society quickly becomes unstable when there is freedom and moral license at the same time. Our founding fathers understood this and told us that our government was not suited for a people without godly character.

When individuals turn from God, their families are affected. When families do not function well, children are not trained to serve God; thus, those children do not function well as adults. More and more of society’s resources must be expended on educational remediation, law enforcement, drug and alcohol rehabilitation services, and counseling. In our humanistic culture, we speak of people having a variety of diseases and syndromes that afflict them. The root of the situation, however, is that we are not submitted to God.

A very important question is, “Can we trust the Bible?” Part of the trustworthiness is centered in who the writers were. Were they eyewitnesses or were they people who lived many years after the actual events and wrote down oral traditions or myths? Consider the testimony of two men as quoted by Dr. David Noel in *Thinking Like a Christian*, page 148. The first was a leading 20th century archaeologist, the second a major author and confirmed atheist: “In my opinion, every book of the New Testament was written by a baptized Jew between the forties and the eighties of the first century (very probably sometime between about A.D. 50 and 75).” (William F. Albright) Also: “...the four gospels...were certainly in existence a few decades after [Christ’s] death.” (H.G. Wells)

The next question is commonly brought up in conversations by people who have not studied much about the history of the Bible, but it is easy to understand why they say it. It goes something like this: The Bible is an ancient book. It’s been recopied hundreds of times. Think of all the mistakes that just keep piling up over the years. The originals probably said a lot of things we haven’t even heard of.

That line of criticism makes sense until you start doing some research. The Bible has hundreds of ancient manuscripts to substantiate it ~ far more than any of the Greek or Roman literary works. Even writings as recent as Shakespeare’s (A.D. 1500’s) do not have as much old documentary

corroboration as the Bible. There is a very high level of agreement among those manuscripts.

A famous discovery in a Qumran Cave near the Dead Sea in 1947 yielded many additional very ancient manuscripts. One of them was a substantial part of the book of Isaiah that was 1,000 years older than anything previously seen by modern scholars. Gleason Archer Jr. Explains further: “...[it] proved to be word for word identical with our standard Hebrew Bible in more than 95 percent of the text. The 5 percent of variation consisted chiefly of obvious slips of the pen and variations in spelling.” (Thinking Like a Christian, page 148)

The Jewish historian Josephus writing about A.D. 93 referred to Jesus at least twice and corroborated some of the Biblical account, naming Annas as the high priest, for example (Antiquities XX.ix.1) The Roman historian Tacitus, writing about A.D. 112 made reference to Christ's being “...put to death by Pontius Pilate, procurator of Judea in the reign of Tiberius...” (Thinking Like a Christian, page 150).

The central fact of history that is most important to a Christian is the life of Jesus Christ. The Bible purports that He would come, that He did come, that He did teach the precepts of His own Kingdom, that He did give His life for His people, and that He rose from the dead. ALL events in history, for the Biblical thinker, are in some way connected to these events.

When people with a Christian worldview are looking at the events of history such as wars, political campaigns, lives of famous people, major inventions, and ground-breaking court decisions, they judge the significance of these developments by the standards that Jesus Christ modeled.

In looking at wars, for example, the Christian would be asking questions such as “Did greed, murder, hate, and selfishness have anything to do with the start of this war?” In looking at political campaigns, the Biblical thinker would be looking at the difference between statesmanship and raw, power-grabbing politics. In other words, whose interest do politicians have at heart? In looking at the lives of famous people, we would look at the moral values they promoted through their actions, not just the specific actions that made them famous. Being famous is not inherently good, neither is it reason to excuse immoral or boorish behavior. In the case of major inventions, we would look at the impact the invention had on society. If the device is a better tool (McCormick's reaper, personal computer, etc.), then the question must expand to look at what people are actually doing with the tool. The tool itself most likely is morally neutral, but the actions taken with the tool may not be. In the case of major court decisions, we would look at the implications of the decisions for family life, church/state relations, and Biblically related legal principles.

As Christians study history, they see purpose in life and reasons to commit themselves to godly principles. They see that God has given His people assurance of His presence in the past. They see that He at times has raised up enemies to bring judgement upon His people when they have not been faithful. They see that God works in the circumstances of everyday life. They see that life is made up not only of a series of people's own choices and the consequences of those choices, but also the actions that God is taking for their own good and for the good of society around them. Because of these observations and the teachings of the Scripture that they should trust God in all circumstances, they are prepared to face life's most difficult challenges. Christians see that the past record of God's faithfulness is the key to their secure future.

Marxists and humanists (since they are both evolutionary) see history as an unfolding series of accidents combined with the decisions that people make. Marxists emphasize the conflict between classes of people who each strive to get their way. Humanists tend to see the innovations of experts or researchers as being the keys to understanding why events in human history unfold the way they do. In both cases, God is nowhere to be found, and there is little reason to believe that the future will be much better.

Biblical thinkers are not afraid to consider whether the hand of God has played a key role in

particular events in history. That affects the way that they relate those events. Consider the following story that appeared commonly in U.S. history books through the 1940's but was removed with the greater and greater secularization of our society.

This concerns a series of events in the life of George Washington during the French and Indian War about 20 years before the American War for Independence when he was 23 years old. There was a dispute between Britain and France over the territories along the Ohio and Mississippi rivers. Both countries claimed the same lands. The Indians sided with the French and the Colonists sided with the British since they were still very much a part of the Empire. With the failure of diplomacy, the English king sent 2,300 veteran troops to America under General Edward Braddock to rout the French. These troops were battle-hardened veterans.

When these troops landed in Virginia they were met by Colonel George Washington and 100 of his buckskins. The Colonel consulted with General Braddock and his officers to form a plan. Colonel Washington, General Braddock and 1,300 of the soldiers marched north to remove the French from Fort DuQuesne (pronounced "doo-kane"), where Pittsburgh is today. On July 9, 1755 about seven miles from the fort, while marching through a lightly wooded ravine, the troops were ambushed. The French and Indians opened fire on them from both sides.

These battle-hardened British soldiers did not panic; they reacted just as their training and experience taught them. The problem was that they had never fought an enemy who fired from behind trees, under rocks and from the tops of hills. They had been used to the wars of Europe where gentlemen formed lines opposite each other on the prearranged open battlefield, then fired on command.

After two hours, 714 British and American troops had been shot compared with 30 French and Indians. There were 86 British and American officers involved that day; at the end of the battle, George Washington was the only one who had not been shot.

After the battle Washington gathered the survivors and retreated to Fort Cumberland in western Maryland, arriving there on July 17th. The next day the Colonel wrote a letter to his family explaining that he had found four bullet holes in his jacket, but no marks on himself. Several horses had been shot from under him but he had not been harmed. He wrote: "By the all powerful dispensations of Providence, I have been protected beyond all human probability or expectation." (America's Godly Heritage by David Barton, page 4)

The most interesting part of the story however doesn't occur for another fifteen years. In 1770, a time of peace, George Washington and Dr. James Craik, a close friend, returned to those same Pennsylvania woods. An old Indian chief heard that Washington was there and traveled some distance to meet him. The two former foes met face-to-face over a council fire. The chief told the former militia colonel and his friend that he had been a leader on the battlefield that day in 1755. He had instructed his braves to single out the officers and kill them. The old chief said that he personally shot at Washington 17 times with no visible effect. Then, becoming convinced that the white leader was under the protection of the Great Spirit, the chief told his braves to stop firing at him.

The chief told Washington on that day in 1770, "I have traveled a long and weary path that I might see the young warrior of the great battle. ...I am come to pay homage to the man who is the particular favorite of Heaven, and who can never die in battle."

When the Christian reads stories like this, his heart jumps with excitement over the ways in which God steps into the events of the day to accomplish His will. Should stories like this be checked for accuracy? Yes. Should they be looked at in their historical context? Yes. Once confirmed to the best of our ability, they should be seen as the handiwork of a real God who governs the lives of real people, and Who wants to prepare us for a real Judgement Day that is coming. When we believe the Word of God and see its consistency, it is completely consistent for us to look for examples of His

hand at work in the events of our day. Seeing history as His-story will lead us to view our own lives very differently from the perspective that would say that our lives can be traced back to an accident.