

"If you love the Forth of July, hug a Presbyterian!"

This article, involving several different elements, is offered as a companion (or a stand alone for that matter) to the sermon I have planned and prepared for worship this Sunday, July 5th, 2020. What follows in italics came to me this morning with a heading and opening the same as the title of this article via Messenger from a friend and former seminary student this morning (July 3rd, 2020). From my research, and knowledge otherwise, it seems trustworthy and factually true. I find its arrival this morning anything but coincidental. Rather it is to my mind an affirmation from heaven that the Epistle text and sermon I not only planned for Sunday but in fact finished yesterday (other than some finishing touches) was proper for this Sunday's sermon. As a side note, these things, when they happen, usually make me shake inside with a bit of fear and trepidation for it emphasizes how great God is and how pitifully insufficient and reliant we ALL are on God's mercy and the unforeseeable work and role of the Holy Spirit. Few things in life make me more nervous than even considering preaching the Word of God, let alone doing it. Perhaps this is why Elders are not only reluctant to take up and use what is granted by authority of our denomination's polity but nonetheless strongly urged to study, learn, and grow such that at some point he or she can and will preach in the pastor's absence or when otherwise called upon to do so.

One key argument made from the evidence given is that Presbyterianism was front and center, seemingly foremost, in terms of presence and influence in our nation's quest for freedom from British tyranny. But at least several key subpoints also are made. The quest for freedom, the Revolution itself, was not, strictly speaking, a secular idea, pursuit, and endeavor, but was unapologetically, inescapably, and inextricably religious. And even then, it was not simply "religious" but Christian faith based, in general, and in the Biblical text, specifically. Thus, not only was the argument for separation made by both citizen and politician but that the Revolution itself was built and stood upon Holy Writ, Holy Scripture, Christian Scripture, principles, and values. The quotes which follow were preserved during and since the days they were spoken.

"As those of us in the United States this week celebrate freedom from British governance, consider the many ways that Presbyterianism influenced the decision to enter a war for independence and take up arms against a magistrate: Only a Presbyterian understanding of Romans 13 would allow us to enter a war. The Bible calls for submission to magistrates, but Presbyterians understood the nuances that allowed for rebellion against tyranny. (See James M. Wilson's Establishment and Limits of Civil Government for an exposition of Romans 13.)

"It was psalm singing Presbyterians like Rev. James Caldwell who helped win some battles--when paper for musket wads was unable to be found--Isaac Watts' Hymnbook was used instead. "Give 'em Watts, boys!"

"King George referred to the war for Independence as the "Presbyterian rebellion." The Anglicans were never fans of rebellious presbyterians.

"The prime minister of England, Horace Walpole said in Parliament that "Cousin America has run off with a Presbyterian parson."

"The Revolution of 1776, so far as it was affected by religion, was a Presbyterian measure...so intense, universal, and aggressive were the Presbyterians in their zeal for liberty..." Lorainne Boettner [a Reformed theologian] in "Calvinism in America."

"Historians note: "When Cornwallis was driven back to ultimate defeat and surrender at Yorktown, all of the colonels of the Colonial army but one were Presbyterians elders. More than one-half of all the soldiers and officers of the American Army during the Revolution were Presbyterians."

"One German mercenary soldier wrote home: "Call this war by whatever name you may... it is nothing more or less than a Scots-Irish Presbyterian rebellion."

"British troops, knowing the role of the Presbyterians in the war, turned Presbyterian church buildings into stables--or sometimes choosing to burn them to the ground. Joseph Galloway, former speaker of the house, fled back to England, blaming Presbyterians for the war, calling it a "religious quarrel."

"Harvard historian, Dr. G. Bancroft notes: "The first public voice in America for dissolving all connection with Great Britain came not from the Puritans of New England, the Dutch of New York, nor the Planters of Virginia, but from the Scotch-Irish Presbyterians of the Carolinas." [end quote]

One of the difficulties afflicting Christendom and the church, particularly in America, is the contrived and falsely articulated "separation of church and state". For this and other reasons there are differing opinions within the church as to not simply the relationship between church and government but also the church and civil society. Some take the position that the church should in virtually all ways distance itself from involvement in governmental affairs, especially in the realm of "politics".

Let us consider the term "polity", directly and unavoidably linked and related to "politics" and "political". Polity simply means, in the most basic understanding, "the way an entity does business and governs itself. Every person has a polity by which he or she operates and uses to govern every aspect of his or her life. Every family has a polity by which it does the same. Every church, whether by congregational status and/or affiliation (e.g. our congregation as a member church of the EPC) has a polity. A polity is the corpus whole of an entity's laws and other elements that make up a framework for life, whether expressly written or stated or by virtue of the unwritten but nonetheless real and determinative values and rules that govern thought and activity. There is no entity on the planet that does not have or exist under a polity. This is what not only influences but ultimately determines everything that goes on for a particular entity. That is why, in one instance, virtually everything in life is connected in one fashion or another to "political". This is unavoidably so. It cannot be otherwise.

Let us also consider the nature of Presbyterianism, in particular, and the Reformed Tradition, in general, both and all of which heavily emphasize and ultimately rely upon, God's utter and total sovereignty. Thus, the American Revolution, to the minds of virtually all of our Founders (men and women alike), was not a secular issue, strictly speaking, but at deepest root a religious issue.

Thus, though little to none of this has been taught the latter part of the 20th century, from the founding of our nation to the middle of the 20th century, churches, pastors, and preachers have emphasized not only the Christian-based founding of our nation but have preached freely, and rightfully, from the pulpit in these terms.

It surely has to be acknowledged that there have been and presently are those folks who do not like the idea of the church, pastors, preachers, and sermons involving themselves in "politics". To hold that view is perfectly fine. Our Founders insisted on the right of preservation of conscience and that this is an area in which we properly can agree or disagree (as long as it is agreeably done). Both are equally true. It is just as proper, if Scriptural warrant actually exists and is not thus contrived or wrongly executed, for individuals to hold the propriety of political involvement as inviolable. No one can take that from a preacher, for the Bible not only provides for it but in some limited circumstances also mandates it. The text of Romans 13:1-7 provides just such a proviso and mandate. The reason? Because God himself, via Scripture, not government or magistrate, has granted and in some instances ordered it. This in no way flows from any government or magistrate but from God himself. That Presbyterianism and the various segments of the broader Reformed Tradition hold to the highest level of importance the doctrine of God's sovereignty, there is no area of life outside of the purview of God's control and involvement. This will be seen below in some of the historical documents, quotes, and writings of the Founding era, most particularly that involving a close and penetrating look at Romans 13:1-7 by one of the most influential founders of the time (note: not one of the most famous, but most "influential").

[The following italicized paragraph is compiled from excerpts, and edited slightly for purposes of clarity in terms of present day language and usage, found at <https://www.covenanter.org/reformed/2016/6/2/kllktn8dr1t36cljwb97jjdk1v1ln2> in terms of James Wilsons' famous *Civil Government: An Exposition of Romans 13:1-7*]

"Great injustice is done to this passage by regarding it in any other way than as a whole. The truth is, as has been urged before, no reference is made whatever to bad governments or bad magistrates. Paul puts no case of princes acting contrary to the purpose of their institution. Separate the first and second verses from the context, and they seem to inculcate a blind and complete submission to any authority that may happen to exist. Civil rulers are under imperative obligations to recognize the divine supremacy, and that in their official character. The ruler, or the nation, that claims to be above all other authority, demanding an unquestioning obedience to mere human law-that denies the existence of a "higher law," is in rebellion against God - is not a "servant," in Paul's sense. And more than this, the acknowledgment must be direct, and in express terms - it must be an acknowledgment-among enlightened people - of the supremacy of the Most High; of his laws, as the Scriptures teach them. Further, still, this acknowledgment must be rendered, not to the God of the deist-but to the only true God-the Christian's God-to God in Christ."

Thus, it is clearly demonstrated that the Reformed Tradition insists that the "religious" foundation of our nation's founding was not simply "religious" in nature but ultimately of a particularly Christian nature. Wilson would not let it be put forth, at least in terms of perspective, that the Revolution and the Constitution had a "religious" foundation but a Christological one.

Furthermore, this is precisely the case for the Constitution of the United States of America, including and beginning with the First Amendment.

From my heart to yours.....

Steven