

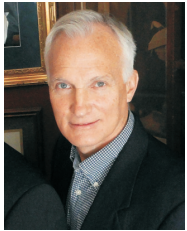
Providential Perspective

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Remembering the Thanksgiving Story

Stephen McDowell, author and President of the Providence Foundation, was recently interviewed by American Family Association for the afaJournal regarding the importance



of parents passing along the true story of Thanksgiving to their children (as opposed to the skewed narrative we encounter in popular media).

afaJournal: What is the greatest threat today to the truth about the Pilgrims and their history?

Stephen: While some books and educators directly lie about the Pilgrims and their primary Christian motive for their starting a new colony in America, the greatest threat to people knowing their true story is what is left out when their story is told. Revisionist history gives a false picture of these devoted Christians. For example, one elementary public school textbook gives 30 pages to present the story of the Pilgrims without once mentioning any reference to religion; thus at the end of their first year they “wanted to give thanks for all they had.” But there is no mention it was God they were thanking.¹

Teaching the Pilgrims without referencing God causes people to think that Christianity was not important to them. Revisionist history is a primary reason for the secularization of America. People are taught our history without mentioning Christianity, or if it is, it is often presented in a negative light, when in reality it is

the most important influence in the birth, growth, and development of the nation.

afaJournal: Why do you think some modern educators wish to revise the history of our nation, particularly the story of Thanksgiving?

Stephen: Most teachers in our schools today are ignorant of the true story of Thanksgiving and the Pilgrims. They never learned it in school and few search out primary source documents so as to get to know the Pilgrims via their own writings. William Bradford, the governor of the Pilgrims for 33 years, wrote their history – *Of Plimoth Plantation* – which is one of the great historical and literary works of all American history, but few teachers have even heard of it, much less



The Pilgrims’ motivation for colonization was clearly stated by their Governor William Bradford: “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 of the Gospel of the kingdom of Christ in those remote parts of the world.”

read it. You only need to read a few pages to see the sincere and deep faith of these men and women who served as “stepping stones” for those who would follow.

Some educators who know the history yet ignore it, either evaluate the Pilgrims through their own secular bias – that is, the Pilgrims may have had a deep faith, but God is a construction of the human mind and consequently is not relevant, so they don’t need to mention God when recounting their story – or they have such a dislike for God that they don’t want to give Him any publicity in history.

afaJournal: Why is it important that we remember and pass on the truth about the Pilgrims?

Stephen: The Pilgrims’ story teaches us many lessons. One, we learn of the great sacrifice they paid to exercise their freedom of religion and to plant the early seeds of our nation. Half of them died the first winter after arriving at Plymouth, and most of the others suffered from sickness and hunger. All were so sick only 6 or 7 could get out of bed, but these toiled night and day to assist their brethren. In the words of Bradford they “fetched them wood, made them fires, dressed them meat, made their beds, washed their loathsome clothes, clothed and unclothed them; in a word, did all the homely and necessary offices for them which queasy stomachs cannot endure to hear named; and this willingly and cheerfully, without any grudging in the least.” Their care for one another reveals their Christian character and practical love, “a rare example and worthy to be remembered.”²



Embarkation of the Pilgrims at Delft Haven, Holland, July 22nd, 1620. This painting in the United States Capitol Rotunda depicts the Pilgrims observing a day of prayer and fasting before departing to America to establish a new colony. William Brewster, who served as their first pastor at Plymouth, holds an open Geneva Bible with the printed words, "The New Testament of Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ." "God With Us" is painted on the upper left-hand sail.

Their motive to spread the Gospel is evident from Bradford's words (which are inscribed on his monument in Plymouth): "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 of the Gospel of the kingdom of Christ in those remote parts of the world."³

The Mayflower Compact, a document they drafted and signed before going ashore, shows their ability to reason biblically to civil affairs: "Having undertaken for the glory of



The Mayflower Compact, signed on board the ship before the Pilgrims went ashore, shows the covenant nature of their government, which is one unique aspect of American polity.

God and advancement of the Christian faith, ... do by these presents solemnly and mutually in the presence of God, and one of another, covenant and combine ourselves together into a civil body politic."⁴

Learning the unique covenant nature of our founding political documents is an important lesson in understanding why America was founded as the most free nation in history.

afaJournal: What is the most important aspect of the Thanksgiving story that parents can teach their children?

Stephen: The most important thing parents can teach their children about the Thanksgiving story is the most obvious. We call it Thanksgiving for a reason. Our Pilgrim forefathers, who are reflective of most of the founders of America, were firmly devoted to Almighty God and His Son Jesus Christ. In recognition of His gracious hand upon them, they set aside regular public days to give thanks and glorify Him. This was not done merely once or twice but regularly throughout their entire lifetime. They set an example that was followed by those who came after them, even up until today. Throughout most of our history, Americans understood thanksgiving days were to thank God. The Pilgrims' love

and devotion to God, and their reliance upon Him in abundance and lack, are evidenced not only by their private lives but also by their public days of thanksgiving.

afaJournal: What are some helpful tools and resources parents can use to teach their children about the Pilgrims and Thanksgiving?

Stephen: The most important resource to teach about the Pilgrims is *Bradford's History "Of Plimoth Plantation."* There is no better way to get to know someone than to hear from them directly. You meet the Pilgrims as you read Bradford's history. Various printings have been made of his work. To get a taste of his history in modern spelling, you can read about ten excerpted pages in my book, *Monumental: Restoring America as the Land of Liberty.* If you prefer to read excerpts with Bradford's original spelling, see my book *America's Providential History.* Both are available on our website. Kirk Cameron's film, *Monumental*, has a great overview of their story and sacrifice. It is contained in the study package with my book mentioned above. And you can read an article on "Why We Celebrate Thanksgiving" on our website. This would be a great starting place.

(To read the article on Thanksgiving or order the books mentioned above, see providencefoundation.com)

End Notes

1. Paul C. Vitz, *Censorship, Evidence of Bias in our Children's Textbooks*, Ann Arbor: Servant Books, 1986, pp. 18-19.
2. *Bradford's History "Of Plimoth Plantation,"* Boston: Wright & Potter Printing Co., 1898, p. 111.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 32.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 110.

The *Providential Perspective* is a regular publication of the Providence Foundation, a non-profit, tax-exempt educational organization whose mission is to train and network leaders to transform their culture for Christ, and to teach all citizens how to disciple nations. For more information:

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