

The Pastors of the Revolution

Pastor's Perspective Column, July 2024

By Rev. Tim White

“My big question is how can a Church be participating in politics? Is your Church tax-exempt?” This one dissenting comment was added among an overwhelming number of supporting comments on a local social media post where I announced that people could sign the I-2066 Petition at our Church if they would like. Almost everyone was appreciative and encouraged others to sign it.

[For a deeper dive into the fallacy of “Separation of Church and State, you can find a copy of last year’s July column on our Church’s website, www.tcccdp.org, under “Pastor Tim’s Writings.”]

July 4th, this year, will be the 248th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence, often called our nation’s birth certificate. My question for consideration is whether this sacred document is solely political or something more. On that question, Gary DeMar, President of American Vision, states:

“The Declaration of Independence is a religious document, basing its argument for rights on theological grounds. Rights, the Declaration maintains, are a gift from the Creator: ‘We are endowed by our creator with certain inalienable [unchangeable, absolute, immutable] rights.’ The logic is simple. No Creator, no rights.”

Most Americans would be surprised to learn that portions of the Declaration of Independence contain complete sentences – word for word – from the numerous sermons preached and published for the public to read from the early 1600s to 1763.

Probably the most influential pastor of the actual wording within our Declaration of Independence – including almost exact quotes – was from pastor John Wise’s teachings. His sermons and writings powerfully expounded on the biblical basis for the issues that eventually found their way into this foundational document.

In 1864, historian Benjamin Morris stated that “some of the most glittering sentences in the immortal Declaration of Independence are almost literal quotations from [an] essay of John Wise,” which was “used as a political textbook in the great struggle for freedom.”

Sixty-two years later, on the 150th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence, President Calvin Coolidge, in a speech he delivered in Philadelphia in 1926, stated: “The thoughts in the Declaration can very largely be traced back to what [Pastor] John Wise was writing in 1710.”

Another historian put it this way: “It is without question: American Christianity, ... was primarily responsible for the philosophy expressed in the Declaration of Independence – a philosophy that energized men to love freedom, that made them see themselves as heirs of human dignity and subject to a law higher than the state (i.e., Nation).”

David Barton, the founder of Wall Builders, said that many Americans today are sadly unaware of this fact, “ministers were intimately involved in every aspect of introducing, defining, and securing America’s civil and religious liberties.” The point is this: It was colonial Christian pastors whose sermons “laid the intellectual basis for American Independence.”

Thomas Jefferson said of the sermons of his day, “Pulpit oratory ran like a shock of electricity through the whole colony.”

I do not intend to be hyper-judgmental, but I must ask, “What impact do our sermons have on this generation?” Will we stand up on the “hot topics” today and lead people out of the darkness into Christ’s marvelous light? Or will we shrink back because we fear the reaction of the unbeliever, fearing we may be labeled a “Christian Nationalist” or just “political”?

On those questions, Wayne C. Sedlak, a historian and a pastor, explains, “The pulpits of that era (17th and 18th Century) were anything but neutral. And they certainly did not subscribe to that error of reasoning so dominant in the churches today, which says that the only proper subject of concern for the pulpit pertains to individual salvation and one’s personal preparation for heaven.”

Listen to our 2nd President, John Adams, response to the pastors of his day when he happily said, “the pulpits thunder and lightning every Sabbath against King George’s despotism” and praised these pastors as being among “the most conspicuous, the most ardent, and the most influential” men of that day in the “awakening and revival of American principles and feelings” that led to our ultimate Independence [The Works of John Adams, Charles Adams, editor].

One historian, Tom Barrett, observed, “I do not consider it a stretch at all to say that were it not for the pastors and churches of colonial America, our land would be a British colony today” [“The Forgotten Holiday”].

Maybe we, who preach and teach other believers, should reread those above paragraphs.

Where would we be today had our founding fathers not been willing to pledge their lives, fortunes, and sacred honors? What kind of people would they have been in the latter portion of the 18th century had the pulpits been more concerned about keeping people in the pews with self-help and prosperity-laden sermons instead of boldly addressing issues that included politics, morality, and government corruption as well as sin and salvation? I shudder to wonder.

On May 9, 1789, in an article titled “The Importance of the Protestant Religion Politically Considered,” which appeared in the Washington, D.C. newspaper “Gazette of the United States,” we find this glowing endorsement of these brave pastors:

“Our truly patriotic clergy boldly and zealously stepped forth and bravely stood [as] our distinguished sentinels to watch and warn us against approaching danger; they wisely saw that our religious and civil liberties were inseparably connected and therefore warmly excited and

animated the people resolutely to oppose and repel every hostile invader. May the virtue, zeal, and patriotism of our clergy be ever particularly remembered.”

“...they wisely saw that our religious and civil liberties were inseparably connected.” Can we, the Christian Church, see that connection too? History proves that we can love God and our Nation simultaneously. What is glaringly evident today is that the latter is in deep need of a Church that can do both.

[On Sunday, June 30, 2024, I preached on this subject with much more content, which you can watch on our Church’s Facebook page. Sources, including direct quotes from: “The Black Robe Regiment: The Pastor-Patriots of the Revolution,” Wineskins.org; “The American Revolution Actually Began in the Pulpits,” By Gary Palmer, Special to the Press-Register; David Barton’s ministry, “Wall Builders;” Others sources cited within the above text.]