

CHAPTER III

THE WAR OF INDEPENDENCE

"God Works in Mysterious Ways"

The Great Awakening

The revival of our national faith, called "The Great Awakening," was triggered by the anger aroused in the colonists because of the heavy taxation levied on them by the British Parliament. They called it "taxation without representation." The Molasses Act of 1764, followed by the Stamp Act and other taxations, were deeply resented.

Because many settlers wanted to seek new farmland, the British Ordinance of 1763 restricting Western settlement also aroused great indignation.

By 1775, the restrictions regarding western settlement and the revenue-raising acts by the British Parliament, though they provoked great ire, also created a sense of unity among the colonies. This unity helped foster resistance against the expanding power of the British Parliament and showed once again how "God works in mysterious ways His wonders to perform."

When the time of crisis came, the colonists were ready. That decisive turn came in April, 1775, when the Revolutionary War really began. It would not end until 1783.

The Declaration of Independence

More than a year of fighting followed the critical juncture of 1775 before the colonies could formally agree to break their ties with Britain. But on July 4th, 1776, the thirteen colonies, united as a federation of states, issued a unanimous declaration, The Declaration of Independence. It begins:

We hold these truths to be self-evident: that all men are created equal; that they are endowed by their creator with certain inalienable rights. That among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. That to secure these rights...



Signing the Declaration of Independence

And for the support of this declaration, with firm reliance on the protection of divine Providence, we mutually pledge to each other our lives, our fortunes, and our sacred honor.

All fifty-six Americans who signed the Declaration of Independence risked death by hanging if their revolution failed. They risked sharing the fate of the courageous patriot, Nathan Hale, who was hanged

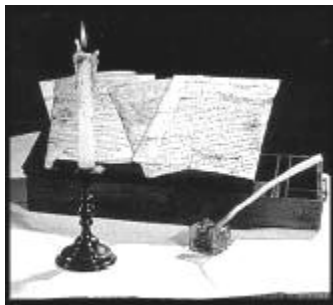
without trial, and who, on the gallows, spoke the famous words: "I only regret that I have but one life to lose for my country." What inspiring courage!

Note the fervor of patriotism and love for their new country expressed in the mutual pledge: "to each other our lives, our fortunes, and our sacred honor." These men meant it! They followed through! Many lost their lives, many lost property, and many endured terrible suffering.

John Hancock, whose elaborate signature bold and large "so that even George III cannot miss it" heads those affixed to the Declaration, later lost much of his fortune in the war, but fortunately escaped when General Gage sent troops to Lexington and Concord to effect his capture.

The holy dedication of all the signers, in the face of such great risk, is echoed in Jefferson' forceful declaration, "I swear, before the altar of God, eternal hostility to every form of tyranny over the mind of man."

The Declaration's salient words, "endowed by their creator with certain inalienable rights," would profoundly affect the history of mankind.



Our forefathers understood that it was God, not man, who was responsible for supplying them with rights. And we today should never for an instant forget to be thankful that they believed in those rights enough to fight for them.

As so clearly stated in the Declaration, the colonists fought the Revolutionary War with a firm reliance on divine Providence. General George Washington believed that the only way they could win this war was with God's help. In line with the highest spiritual understanding of that time, he issued orders to his troops demanding (along with other high principled behavior) "punctual attendance at divine services to implore the blessings of heaven upon the means used for our safety and defense."

Surely, "God tempers the wind to the shorn lamb," for it was only through the most miraculous intervention of divine Providence that the ragged and tattered little band, "the continental army" led by General Washington, survived and eventually won.

Memoir of Major Ben Tallmadge

An illustration of this divine protection occurred early in the struggle for independence: At about the same time the Declaration of Independence was being signed, the British general, William Howell, had a well disciplined fighting force of over 32,000 troops. Washington had barely 8,000, pitifully few of them trained. The Americans were gathered near the town of Brooklyn on the western end of Long Island. The British moved in with their 32,000 troops, and by August 27, 1776 our entire Continental Army was surrounded.

At this point and there can be no doubt that it was the result of providential intervention General Howell did not attack for two whole days. Had he attacked, the war would have been over. Obviously the prayers of General Washington and his men had been effective.

For the Continental Army to fight under these conditions would have been suicide; to surrender was unthinkable. The only other way was to transport 8,000 men across the East River, more than a mile wide, without the British detecting the operation.

That night, as they crossed the East River in small boats, not a sound was heard. But time was against them. Many were still on the Brooklyn side when the sun began to rise, which meant potential death for the Americans who had not yet crossed.

Major Ben Tallmadge, one of General Washington's officers there that morning, described what happened:

As the dawn of the next day approached, those of us who remained in the trenches became very anxious for our own safety; and when the dawn appeared there were several regiments still on duty.

At this time a very dense fog began to rise (out of the ground and across the river) and it seemed to settle in a peculiar manner over both encampments.... So very dense was the atmosphere that I could scarcely discern a man six yards distance. [The fog remained long after] the sun had risen. (Major Benjamin Tallmadge, Memoir, pp. 1214)

When the last man, horse, artillery and General Washington had safely crossed, the fog lifted. Washington and his men knelt in prayer to thank God for this blessing from heaven.

Before the war ended, many more similar instances of answers to fervent prayer were recorded in diaries and documents. They were called "providential acts of God." Christian Scientists would call them "demonstrations." It was all part of divine Love's plan to provide the cradle for the second coming of the Christ, the impersonal Christ, and its permanent establishment as the kingdom of God in the consciousness of humanity.

Valley Forge

As Commander in Chief of the Continental "army," it fell to George Washington to turn farmers, traders, merchants, seamen, frontiersmen and even young boys into soldiers. Because the Federation had no power to collect taxes or raise an army, Washington's soldiers, all volunteers, often furnished their own clothing, their own rifles and sometimes even their own gunpowder.

The world owes much to these liberty loving Christian patriots who, in their cry "Give me liberty, or give me death!" were sustained by faith and prayer. Their endurance as they fought on multiple fronts unfolds in a saga of persistence in the face of incredible hardships.

Consider the snow and ice covered Valley Forge retreat. There, supported and strengthened by daily prayer, Washington's men, without boots or warm clothing 4000 of them sick from exposure to cold, hunger, and disease survived a long savage winter.

"The event is in the hands of God."

Sharing the fate of his small ragged army, whose endurance and courage defied a king and built a nation, Washington kneels at prayer in the woods at Valley Forge.



George Washington The Prayer at Valley Forge

At Valley Forge many died of malnutrition and of the cruel, unrelenting cold that wrapped its icy arms around the tattered regiment. The faith of the ragged, decimated survivors rested in that ultimate reality whose sustaining power and ordered activity has mercifully provided continual guidance over human destiny.

"Freezing, starving, dying," wrote a 19th Century historian, "they persevered they kept the faith. In this testing fire for freedom [they] were forged into men of steel. Their iron will to endure helped them to survive."

"The Event is in the Hands of God"

General Washington shared the hardships of his small ragged patriot army, struggling alongside them in every difficulty. He also shared their indomitable faith. It was his practice, when faced with no evident human solution, to go into the woods to pray. Then, Washington said, "The event is in the hands of God."

When the frustrating eight year long war ended on October 19, 1783, Washington made sure a peace treaty between all warring factions was signed by Congress. He wrote to the governors of the independent states of America, congratulating them "on the glorious events which Heaven has been pleased to produce in our favor." He then announced his retirement and called a final review of his troops to say a fond farewell.

Jan Pierce records: "The love and loyalty which flowed back and forth from general to soldier, at the parade, was an emotional time. In bidding 'Adieu' to his officers, he asked each of them to come and shake his hand. They soon forgot their formal occasion and hugged and cried without shame."

Of Washington's character, Henry A. Brown wrote:

Modest in the midst of Pride; Wise in the midst of Folly; Calm in the midst of passion; Cheerful in the midst of Gloom; Steadfast among the Wavering; Hopeful among the Despondent; Bold among the Timid; Prudent among the Rash; Generous among the Selfish; True among the Faithless; Greatest among Men and Best among the Great....

It is a measure of George Washington's greatness that he glimpsed the import of the task he and his army had undertaken. During the bitter Valley Forge winter he had written:

Even if the rest of the world continues to ignore us, we will fight on. For we are fighting not only for ourselves, but for all mankind. We are fighting for freedom and human dignity and the right to worship the God of our choice.

The tremendous moral consequences of the ideals of liberty and democracy that brought on the American Revolution are by nature incalculable. So is our debt to the brave heroes who risked their lives to advance these ideals, from the first signer of the Declaration of Independence to the last farm lad wounded in battle.

These patriots knew that a redeeming Providence presided over the rise and fall of civilizations, and they firmly believed that the help they implored of God would be forthcoming. Their faith, courage and endurance defied a king and built a nation. Yes, a nation that would provide the cradle for the second coming of the Christ, which, in turn, would set at liberty every human being not only in America but in all the world showing them that "the kingdom of God is within" their own consciousness.