



When I was approaching ordination, I was asked by my superiors if I would be willing to teach at what was then our high school seminary. I said that I would do what I was asked. They asked me if I were to teach what courses would I be most interested in teaching. I replied American History. So, when I received my assignment I was told to prepare to teach British Literature. So much for consultation! Actually I grew to love teaching literature and never regretted getting a degree in English.

But I still like to read history especially about the Civil War and World War II. Lately though I am reading about the early days of the founding of our nation, in particular around the period of the colonies breaking away from English. I have read two massive biographies on Alexander Hamilton and George Washington by Ron Chernow. Chernow's wonderful book was used to help write the vastly popular Broadway musical *Hamilton*.

So, on this Independence Day, the Fourth of July, I raise a question that is both philosophical and spiritual. Does God ever favor one nation over another? Does God intervene in history, putting his thumb on the scale and help a particular people succeed. I suppose we could argue from the Old Testament that the Jews were clearly God's chosen people. Although battered and beaten in many wars, they survived and arrived at the promised land. I wonder if every nation that has people who believe in the Divine believes they are God's favorites. I have heard it said that a parent is doing great if he or she has each of her children feeling that they are number one. I wonder if that applies to nations and nationalities also. I do know we Irish tell a story that when heaven was being formed, a piece of it broke off and fell to earth becoming Ireland but I have not found that story in the Bible or in the teaching of the Church. However, it is most likely true!

As I think about my amateur reading of American history, I do think it is a kind of miracle that the United States exists at all. When the founders of our nation arrived at what is now Independence Hall there were fierce debates and many of

the delegates thought that an agreement to declare independence could never be reached. When it was decided, the British Government, the most powerful country in the world, was determined to crush this incipient revolution.

I have read that about a third of the colonists wanted independence; about a third wanted to stay loyal to England; and a third did not care one way or the other. If we think we are a divided nation now, and we are, that was much worse. The Battle of Brooklyn took place not far from the neighborhood where I grew up. A small group of Maryland soldiers held the great British army at bay while Washington's army retreated to the tip of Brooklyn, about where the Brooklyn Bridge stands today. The British rested for the night, sure that in the morning, they would put a quick end to this rebellion, arrest Washington and the other rebels, hang them, and get back to normal. Washington's army was trapped with nowhere to escape.

But the General had a plan. He would secretly seek to have his army of several thousand men secretly row across the harbor to the New York City side and move away from the British for a time. The odds were against this escape since it was felt that the English would spot the Americans and attack them as they were boarding the small rowboats that were crossing back and forth with the future of the nation in them. But, a great fog rolled in that night. Nothing could be seen. The entire army rowed across the bay as Washington's army escaped. Was that fog mother nature or an act of God?

Another historical incident comes to mind as I ponder the first beginnings of our nation: the British army, after six long years of fighting, was getting tired of war as were the Americans. Whose will would be the first to break? The British chased the Americans from the Carolinas to Virginia. The British were camped in the Yorktown Peninsula. They were not concerned that the Americans had them bottled up since the mighty British navy could rescue them at any time. Again, almost unexplainedly, the winds turned against the sailing warships of the British. Meanwhile, the French Navy, due to prevailing winds, and after numerous delays, suddenly arrived and hemmed the British in on the land. The British, tired of war, surrendered and our nation was alive and free. It is mere coincidence that the winds favoring one navy over the other just at the right time?

I don't know. A secular person would scream coincidence. I wonder. Perhaps, in the Almighty Providence of God, this new nation, with fresh new ideas, should be born. As I said, it doesn't mean we are closer to God than any other people. We know we have our great original sin of slavery that still haunts us. We know of mistreatment of the Native Americans, and not the growing loss of protection for life in the womb. We are a people not without fault.

As an American, I may be biased but I think this nation, in spite of its sins, has done enormous good for countless people all over the world. How many of our people died to end slavery and how many gave their lives to save the world from Hitler and totalitarianism. We struggle to know how best to continue to welcome immigrants while at the same time caring for our own citizens. We are often the bread basket of the world.

So, today we picnic and light fireworks. We will go to the beach and listen to patriotic music. We will swim and barbecue, share a cold beer with a neighbor and invite friends over. Today, we thank God for our nation, those who have gone before, ask mercy upon our sins and seek to continue to live up the ideals first heard in read on July 14, 1776

*We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness*