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A Newsletter of The Amy Foundation



Don't Know Much About History

By: Tom Flannery

Years ago, I was in the jam-packed audience at a cultural center for an enthralling evening with the great historian David McCullough.

He spoke with great urgency about a gathering storm that doesn't involve terrorism, nuclear proliferation or the national debt. Yet the crisis he confronted was every bit as much a threat to America's future, over time if not quite as immediately, as any of these others — that is, our nation's loss of its own history.

One of the surest ways of undermining the future of any nation is to take away its past.

McCullough, who has won Pulitzer Prizes for his biographies of John Adams and Harry Truman, described most of the history textbooks used in our schools today as "atrocious."

"They're a pile of politically correct mush," he stated, with roaring applause from the crowd.

McCullough told of speaking at one prestigious university where a student said after-

ward she'd never realized before that "all of the original 13 colonies were on the East Coast."

He once addressed a group of Dartmouth College honor students who majored in history, and learned that none of them knew of George Marshall. Finally, one of them asked: "Did he have anything to do with the Marshall Plan?"

Then there was the time that McCullough, then 73, was asked: "Besides John Adams and Harry Truman, which other U.S. presidents have you interviewed?"

"Appearances notwithstanding," he noted, "I never met John Adams."

Consequently, we now have Jay Leno doing his "Jaywalk-

ing" segments on "The Tonight Show" in which he asks general knowledge questions like "How was Mount Rushmore formed?" and gets serious responses like "Erosion."

This may be merely anecdotal evidence of how far we've fallen, but it is consistently corroborated by test scores, national surveys and the like.

Last month, the Depart-

ment of Education released the results of its latest National Assessment of Educational Progress, and once again we see there is no progress. Not even a quarter of American students is proficient in U.S. history, and the percentage declines as students grow older. Thus, the longer they're in our government schools, the worse they do.

Yet it wasn't always this way. During our founding era — the subject of McCullough's superb books *John Adams* and *1776* — only about 2.5 million people lived in America (500,000 of whom were slaves). So how did the country produce such giants of history such as George Washington, Ben Franklin and Thomas Jefferson among a relatively small populace?

McCullough cites several reasons, including their absolute reliance on Providence (the founders defined this as the will and working of God in their lives). He points out that they believed they could not have won their independence or birthed a new nation without the hand of God working on their behalf. The more one studies the Revolution, he explained, the more one realizes

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Suggested History Reading

*America's
Providential
History* by
Mark Beliles
and Stephen
McDowell

*Never Before
in History* by
Gary Amos
and Richard
Gardiner

*The Light and
the Glory* by
Peter Marshall
and David
Manuel

For children:
*The Light and
the Glory for
Children* by
Peter Marshall
and David
Manuel

► History, cont'd from p.1

it was "a miracle" that America prevailed.

But young people today aren't studying the Revolution — so they don't know these things. And that's by design.

For the past half century, there has been a concerted effort to de-emphasize our founders, the (biblical) principles upon which they established this nation — for the express purpose of robbing us of that heritage. Consequently, most people today believe that the phrase "separation of church and state" is found in the Declaration or our Constitution. Indeed, the principle itself is antithetical to our founders' original intent to restrict government, not religion (the so-called Establishment Clause declares that "Congress shall make no law...").

It's a surprise to many that God is mentioned no less than four times in the Declaration. He is acknowledged in it as the Source of all our human rights. That's what makes these rights unalienable and therefore inviolable — they weren't given to us by man or government, so they cannot legitimately be taken away or superseded by either.

In the past half century we have seen an overall de-emphasis of American history itself — our true history, that is, since an honest reading of U.S. history reveals a veritable wealth of examples of American exceptionalism. In its place, political and cultural and media elites have served up a distorted version of historical events promulgated by leftist radicals like Noam Chomsky and Howard Zinn.

Their singular focus upon a perverse blend of historical revisionism and the darkest

chapters of our great experiment has served, first, to undermine the whole idea of American exceptionalism and, second, to enshrine the "values" of leftism/liberalism in the collective consciousness.

It is well said that those who forget history are bound to repeat it, and forced to learn anew its most bitter lessons. Moreover, one of the surest ways of undermining the future of any nation is to take away its past. As the Bible warns in Psalm 11:3: "If the foundations be destroyed, what can the righteous do?" It's a rhetorical question, for there is nothing anyone can do once the foundations of any nation are destroyed. And as some-

one else once famously said, all that is necessary for evil to prevail is for good men to do nothing.

Thus, the question right now might be: As the foundations are being destroyed, what will the righteous do? The answer to that question may very well determine if America will continue to prosper into the future, or go the way of so many others who lost their history and lost their way, never to recover. ◀

Tom Flannery is a regular contributor to Real Answers, an Internet syndicate from The Amy Foundation with articles available for free download on our website at www.amyfound.org.

American Christian Writers Hosts Conferences Nationwide

Visit the the ACW website at www.acwriters.com for more details about each location or call 1-800-21-WRITE to register. *Note: The Amy Foundation regularly posts and updates our website's "Conferences" tab if you would like to alert others of a writing opportunity in your area.*

Spokane, WA Sept 30-Oct 1
Phoenix, AZ October 28-29
Orlando, FL November (Sat) 19
Caribbean Cruise Nov 27-Dec 4
Oklahoma City, OK March 16-17, 2012
Dallas, TX March 23-24, 2012
Fort Wayne, IN March 30-31, 2012
Nashville, TN Mentoring Weekend April 13-14, 2012
Memphis, TN April (Sat) 28, 2012
Charlotte, NC June 1-2, 2012
Columbus, OH June (Sat) 9, 2012
Grand Rapids, MI June 22-23, 2012

Like Books? Write a Review

By: Mary Jackson

Sir Francis Bacon, called the father of the scientific method, once said, "Some books are to be tasted, others to be swallowed, and some few are to be chewed and digested."

Every year, a plethora of newly released books hit the stands. People often turn to search engines and blogs to determine whether any of these are worth reading. As books become more accessible through e-readers and Internet sellers, writers with a love for reading and a sharp biblical worldview can create a niche for themselves with insightful reviews. A concise analysis of a newly released book or one on a bestseller list can make excellent blog content or appeal to editors of magazines, newspapers and academic journals.

Many confuse book reviews with reports. A report, typically shorter in length, recounts what happens in a book — the plot, characters and main ideas. In contrast, reviews give readers a taste of what the book is like, whether the writer liked it or not, and details on how to purchase it. They generally range from 500-750 words, though some run longer.

Here are some tips to consider when penning a book review:

- Consider the author: Do your homework before reading — who is the author? Often authors have a blog or other reviews written on their previous works. It's not cheating to begin reading with this context in mind. What is his/her worldview? What else has he/she written?

- Take note of the title, introduction and any guest author:

Somewhere in the review, plan to comment on how the book correlates with its title. Is it fitting or too provocative? Don't skip the introduction/preface — these sections frequently provide revealing context with a guest author of importance often contributing.

- When reading, jot down the key ideas: What is good, unique or groundbreaking about this work? Underline particularly telling quotes that show the author's slant and the overall feel of the book. How does the author support his/her ideas? Who does this book appeal to?

- Organize your thoughts: Pick one or a few points to highlight about the book. What appealed to you? How does this book line up with other books in the same genre? Consider cultural hot topics and how to apply a biblical worldview to the points you chose to amplify. Is there a Scripture to support or refute the author's worldview?

- Include the publisher/price: Most reviews place this information at the end of their article. The publishing year and ISBN can also be included.

- When revising, double check the spelling of the author, title, publisher, and any special terms or quotes.

- Read from the audience's vantage point: Did you include too much or not enough summary? Does your argument make sense? Have a friend or colleague take a look.

With these tips in mind, consider writing reviews that help others make good reading choices. The apostle Paul urges believers to praise what is good and "keep your eye on those who cause dissensions

and hindrances contrary to the teaching which you learned" (Romans 16:17, NASB). He notes that these people "deceive the hearts of the unsuspecting with their smooth and flattering speech" (v.18). In other words, some books aren't even worth tasting. ◀

Looking for Writing Tips on the Web?

Get ideas by reading other book reviews:

- Follow Marvin Olasky's regular book reviews (written from biblical worldview) with a subscription for the print or online version of World Magazine, www.worldmag.com.
- For a younger perspective, check out Tyler Howat's blog featuring book reviews and articles targeting 20-somethings at <http://ravereader.wordpress.com>.
- Several book blogs offer reviews on a wide gamut of current reading material: www.themillions.com; www.powells.com/blog; www.thedailybeast.com/books

Check the bestseller lists:

- For a current list of top-selling Christian books, go to: <http://ecpanews.org/bestseller/index.php>
- To look at Amazon's most picked books, go to: www.amazon.com/gp/bestsellers/books
- Other notable bestseller lists are *The New York Times* www.nytimes.com/best-sellers-books and Publishers Weekly, www.publishersweekly.com

Pen & Sword

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Consider Submitting Your Article!

Book reviews published in a mainstream print or online newspaper that contain a quote from Scripture qualify for the Amy Writing Awards. Articles published during the 2011 calendar year can be submitted for the contest until January 31, 2012. See our website for details: www.amyfound.org.

**Tell Us a
Discipling
Story**

Do you have an interesting discipling story to tell? Send a vignette (200-400 words) about a situation or interaction that led to your discipling another person—or group of people—in an unusual or unexpected way. How was God faithful in supporting, reinforcing or extending your obedient actions?

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Canopies & Roots: Learning from the Mightiest Trees

By: Robin Blonsky

If trees had a hierarchy, Redwoods would bear the royal lineage. Though majestic in their expanse, due to the kingly stature of these trees, the normal means of survival is insufficient.

In basic science, we learn that most trees get their nourishment from the roots up. However, many Redwoods tower over 300 feet high, so they cannot possibly get all their nourishment from the ground. Clearly the water from the root level fails to reach to the top. Yet Redwoods grow and survive for centuries, some standing for thousands of years.

So, what is the secret? How do these trees stay hydrated, especially in the dry California summers? The answer lies upward, in the canopies. While scaling many trees for research, forest scientist Steve Sillett made an intriguing discovery. In 2009, The National Geographic showcased Sillett's finding that Redwood canopies received a large amount of dew daily from the clouds. Their enormous height and longevity

derives from the nourishment they receive from the top.

Christianity parallels the Redwood in this way. Christ is the vine. We are the branches, as Jesus states in John 15:5. To produce fruit, each of us must be planted in the house of God. Our branches need watering daily from above. Just as the Redwoods can grow to incredible heights with daily nourishment, we too can grow in Christ and reach our full stature.

Wayne Cordeiro, in his book *The Divine Mentor* (Bethany House, 2008), illustrates the need for daily time with God by showcasing another great tree, the Sequoia. He cites a 400-year-old Sequoia that recently fell to the ground. After careful investigation of this unusual occurrence, researchers discovered years of foot traffic around the base of the tree damaged the root system and contributed to its collapse. After this finding, many of the remaining Sequoias were fenced, "to keep the public from trampling the root systems of these giants" (16-17).

Reflecting on this example, Cordeiro writes, "What is true for the Sequoias is also true for you and me. We have delicate root systems — more fragile than we would ever imagine — and unless we find a way to protect and nourish these roots, we too will fall" (16-17). He describes this protective fence as a sacred enclosure around our root systems. Similarly, King Solomon advises, "Above all else, guard your heart, for it determines the course of your life" (Proverbs 4:23 NLT).

In our own lives and in discipling others, we learn important principles from Sequoia and Redwood trees. We cultivate deep roots with daily time in Scripture and prayer, reaching upward for nourishment. We develop a sacred enclosure around this time to keep out that which threatens our growth. ◀

Robin Blonsky is a business owner and freelance writer from Oklahoma.

Writers' Conference Opportunity on Lake Michigan

Professional and novice writers looking for inspiration should consider attending the 34th annual Maranatha Christian Writers' Conference, September 26-30. The conference, held at a beautiful facility on the shores of Lake Michigan, offers the unique opportunity to meet an array of accomplished writers, editors, and publishers who are on hand and accessible.

This year's line-up includes award-winning suspense author and filmmaker Bill Myers, ESPN writer and author Ted Kluck, Credo Communications owner Tim Beals, and Zondervan senior editor Bob Hudson, among others. Attendees can pick from over 50 workshops and seminars designed to meet their needs, with new sessions on photography and improvisational story-telling added this year. Registrants can submit their manuscripts and writing in advance for participating editors and publishers to view. They can also arrange one-on-one consultations with authors, editors, publishers and agents.

Affordable tuition, food, and lodging packages are available. For complete details and a schedule of the conference, check out www.writewithpurpose.org. Request a brochure by calling Maranatha at 231-798-2161 or emailing them at info@WriteWithPurpose.org. The deadline for registration is September 19, 2010. Don't miss this great time of instruction and inspiration!