

Doing Providential History

Written by Calvin Fox

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I am currently studying US History, focusing on the period after the Civil War up to WWI (1860's to 1910) What was God doing in America during that Period (it could be other Periods, too)? Why should I do this?

I am very interested in seeing God's Hand in "events" that transpire. This is known as pursuing Providential History [PH]. Many professional Evangelical Historians, such as George Marsden and Mark Noll, Jay Green, John Fea, Timothy Larson and Carl Truman reject PH as such (because it is not subject to objective verification or falsification). These Historians, like their secular colleagues, are committed to a "scientific", empirical Methodology. They believe in God but in everyday practice they process historical events as Philosophical Naturalists (which does not make allowances for any God) However, some professional Historians do believe in PH, eg- Steven Keillor, Tom Nettles, Rodney Stark, Roger Schultz, Larry Schweikart, Cornelius vanTil and Gregg Singer.

Here are Reasons why I am convinced that Providential History is not only valid but necessary-

- A Biblical World View requires PH
- The nature of God, especially the truth that He is both transcendent and immanent at all times and places requires it.
- The Kingdom of God as His dynamic Rule gradually subjecting all to His control and purposes requires PH
- The Sovereignty and Providence of God over all, everywhere and at all times to His ultimate Glory requires it
- The authority of Christ over all things, including the affairs of Nations requires it.

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- The Doctrine of the Creation of Time (and therefore of History itself) by God to accomplish His Purposes requires PH

- The reality of efficacious Prayer at all times and places requires it

- The phenomena of fulfilled Prophecy also requires Providential History

Of course all these Reasons are derived from Scripture, the ultimate external Source and major reason for being committed to PH. Each one of these Doctrines (above) under-girds and requires Providential History

CAVEAT Beware! Caution! Doing PH, we must be excellent scholars and be honest and humble researchers. when applying Biblical Principles to History, seeking to explain cause and effect about what happened, especially if we are looking to see the Hand of God at work. (Popular proponents of PH are often weak in these things and mislead many).

We also must be very humble about our deductions [our “take aways”] from particulars as we read History, as well as expanding those particulars into universal “truths”.