

FAITH OF OUR FATHERS

How the country
has strayed from its founding
biblical principles

By Kirk Noonan

Photos by Aaron Funk

Tourists and Bostonians flock to Richie Holland. Some want a picture with him; others smile knowingly as he walks past them. Still, people cannot get enough of this guy. Perhaps it is because of his circa mid-1700s black tri-corner hat, knickers, spectacles, fluffy collared shirt, and fine jacket. Or maybe people just want to believe he has recently broken out of



Richie Holland

a marble shell, descended a park pedestal and left existence as a statue for reality.

“I am Deacon John Larkin,” Holland tells a couple from Ohio when they approach him.

“Who’s that?” asks the woman.

“Did you ever hear of Paul Revere?” asks Holland, who

has been giving tours for more than two decades and has a master’s degree in Christian education. “I lent him my family’s horse when he took his ride to tell the colonists the regulars [British] were coming.”

“Oh,” say the tourists in unison. “Can we get a picture with you?”

And so it goes for Holland who says his outfit and study and promotion of Christian history and how it intersects with American history are excellent ways to help preserve the freedoms the Founding Fathers established.

To do so properly in Boston, where there are more than 50 colleges and universities, Holland works hard to know his facts. He regularly pores over historical documents, takes classes on colonialism, devours history books and discusses his findings with fellow history buffs

bent on informing people America was built on Christian principles.

On a sunny, but freezing February day Holland takes me on a tour he promises will highlight the role Christianity played in founding the nation, counter popular historical myths, and reveal a need for Christians to become active in setting the record straight about the founding principles our nation was built upon.

Plymouth Rock

“The happiness of a people, and the good order and preservation of civil government, essentially depend upon piety, religion and morality.”

— *The Massachusetts Constitution, 1780*

We travel south from Boston to Plymouth where a replica of the *Mayflower* and what is thought to be Plymouth Rock are on display. As we drive, Holland points out townships, buildings and even fields that played a role in the Revolutionary War.

Plymouth was founded in 1620. Many of the Pilgrims who landed there had fled England and moved

We follow it. Tucked in a residential area on an unkempt, grassy hill stands the 81-foot-tall monument that is rarely visited. Though the monument has been vandalized and neglected over the years, the truths symbolized and inscribed on it remain true and relevant.

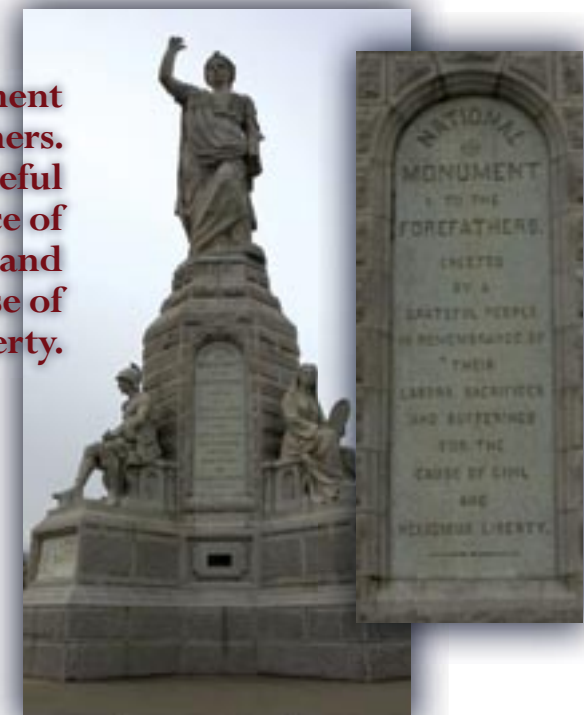
At the top of the monument stands Faith, a statue symbolizing the virtue that inspired the Pilgrims’ journey. She holds a Bible representative of God’s new work in the New World. Four figures — Morality, Education, Law and Liberty — are seated beneath Faith on buttresses. Prayer, evangelism, mercy and other Christian principles are also represented on the monument. The monument’s attributes are meant to represent the principles upon which the Pilgrim Fathers proposed to found the commonwealth.

Unfortunately, says Holland, many of those principles, like the

**National Monument
to the Forefathers.
Erected by a grateful
people in remembrance of
their labors, sacrifices and
sufferings for the cause of
civil and religious liberty.**

to the Netherlands where they enjoyed religious freedom. But the idea of establishing a commonwealth under God in a New World was irresistible, and a small band of them risked everything to voyage across the Atlantic to start new lives.

As we descend into Plymouth a small sign points to the National Monument to the Founding Fathers.



monument, have been neglected, ignored and even attacked in the United States by the people they are meant to benefit.

"If you want to take over a country there are several things you have to get rid of such as morality, religion, culture and heritage," says Holland. "Do that and people will follow whoever offers them the best deal."

Holland points to a John Adams'

Statesmen may plan and speculate for liberty, but it is religion and morality alone which can establish the principles upon which freedom can securely stand.

— John Adams

quote to support his view. "Statesmen may plan and speculate for liberty," Holland says, reciting the quote, "but it is religion and morality alone which can establish the

principles upon which freedom can securely stand."

We venture over to Plymouth Rock. As cold wind whips at us Holland explains the rock is the symbolic foundation for the government. The Pilgrims believed God was first and the government was second.

"Today's society has it backwards," Holland contends. "We have put government above all else. The consequences are we will one day become like any other government in the world and eventually become a godless society."

Back to Boston

"If we abide by the principles taught in the Bible, our country will go on prospering."

— Daniel Webster, 1821

As we drive back to Boston, Holland talks about the history of education in the United States and pulls out a copy of *The New England Primer*, which was used in public schools for more than 150 years.

"This book would be thrown out of schools today," Holland speculates, pointing out several references to God.

Holland then talks of things thrown out of the public square by the Supreme Court. He points to the 1962 decision that prohibited prayer in public schools, the 1963 decision that banned Bible teaching in public schools, and the 1980 decision that ordered public schools to remove the Ten Commandments from student view.

Holland shows me a summary of government studies that show that since 1962, when prayer was removed from schools, teen suicide has risen more than 450 percent, illegal drug use among youth has skyrocketed 6,000 percent, SAT scores have plummeted and criminal arrests of teens aged 14-17 are up more than 150 percent.

The meetinghouse

"This is all the inheritance I give to my dear family. The religion of Christ will give them one which will make them rich indeed."

— Patrick Henry in his last will and testament, 1798

As we pass Boston landmarks such as the Old North Church, Paul Revere's house and the Old State House, Holland explains how the meetinghouses [churches] were crucial to Puritan communities.

By law, says Holland, everyone in the community had to live within half a mile of the meetinghouse,

which was placed in the middle of town. A town was squared off and the meetinghouse was in the middle of it. All roads and pathways led to the center of town where the meetinghouse was located. It was at the meetinghouse that services took place twice on Sundays. There were also lectures on Thursdays, and everyone was expected to be there — even children. By the time a person turned 65, says Holland, he or she had learned enough at meetinghouses to obtain the equivalent of three college degrees.

Because of the church's active and influential role in the community it played a vital part in the colonists' decision to go to war with Great Britain, whose army had never been defeated and was considered the most powerful in the world at the time.

"Even King George III called the Revolutionary War a pulpit war because the ministers instigated their congregations to war," says Holland, noting that between and after Sunday services boys and men were taught to handle firearms and schooled in the art of battle by ministers and deacons.

No taxation without representation

"We have this day restored the Sovereign to Whom all men ought to be obedient. He reigns in heaven and from the rising to the setting of the sun, let His Kingdom come."

— Sam Adams, 1776

For decades, says Holland, public schools have focused so heavily on the economic reasons for breaking away from Great Britain that many other reasons for the split have been largely ignored — especially the religious ones. According to Holland, the colonists became enraged when the king said he was sovereign over everything.

"The colonists said, 'No you're



Tercentenary Canopy over Plymouth Rock

not; only God is. No man is above the law because our law comes from God," Holland says. "The motto for the Revolution was 'No king but King Jesus.' That is what the colonists believed, but that's not taught in schools today and hasn't been for years."

Heed the call

Holland is convinced the freedoms enjoyed, and sometimes even

Christians must take part in the political process by voting and being involved in their government and community.

taken for granted, in the United States are not free and everyone must fight for them every day.

To do that, he says, Christians must take part in the political process by voting, being involved in their local government and community, and voicing their displeasure when their community makes morally objectionable decisions.

"People don't have to be politicians, but they have to get involved," Holland says. "It's a fight, and people have to decide to fight, protect our rights and pass them on."

As the sun sets we leave Harvard, America's oldest university whose original motto was "For Christ and the Church." On one of Cambridge's main streets

Holland has me pull over as he points out an inscription in gold letters above the entrance of city hall. He reads it out loud.

God has given commandments unto men. From these commandments men have framed laws to be governed. It is honorable and praiseworthy to serve the people by administering these laws faithfully. If the laws are not enforced the people are not well governed. tpe

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