

When Religious History and Government Meet

Professor serves as museum consulting expert

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Nicholas Miller speaks on religious liberty at PMC in February. (Photo by Jonathan Logan)

By: Konner Dent

In an [op-ed piece for the Philadelphia Inquirer](#), Nicholas Miller, professor of church history at the [Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary](#) on the campus of Andrews University, reflected on the Quaker lawmaker William Penn.

“Penn placed a special emphasis on the equal treatment of people of all religious beliefs; a conviction rooted in his dissenting Protestant biblical and philosophical conceptions of the rights of individual conscience given by a divine Creator.”

Along with detailing the religious diversity of a young Pennsylvania, Miller’s article also brought attention to an upcoming development which stands out in Philadelphia’s history: A \$60-million [Faith and Liberty Center](#), with which the professor is assisting as a consulting expert.

“It’s really a major new addition to the historical monument memorial makeup of downtown Philadelphia,” says Miller. “In Independence Mall, there is a major museum on both the

Constitution and the Declaration of Independence and it is going to be part of the framework of museums, which makes it kind of a big deal.”

“A big deal” is a pretty accurate description, since a tremendous concentration of American history is distilled into Philadelphia’s [Independence Mall](#). The historic location includes Ben Franklin’s grave, the Liberty Bell and Independence Hall, where the Declaration of Independence was signed.

“Most museums were built in the 1970s during the secular era of academia, so this is a helpful corrective to that,” adds Miller. “Separation of church and state and the free exercise of religion are both important to Seventh-day Adventists, and this museum should stand as a physical reminder of those ideological cornerstones of our government.”

Understandably, some might find a museum dedicated to faith contradictory to the secular principles held by those who signed the constitution a few blocks away 240 years ago. However, Miller hopes for the contrary.

“History is always more complicated than most of us realize, even for historians,” he says, adding that he believes there are two versions of the story. “Secular academics paint founders as secularists, using enlightenment principles and humanism for independence. The Christian Right wants to paint them as the founding fathers of evangelical Christendom. The two stories never meet, and I think this museum can tell the story of the role of religion and the Bible in a balanced way. It’s going to acknowledge secular enlightenment in its founding, but also a strong standing for separation of church and state made by very religious people. I believe it is a much-needed balance.”

In “The Great Controversy,” Ellen White stated that, “Freedom of religious faith was also granted, every man being permitted to worship God according to the dictates of his conscience. Republicanism and Protestantism became the fundamental principles of the nation.”

According to Miller, White’s “Republicanism” referred to the democratic process of checks, balances and free press, while Protestantism was the freedom of religion—a balance often difficult to maintain, but nonetheless important.

Hopefully, Miller says, Philadelphia’s upcoming museum and his involvement with the project will help others realize its importance as well.

More information can be found on the Faith and Liberty Discovery Center’s website, Miller’s Inquirer article and the book “500 Years of Protestant Liberty” by Pacific Press Publishing Association, to be released in summer 2017.

Related Links

- [Who was William Penn?](#)
- [About Quakers](#)
- [What is Independence Mall?](#)

- [About The Great Controversy](#)
- [The Foundation of All Freedom](#): Nick Miller speaks at Harvard event on religious liberty

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