

Winter History & Heritage -- #6 (January 30)

Our H&H entries this week are based on George Grant & Gregory Wilbur's *The Christian Almanac* and a few other sources (like *Tabletalk* magazine) as indicated:

Paraenesis -- (*Tabletalk* studies, Dec. 19-21, 2011)

This Greek word signifies a common first century form of moral instruction and exhortation, one highlighting practical everyday conduct? Even the Apostle Paul used the form in his New Testament epistles, a noteworthy example occurring in *Philippians 4:4-9* where he commends many virtues (whatever is true, honorable, just, pure, etc.) to the contemplation of Christians. All of which shows that Christianity came not so much to destroy man's culture, but to renew and sanctify it.

Martin Luther -- (*Tabletalk* studies, Dec. 26-27, 2011)

A miner's son, **this German monk (1483--1546)** unwittingly ignited the Protestant Reformation with his *Ninety-Five Theses* (1517), a critique of Divine mercy put up for sale (papal indulgences)? Pivotal events in his life included a close call with lightning while on horseback, the disillusionment of a visit to Rome (1510), and his own scholarly study of the Scriptures (*Psalms* and *Romans* in particular). Slowly it dawned on him that only Christ's righteousness, received by faith alone, saves sinners.

Divorce -- (R.C. Sproul, *Tabletalk*, Dec. 2011)

The acclaimed Harvard sociologist, Russian-born Pitirim Sorokin, in a 1948 essay, noted that **this social pathology** had risen from a rate of 10% of all marriages in America in 1910 to 25% by mid-century? Sorokin said such a rate (one quarter of all contracted families) spelled doom for the stability of any society, anywhere anytime. One need not wonder what Sorokin, who died in 1968, would say if he saw today's America, where the aforementioned rate has risen to about 50%.

George Kennan -- (Jordan M. Smith, *The American Conservative*, Jan. 2012)

This U.S. diplomat (1904--2005) formulated the policy of containment in relation to the Soviet Union during the so-called Cold War (roughly 1945--1990)? His careful intention was to strike a balance between provoking a war with Communist Russia, on the one hand, and passivity in the face of her expansionary ambitions on the other. In his later years, in spite of a favorable end to the Cold War, he was gloomy about America's future, even urging dismemberment of the nation into smaller regional republics.

The Agrarians -- (*Almanac*, Jan. 12)

A graduate student at Vanderbilt in 1930, Andrew Nelson Lytle joined **these Southern scholars** and contributed to their landmark critique of modern times, *I'll Take My Stand?* The Southerners, in a compilation of essays, lamented the loss of the old liberty and virtue, rooted, as they saw it, in loyalty to family, faith, farm, community, and culture. Modernity (with its mass democracy, industry, and living habits), they believed, had turned our hearts away from home and seduced us with empty promises of happiness.

Noah Webster -- (Adam C. Wolfe, *Chronicles* magazine, Jan. 2012)

This Connecticut lexicographer (1758--1843) tried to pioneer a national approach to learning and letters through his *American Dictionary of the English Language* and his *American Spelling Book*. The latter, also known as the “Blue-Backed Speller,” taught five generations how to read. His nationalist ambitions, however, went way beyond standardizing the way Americans read and write, aimed as they were on erasing all regional dialects and removing our landmarks in the literature and culture of Britain.

James Monroe -- (*Almanac*, Jan. 17)

The two presidential terms (1817--1825) of **this Virginian** coincided with the first period of extensive tranquility for the new United States, the so-called “Era of Good Feeling”? Highlights of this era included a treaty with Britain to disarm the Canadian border, the purchase of Florida from Spain, and the Missouri Compromise over slave and free states. His greatest executive achievement was a foreign policy proclamation (1823) warning Europe to refrain from further conquest in the Western Hemisphere.

Eschatology -- (Peter Leithart, *Deep Comedy*)

This term in Christian theology, from “the last things” in Greek, implies that human history is Divine comedy, a story that ends everlastingly not only as well as but better than it began? Such a view was basically foreign to the Greco-Roman world with its pervasive degenerative and cyclical outlook (things go from good to bad to worse, over and over again). By contrast, the Bible, says author Peter Leithart, moves from garden to garden lost to garden-city, proving that “God gives with interest.”

Works and Days -- (Peter Leithart, *Deep Comedy*)

This Greek epic by Hesiod (c. 800 BC) relates in classic form the pagan view of history, a degenerative myth that moves from good to bad to worse, or from glory to dust? Revisited by many ancient poets, like Rome’s Ovid (43 BC--17 AD), Hesiod’s metallic ages (gold, silver, bronze, & iron) make room for an interlude of heroes, but generally speaking there is no hope for later times. The first things are necessarily the best things, and the fathers always outshine the sons.

Virgil -- (Peter Leithart, *Deep Comedy*)

This Roman poet (70--19 BC), famed author of the *Aeneid*, came closer than any of the pagans to a hopeful view of history, one in which a golden age of plenty reemerges from a forgotten past after long years of decline and decay? His *Fourth Eclogue*, manifestly messianic in tone, tells of the birth of a child through whom the world is eventually renewed. The happy ending suggested in this and other works, however, is tempered by tears and never advances in glory beyond the beginning.