

Summer History & Heritage -- #3 (June 25)

This week's entries include a reflection on Lincoln's famous *Second Inaugural Address*, as well as summaries from our *Christian Almanac* and *Tabletalk* readings.

George C. Marshall --- (*Almanac*, June 5)

This Army general and diplomat (1880--1959), Truman's secretary of state at the time, delivered an historic commencement address at Harvard on June 5, 1947. The secretary warned against a post-WWII retreat to America's traditional posture of detachment or isolation from an exceedingly troubled international scene. The plan he proposed that day (later named after the secretary) called for a massive infusion of U.S. capital to rebuild the economic infrastructure of devastated European nations.

Richard Henry Lee --- (*Almanac*, June 7)

A Virginian and the great-uncle of a great Confederate general, **this Founding Father (1732--1794)** authored the first independence resolution of the American colonies. His resolution, approved by the Continental Congress on June 7, 1776, boldly asserted "that these United Colonies are, and of right ought to be, free and independent States." He was appointed to the committee charged with drafting the *Declaration*, but missed the chance to write it himself when he was called home to attend to his ailing wife.

The Righteousness of Man (in the eyes of God) --- (*Tabletalk*, June 13)

Western man, for the last 300 years or so in what are called modern and postmodern times, has clearly been obsessed with his rights: human rights, inalienable rights, civil rights, democratic rights, minority rights, women's rights, gay rights, on and on.

Is it too much to ask him to revisit the question of his righteousness, of whether his words and deeds are in fact right in the eyes of God?

But we are all like an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are like filthy rags; We all fade as a leaf, and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away (Is. 64:6).

Thus observed one of the ancients, the prophet Isaiah. Commenting on the prophet's words, the French Reformer John Calvin (1509--1564) conceded that God could justly punish man not only for his blatant sins, but for his "good" deeds as well. Thus the original Protestants insisted on Christ's righteousness alone, received by faith alone, as the ground for the salvation of sinners.

Talk of man's rights may have its place, but surely it's a subordinate place in the hierarchy of his concerns. One suspects a good man, a truly righteous man living before the face of God, would be about his daily business (his duties) and little else.

So likewise you, when you have done all those things which you are commanded, say, "We are unprofitable servants. We have done what was our duty to do" (Lk. 17:10).

Justification by Faith Alone --- (*Tabletalk*, June 11-13)

This Christian doctrine teaches that sinners cannot be declared righteous before God on any other basis than that of Christ's obedience credited to them when they believe? Moreover, the saving belief of sinners, the doctrine says, is God's gift to them in Christ, a gracious benefit of His labors for them, thereby excluding human merit and pride. Thus proclaimed the magisterial Protestants, like Luther and Calvin, of the 1500s, provoking no small controversy with the Roman Catholics of their day.

The Second Inaugural Revisited -- (Katherine Dalton; *Chronicles*, June 2012)

With malice toward none; with charity for all; with firmness in the right, as God gives us to see the right, let us strive on to finish the work we are in; to bind up the nation's wounds; to care for him who shall have borne the battle, and for his widow, and his orphan---to do all which may achieve and cherish a just and lasting peace, among ourselves, and with all nations.

That's the last paragraph of Abraham Lincoln's brief *Second Inaugural Address*, delivered on March 4, 1865, and generally regarded as a gracious appeal for national forgiveness and reconciliation in the closing days of the Civil War.

The speech is chiseled into the north wall of the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, D.C., and not long ago Louisville author Katherine Dalton visited the site and reflected on the message and its meaning. Her view, that the address is rather bitter and less about reconciling the estranged sections of the country than justifying the Union's cause and war effort, may be a minority report but cannot be dismissed lightly. Dalton's meditation, as it appears in the June 2012 issue of *Chronicles*, appears in part below:

"...It was a bitter time, even in the North as victory seemed near, and it is a bitter piece of oratory.

"You don't think so? Read it again. The hardest language in that address is not its condemnation, which one would expect given the time and speaker, but the pretense of forgiveness. 'It may seem strange that any men should dare to ask a just God's assistance in wringing their bread from the sweat of other men's faces; but let us judge not that we be not judged' is not really a rhetorically extended olive branch. I think some schoolchildren still memorize the lines about 'malice toward none,' but they were first spoken just a few weeks after a surrendered Columbia [SC] had been burnt by the Union Army.

"No: The Second Inaugural is as implacable as the Scripture it quotes---'woe to that man by whom the offense cometh'---while wearing the fig leaf of forgiveness. It is powerfully written, but it is a speech of justification, not reconciliation."