

Winter History & Heritage -- #7 (Feb. 18)

This week, a quote worth pondering, a couple of *Almanac* sketches, and summaries of select content from Brion McClanahan's *Founding Fathers' Guide to the Constitution*.

The Life of the Mind or Cultivating Right Reason -- (James V. Schall, SJ)

"We go to college [in part] for a job or a profession. Jobs and professions are good things. We need to work. It is a noble thing to make or sell or assist others through our skills. However, we need more than skills. In *The Intellectual Life*, A.G. Sertillanges tells us to organize our lives so that we keep some regular time to think, to contemplate, to pursue *the things that are*."

"Have Faith in Massachusetts" --- (Christian Almanac; Grant/Wilbur; Feb. 5)

This Massachusetts state senate speech (Jan. 7, 1914), published by *Harper's Weekly* a month later, helped launch the national political career of Calvin Coolidge? In his address the taciturn New Englander sang the praises of the Anglo-American tradition of representative (republican) government, calling it the "latest, most modern, and nearest perfect system that statesmanship has devised. . ." Despite weaknesses, he said, the system "secures to the people more blessing than any other. . ."

Dietrich Bonhoeffer --- (Christian Almanac; Grant/Wilbur; Feb. 7)

"I have come to the conclusion that I have made a mistake in coming to America. I shall have no right to participate in the reconstruction of the Christian life in Germany after the war if I did not share in the trials of this time with my people. . ." That reflective self-criticism came from the pen of **this German theologian (1906--1945)**, a Lutheran scholar stationed briefly at Union Theological Seminary in N.Y. in 1939? His return home was marked by heroic resistance to the Nazis, imprisonment, & execution.

Preamble to the U.S. Constitution -- (Founding Fathers' Guide; McClanahan; p. 7)

(from post #6; repeated here for the sake of memorization & the content below)

We the People of the United States, in Order to form a more perfect Union, establish Justice, insure domestic Tranquility, provide for the common defense, promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America.

Problems with the Preamble: Patrick Henry & Sam Adams

(*Founding Fathers' Guide*; McClanahan; pp. 9-10)

Patrick Henry (VA) and Samuel Adams (MA) were among the old patriots deeply suspicious of the "We the People" language of the Constitution's Preamble. As Brion McClanahan observes:

"Patrick Henry, the most dominant political figure in the State of Virginia and possibly the best orator in the United States, asked in the Virginia Ratifying Convention, "My political

curiosity, exclusive of my anxious solicitude for the public welfare, leads me to ask, Who authorized them to speak the language of *We, the people*, instead of, *We, the states*? States are the characteristics and the soul of a confederation. If the states be not the agents of this compact, it must be one great, consolidated, national government, of the people of all the states.”

McClanahan continues, “Samuel Adams, the famous Patriot from Massachusetts, wrote in 1787 that the Preamble pointed to one conclusion. ‘I meet with a National Government, instead of a federal Union of Sovereign States. . . .’”

Madison on the Preamble’s True Purpose

(Founding Fathers’ Guide; McClanahan; pp. 7-13)

James Madison (1751--1836), addressing controversy over the intent of the Preamble years after ratification of the Constitution, said it was manifestly “preliminary” and “introductory” material meant merely to set the stage for the specifics of the main body of the document. One ought not to “read between the lines” of the Preamble and use its generic phrases to authorize this or that act of Congress or of the general government of the United States. No, insisted Madison, the U.S. can’t do whatever it likes under cover of promoting the general welfare or some such.

Earlier, during the ratification debates (1787-88), Madison chided those (some opponents or Anti-federalists) whom he thought read too much (nationalist conspiracies) into the document’s well-crafted opening lines. Those opponents included the revered Patrick Henry of Madison’s Virginia.

There was no aim on the part of the Framers, according to Madison, to displace or diminish the States in the new and revised political scheme. They simply wanted to acknowledge expressly that final political authority in America rested in “We the People,” an affirmation somehow omitted in the Articles of Confederation.

Reasonable enough, this teacher thinks, but that doesn’t mean the critics (opponents/ Anti-federalists) like Henry & S. Adams were merely whistling in the dark. They sensed something ominous lurking in the shadows, something they believed would sooner or later gobble up republican liberty in their native land. History, it seems, has more or less confirmed their prophecies.

Legislative Branch --- (Founding Fathers’ Guide; McClanahan; pp. 15-16)

The Constitution’s Article I, the most extensive of the seven making up the document, addresses the structure & powers of **this branch of the general government?** The branch is built in a bicameral way, consisting of a House of Representatives, the most democratic body in the government with representation based on a State’s population, and a Senate. The latter, a more aristocratic body, the elite of the elite, was meant to express the will of the sovereign States, each of which gets two senators.