

The Constitution: Our charter of Freedom — Part II

by Reverend R.A. Shackles

A difficulty in understanding our Constitution is that we too often attempt to interpret it in terms of our present-day word and thought usage. Consequently, we tend to read things into it which may not be there or misconstrue their sense completely. It is important, therefore, to try to read it in terms, not of 2009, but of the thinking of the men who produced this great document.

To do this, we must turn first to the Declaration of Independence. Forrest McDonald, concluding his landmark study, *The Making of the Constitution*, says, “ Perhaps, as Bismarck is reported to have said, a special Providence takes care of fools, drunks, and the United States of America. Surely the Framers believed the last of these.” (*NOVUS ORDO SECLORUM: The Intellectual Origins of the Constitution*, pg. 203.) McDonald understood the framers of our Constitution. He sees what first motivated the signers of the Declaration and the framers of the Constitution, many of whom were involved in producing both documents. So it helps to understand their commitments, their intellectual “origins,” including their spiritual commitments — which they certainly did not withhold!

The key statements in the Declaration give the background of their firm reliance on “Providence.” In the Declaration’s opening paragraph, they speak of the “laws of Nature and of Nature’s God.” By this we understand that a firm belief in God defined their thinking. Referring to the “self-evident trust” that motivated them, they note it as “endowed by their Creator.” In the final paragraph, pledging their total commitment to independence, they do so “with a firm reliance on the protection of divine Providence.” It is important to understand their words as they were meant *then*. In that context, “Providence,” especially as “divine,” is the 18th century equivalent of our speaking of “God, the Creator of Heaven and earth.” The claim that the Framers were not Christians or religious generally comes from a failure to understand 18th century modes of expression. (George Washington, who consistently used “Providence” was an active Christian, a long-time Senior Warden of Christ Church, Alexandria, Virginia.)

This is what McDonald meant in saying, “surely the Framers believed in the last,” *i.e.*, Providence. It is out of this that the genius of our Constitution was composed. It gave them, along with their very strong background in the governments of history and political philosophy, a balance of insight and genius that gives the best foundation of freedom so far in all history. More, it still works in spite of every effort to “interpret” it into directions that depart from its timeless truths.

As historians point out, the process by which sometimes sharp divisions were overcome was marked by debates that truly would put today’s politicians at a loss for words. This led to one of their greatest achievements: The tri-partite division of power, authority in our nation: Executive, Legislative and Judicial. Actually, however, it is not generally understood that, in fact, the Constitution recognizes *four* such parts. As you carefully read the Constitution, you learn that the *fourth* department of government is the states. This was officially recognized early on, by the passage of the Tenth Amendment, on February 7, 1795. This stipulates that “The powers not delegated to the United States by the Constitution, nor prohibited by it to the states, *are reserved to the states respectively, or to the people.*” (Italics not in the original.) It is fundamental to proper understanding here, that to the framers, the states specifically are where the “voice” of the people is primarily to be heard!

As we deal with the specifics of the Constitution, we must keep in mind both what it says and means and the care by which the signers reached agreement for this government that has succeeded because the checks and balances were worked out by men who knew precisely what was needed: A political system which above all prevented tyranny and a system in which a free people could flourish and prosper — in the rights created and the support provided by “divine Providence.” In this, the framers avoided a mere confederation (as had previously existed) vulnerable to individual whims, forming “a more perfect union,” that *Novus Ordo Seclorum* —A “New Order of the Ages.”

Next: How the Congress works: The legislative branch.●



Mildred Rainbolt and Richard Lang will celebrate their 50th wedding anniversary on November 7, 2009. The family is giving them an open house party to celebrate at Uncle Mark’s Restaurant, 1910 E. Apple Avenue on November 7 from 3 to 6 p.m.

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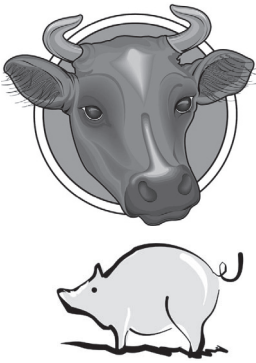
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