ADDRESS OF SENATOR EVERETT MCKINLEY DIRKSEN
AT THE 100TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE LINCOLN-DOUGLAS
DEBATE AT GALESBURG, ILLINOIS, OCTOBER 7, 1958

"ABRAHAM LINCOLN"

Ecclesiastes, so long ago remarked that "The thing which hath been, it is that which shall be and that which is done is that which shall be done; and there is no new thing under the sun."
The past is prologue. And the past is tradition.

To the Thessalonians, Paul wrote, "Hold fast to the traditions ye have been taught." And what is tradition? It is the whole body of culture and beliefs, of usages and practices, of achievements and accomplishments, of personalities which come down to us from the past.

In the American tradition, shining majestically, there are the Pilgrims and pioneers, Valley Forge and Gettysburg, the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution. In it looming large are William Penn and Daniel Boone, Washington and Paine, Zenger and Marshall, Jefferson and Jackson. In it are faith and hope, tears and laughter.

And high in our tradition stands Abraham Lincoln. Can he be explained in any other way than that he was an instrument of divine destiny?

History is but the unfoldment of a divine pattern. This may be amusing in highly liberal quarters. If not this, it can only
be materialistic drift. If there be a creative hand behind this
universe, there must be a creative hand in its unfoldment and direction.
Everything in it, sun, moon, stars, planets -- their distances --
the calibration so that people will neither freeze or scorch to death --
the procession of the seasons -- man's subsistence -- all rise to
testify to the amazing adjustments in the universe to preserve life.
And surely the creative force would not provide it all in such met-
iculous detail and then ignore its ultimate destiny.

But destiny does not unfold in a vacuum. It cannot be manifested
without a vehicle, without an instrument. The light falling upon
Saul enroute to Damascus to convert him into the world's great sales-
man was a divine hand reaching for an instrument. The voice from
the Heavens said to Ezekiel, "Son of man, stand upon thy feet and
I will speak unto thee." Destiny was seeking an instrument. The
servant of the Lord commanding Joshua to be strong and of good cour-
age and giving him assurance and instruction was but finding an
instrument for the unfoldment of history.

Abraham Lincoln standing before 15,000 people on a cold, raw,
windy day in Galesburg 100 years ago today may not have seemed an
instrument of an all pervading conscience to carry on in a struggle
which still besets our land a century later. How could a story
teller be regarded as an instrument of destiny unless it be remem-
bered that in a day when the vagaries of the mind were not too well
understood, it is easy enough to perceive that the brooding mystic
introvert can so easily conceal his introvert attributes in this
understandable manner.
But consider this whole moral common man moving always godward, never too fast and never too slow, walking ever slowly but never backward.

In May of 1856 in Bloomington he delivered what came to be known as the Lost Speech. The form and text may have been lost, but not the spirit and the impact. For it was here that he received a new baptism. It was here that the moral, rather than the political or intellectual aspects of the slavery issue fired his soul and his cross was found.

Two years later at Ottawa, it became the overriding issue for on that occasion he said, "I hold there is no reason in the world why the negro is not entitled to all the natural rights enumerated in the Declaration of Independence, the right of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness...in the right to eat the bread without leave of anybody else which his own hand earns, he is my equal and the equal of Judge Douglas and the equal of every living man."

Here at Galesburg he said of his opponent that, "he is blowing out the moral lights around us when he contends that whoever wants slaves has a right to hold them." He continued. "I confess myself as belonging to that class in the country who contemplate slavery as a moral, social and political evil having due regard for its existence among us and the difficulties of getting rid of it in a satisfactory way and to all constitutional obligations which have been thrown about it; but nevertheless desire a policy that looks to the prevention of it as a wrong, and looks hopefully to the time when as a wrong it may come to an end."
On they went in the discussion until at last, this far-reaching discussion carried them to the concluding debate at Alton. Over and over a word kept tumbling from Lincoln's lips. It was the word "wrong." And as they concluded, Lincoln said, "That is the real issue. That is the issue that will continue in this contry when these poor tongues of Judge Douglas and myself shall be silent. It is the eternal struggle between these two principles of right and wrong through the world.

The moral contagion which Lincoln had created was spreading. At first, the moral issue had to be tempered to reality. He was dealing with an entrenched institution, with a Supreme Court, with a Congress, and with a certain concept of the Constitution. He was dealing with a divided land. He was dealing with people sharply divided. He was dealing with friends and party associates who were vitally interested in a political victory. He was dealing with his own candidacy. These were realities. Little by little, people must be conditioned for the whole dose of moral principle -- wrong vs. right. As the conditioning process went on, so the conditioning of his own spirit went on. The contagion was slow but inexorable.

Come that day in March, 1861, when he took the oath as President of the United States. How careful he was with respect to the Constitution and the rights of the states. How earnest were his entreaties to preserve the Union. Yet he never lost sight of the
moral issue. "If the Almighty Ruler of Nations", he asked, "with his eternal truth and justice be on your side of the North or on yours of the South, that truth and that justice will surely prevail by the judgment of this great tribunal, the American people." And he continued, "Intelligence, patriotism, Christianity, and a firm reliance on Him who has never forsaken this favored land are still competent to adjust in the best way all our present difficulty."

There was no word about slavery. He knew as none other knew what the ultimate solution would be.

On the first day of January in 1863, it is said that he first regaled the Cabinet by reading from one of the quaint and whimsical lectures of the current humorist, Artemus Ward. Then in a complete change of mood, he took from a drawer, what turned out to be the Emancipation Proclamation. What a spectacular way to begin a New Year! Having disposed of the details, he came to the final paragraph. "And upon this act, sincerely believed to be an act of justice, warranted by the Constitution, upon military necessity, I invoke the considerate judgment of mankind and the gracious favor of the Almighty God." That day there must have been unbounded joy in God's Heaven.

On a cool afternoon at Gettysburg in November of 1863, after the words of the orator of the day had faded into obscurity on the afternoon breezes, he came forth with only a few hundred words, but they
were deathless. How easily and clearly he stated the issue -- whether
a nation conceived in liberty and dedicated to equality, can endure.
There followed his appeal for a new dedication of the spirit and for
a new birth of Freedom. Justice and morality were marching and he
was in the forefront, moving ever forward -- not too fast to leave
public confidence behind and not too slow to invite defeatism or to
frustrate the unfoldment of a divine pattern.

Came that day in March, 1864, when he stood before his countrymen
again to take the oath as Chief Executive. Gettysburg was behind him
now. The progress of the Union forces was more encouraging.

He might have become stern and less humble. He might have ful-
filled the politicians hopes and stated what he expected to do with
the sister states still in rebellion. He might have threatened. But
not so. There was no passion, no spleen, no politics. It was the
Instrument speaking. "If we shall suppose that American slavery is
one of those offenses which in the Providence of God must need come,
but which having continued through his appointed time, He now wills
to remove and that he gives to both North and South this terrible war
as the woe due to those by whom the offense came, shall we discern
therein any departure from those divine attributes which the believers
in a living God always ascribe to Him?" With what humility he con-
cluded. "With malice toward none, with charity for all, with firmness
in the right." There was that word again. Firmness in the right,
the antithesis of wrong.
Consider finally Abraham Lincoln's last speech. It came in the evening of April 11, 1865, at the White House in response to a serenade. Lee had surrendered. There was jubilation in the land. Lincoln took the occasion to speak of the action of 12,000 voters in the State of Louisiana who had taken the necessary steps to return to the Union. Before discussing the details of the action taken by Louisiana and his obvious inclination to accept the action, even though defective in some particulars, he said to the serenaders, "In the midst of this, however, He from whom all blessings flow must not be forgotten. A call for a national thanksgiving is being prepared and will be duly promulgated."

Four days later, the assassin's bullet ended all that was mortal. The Ages embraced him. The Lord's instrument had consummated his mission. How else shall one adjudge this exalted common man?