

## Inaugural Prayers Fit America as a Civilization

1.....Should the presidential inauguration ceremony include prayers by clergy? 2.....Should President-elect Obama say "so help me God" at the end of his oath of office? 3.....Should Chief Justice John Roberts ask him to?

1.....Yes, no, yes.

YES: America One (we affirmers of Samuel P. Huntington's "Anglo-Protestant" distinct civilization of America's founders) says the presidential inauguration ceremony should include prayers by clergy. In his 1996 "The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order," Huntington affirmed "America's Creed" as the English-language, Protestant values [including religious commitment], individualism, and "the rule of law rather than of men." After 9/11 (the clash of Islamism and Americanism), in his 2004 "Who Are We? The Challenges to America's National Identity" he updated and further developed his thesis.

NO, says America Two. America's "denationalized elites" (as Huntington called them) see America as the flagship of a post-particular world civilization: secular, multi-lingual, multi-cultural. Say they, America's historic practice of assimilating immigrants into "the American way of life" should cease. They are revisionist about America's founding, claiming that it was essentially not religious but Enlightenment (instead of, as Mark Noll, both). And they keep pressing for what Richard John Neuhaus called "the naked public square" (religious words eliminated from public events, religious symbols eliminated from public places). No prayers, by clergy or laity, at any public event, including presidential inaugurations.

YES, says America Three. The most recent waves of immigrants, especially Hispanic, are Christian, as are most Arab Americans; and Muslim immigrants are religious. All of these stand closer to America One than to America Two.

2.....A presidential inauguration combines ceremonial (actions) with ritual (words). Obama should submit to both, including "so help me God" - a phrase conveying the humble recognition that our president is not God and that our nation is not an empire making a world claim. But rightly, he stands *against "faith-based" politics*, as in his 5.28.06 speech:

"Democracy demands that the religiously motivated translate their concerns into universal, rather than religion-specific, values. Democracy requires that their proposals be subject to argument, and amenable to reason. I may be opposed to abortion for religious reasons, but if I seek to pass a law banning the practice, I cannot simply point to the teachings of my church or evoke God's will. I have to explain why abortion violates some principle that is accessible to people of all faiths, including those with no faith at all....Politics depends on our ability to persuade each other of common aims based on a common reality. It involves the compromise, the art of what's possible. At some fundamental level, religion does not allow for compromise. It's the art of the impossible. If God has spoken, then followers are expected to live up to God's edicts, regardless of the consequences. To base one's life on such uncompromising commitments may be sublime, but to base our policy-making on such commitments would be a dangerous thing."

3.....Yes, Chief Justice John Roberts should ask Obama to say "so help me God." America One and America Three agree, and in this are implicit enemies of America Two.

4.....America One's national identity is unique and distinctive in the history of the world. This "exceptionalism," singularity, should be the basis of our *hope of being better news* to humankind and the good earth than we have been in the past. To this humble task, our present declining military and financial world-dominance should contribute.

5.....The *re-assertion of America's core values* is increasingly difficult, as America Two has come to dominate our public schools. But as the clash of civilizations becomes clearer, I'm hopeful that America's basic civilization will gain support among our people.



## Comments

Please report offensive comments below.

Discussions aside for a moment, I do celebrate the fact that Mr. Elliott personally replies the comments made on his post.

POSTED BY: BIOS | JANUARY 21, 2009 12:26 AM

[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

TO PAGANPLACE:

When "secular" & "secularism" are distinguished as two modes of thought, the latter means what Wikipedia calls "hard" (anti-religious) secularism.

POSTED BY: WILLIS E. ELLIOTT | JANUARY 20, 2009 2:11 PM

[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

"2....."Secular" means non-sacred, & "secularIST" means anti-religious, (usually) atheist."

No, Reverend, before this turns into a bottle of Dr. Bronner's soap, it \*doesn't.\*

Who taught you that?

POSTED BY: PAGANPLACE | JANUARY 19, 2009 9:25 PM

[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

Oaths and Swearing . . . Why?

As kids it was "Cross my heart, hope to die, stick a needle in my eye,"

Then the adolescents' adage "I swear on a stack of Bibles,"

Today as adults "So help me God".

All the above was/is to cause others to trust us.

Now there was a day I stood before an altar and entered into a commitment to my wife, for life. It was a promise made before God and with God as witness, in other words a vow to be kept.

As Pres. Obama invokes God's name, he too will be swearing an oath with God as witness.

Pray for him.

The Problem ...

We live in a world of lies; to be honest most of our system it seems is built upon them. Lies are what make this world a tough place to exist in.

Just imagine if humans stopped lying. What would happen to us?

Now that would be "Change We Can Believe In."

POSTED BY: 4THWATCH | JANUARY 19, 2009 7:03 PM  
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

---

Word-clarify about our differences as Americans, by freeing us from logomachy (as the Greeks called fighting over words), can further our acting TOGETHER toward common national and human ends. Obama is a master of making this distinction. Thinking Americans are not divisible into word-herds: Obama calls himself progressive, conservative, liberal, secular, religious depending on areas of life-involvement & issues under debate.

A few examples of important disinctions:

- 1.....America is a highly religious SOCIETY with a deliberately secular GOVERNMENT.
- 2....."Secular" means non-sacred, & "secularIST" means anti-religious, (usually) atheist.
- 3.....America's FOUNDING document (the Declaration of Independence, declaring us a new political entity) is religious (speaking of the "Creator" & "Nature's God"): our government's FORMATIVE document (the Constitution) is secular (with legal, non-sacred language).
- 4....."Christian" does not mean "CONSERVATIVE." Today is Martin Luther King day, memorializing a Christian RADICAL.

POSTED BY: WILLIS E. ELLIOTT | JANUARY 19, 2009 4:19 PM  
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

---

Secularism and atheism are not the same thing.

'One Nation Indivisible' should not be divided by 'under God.'

This is not a nation of Christianity vs non-Christian-conservative subjects.

As much as some try to make one of it.

POSTED BY: PAGANPLACE | JANUARY 19, 2009 1:36 PM  
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

---

I think that the main division the article establishes is between religion and secularism/atheism.

This being the case, my questions is, why fear secularism so much?

POSTED BY: BIOS | JANUARY 18, 2009 6:49 PM  
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

---

TO SPARROWHAWK

You are being divisive, and a part of America Two, when you claim that "the country was founded as a secular society." Samuel Huntington was correct: America ("the country") was founded by English-speaking Protestants, & our civilization is distinctly Christian (though our present population is only mainly Christian). English common law (with Roman law behind it) is the basis of our legal system; and as a legal document, our Constitution uses exclusively legal language ("secular" only in the sense of being nonreligious in wording). / One should note a difference between the Constitution's nonreligious wording and the Christian identity of its signers, who in conclusion date by the phrase "in the year of our Lord" Jesus (the Latin, "anno domini," does not suggest "our"; but "domini" is a specific reference to the Lord Jesus).

Yes, Obama's aim should be the aim of all Americans, namely, to COME TOGETHER with a vision of the common good transcending all our differences. As for "splitting us into groups," which you accuse me of, I identify existing groups for clarity of understanding and discourse. The need for this is apparent in your failure to recognize that you

were speaking for a group (which I call America Two) rather than for America in your narrative of our country's founding: you were being divisive, and were not aware of it.

POSTED BY: WILLIS E. ELLIOTT | JANUARY 14, 2009 3:44 PM  
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

---

I think that a person's faith should be an important part of such an act as swearing to protect our constitution. There should be meaning to the oath, and if adding a religious note gives it that extra meaning...then so be it. If a person is going to protect what protects us then by all means there should be a binding, even if it is just to that persons honor.

Bush kept on saying he made his oath to protect the people...no he did not. He made an oath to protect the Constitution. Maybe that is why he was a lousy president...he had no idea what he was taking an oath to do and he did not protect the Constitution. Call on what you hold sacred to seal your oath, know what you are swearing before your God/s to. Then allow all people to have the same right...So help me God...or So Mote it Be.

terra

POSTED BY: KEIRGAZELLE | JANUARY 14, 2009 12:37 AM  
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

---

Again with the divisive language, Willis? Come on, you did this same thing in your post on gay marriage. You said homosexuals as a group could NEVER reach the level of dignity as the rest of us. Now you are implying that people who don't think we need (key word here is need) to have religion in public inaugurations are part of some "America Two"? And then you go on to claim that this America Two is revisionist because we claim this country was founded as a secular society? Luckily, there is no need to even be revisionist about it. We have a very handy foundational document called the Constitution. The oath is included in this document, and it does not include religious language (none of the Constitution does). I'm all for an individual candidate choosing to invoke their god at the end of their oath, but I don't see why you want to be so divisive and start splitting us into groups.

POSTED BY: SPARROWHAWK | JANUARY 13, 2009 5:40 PM  
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

---

The comments to this entry are closed.