

The first presidential inauguration of these United States

This week I had the privilege to attend the inauguration of President-elect Donald Trump. While this is truly an honorable day and tradition for Americans, did you know there are seven distinct religious activities in the first presidential inauguration that have been repeated in whole or part during every subsequent inauguration? They include:

- 1- The use of the Bible to administer the oath
- 2- Solemnifying the oath with multiple religious expressions (placing a hand on the Bible, saying "So help me God," and then kissing the Bible)
- 3- Prayers offered by the president himself
- 4- Religious content in the inaugural address
- 5- The president calling on the people to pray or acknowledge God
- 6- Church inaugural worship services
- 7- Clergy-led prayers

The first inauguration under our current Constitution occurred in New York City, which served as the nation's capital during the first year of the new federal government.

The papers reported the activities:

"[0]n the morning of the day on which our illustrious President will be invested with his office, the bells will ring at nine o'clock, when the people may go up to the house of God and in a solemn manner commit the new government, with its important train of consequences, to the holy protection and blessing of the Most High."

The ceremony took place on the balcony at Federal Hall with a

huge crowd gathered below watching the proceedings.

Washington placed his left hand upon the open 1767 King James Bible, raised his right hand, took the oath of office, then bent over and reverently kissed the Bible.

As the first-ever presidential address, Washington's precedent began with prayer, explaining:

"It would be peculiarly improper to omit in this first official act my fervent supplications to that Almighty Being Who rules over the universe, Who presides in the councils of nations, and Whose providential aids can supply every human defect – that His benediction may consecrate to the liberties and happiness of the people of the United States a government instituted by themselves for these essential purposes." [1]

After concluding his address, Washington offered its closing prayer:

"Having thus imparted to you my sentiments as they have been awakened by the occasion which brings us together, I shall take my present leave – but not without resorting once more to the benign Parent of the Human Race in humble supplication [prayer] that . . . His Divine blessing may be equally conspicuous in the enlarged views, the temperate consultations, and the wise measures on which the success of this government must depend. [2]

The next activities were arranged by Congress itself when the Senate directed:

"That after the oath shall have been administered to the President, he – attended by the Vice-President and members of the Senate and House of Representatives – proceed to St. Paul's Chapel to hear Divine service." [3]

The House had approved the same resolution, [4] so the president and Congress thus went en masse to church as an

official body. As affirmed by congressional records.

So you see our Constitutional Government was birthed and covered with a holy Christian cloak and, while this inauguration will likely be an experience I will never forget, I believe there is something more important than ceremonies. My prayer is that posterity will look with honor on our labor to preserve the indispensable supports of political prosperity that Washington attributed to "Religion and Morality".

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