

FROM ONE HILL TO ANOTHER

Corvallis, Montana

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Presidents' Day and Our Challenge!

By Gary and Joan Carlson

February is unique when it comes to the number of U.S. Presidents whose birthdays occurred during that month. There are four: Ronald Reagan on the 6th, William Henry Harrison on the 9th, Abraham Lincoln on the 12th, and George Washington on the 22nd. We now set aside one day during February as "Presidents' Day" to commemorate all U.S. Presidents.

This tidbit of historical information gives us an excellent opportunity to reflect upon our nation, several of our presidents, and their faith revealed in the content of their State of the Union speeches. Let's take a look at the following

information to explore the history of Christianity in America, Christianity in America today, and whether or not we will be a Christian nation in the future.

First of all, almost every State of the Union address includes references to God. President Eisenhower even asked everyone to bow their heads as he gave his personal prayer before his address to Congress.

James Madison, the Father of the Constitution, chose words limiting the Constitution and any form of government intrusion into the exercise to freely worship. He said, "...avoid the lightest interference with the functions of religion."

The original intent expressed in our founding documents made it very clear that it was not the government's responsibility to intrude into the religious affairs of the American people. They had been denied religious freedom under the Church of

England, so wanted America to be free from similar religious restrictions. They did not want a "state authorized religion." But they also clearly expressed the need to keep their reliance on God to properly run the affairs of the state.

President Madison ends his first address with a dynamic paragraph in support of the guardianship and guidance of the "Almighty Being."

John Adams included the words "Christians" and "Christianity" in his address. James K. Polk states, "Almighty Ruler of the Universeguard this Heaven-favored land against the mischiefs which, without His guidance, might arise from an unwise public policy."

George Washington's first address included a powerful paragraph on the role of the "Invisible hand that has guided us every step along the way."

Abraham Lincoln began his

1862 address saying, "Since...and while it has not pleased the Almighty to bless us with a return of peace, we can press on, guided by the best light He gives us, trusting that in His own good time and wise way, all will yet be well."

William Henry Harrison stated, "a profound reverence for the Christian religion and a thorough conviction that sound morals, religious liberty, and a just sense of religious responsibility are essentially connected with all true and lasting happiness...and to that good Being who has blessed us by the gifts of civil and religious freedom...in all future time."

John Quincy Adams started his address with these words. "...in that of heaven to bind myself by the solemnities of religious obligation to the faithful performance...which I have been called." He also ended his address with words from scripture,



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"...except the Lord keep the city, the watchman waketh but in vain."

President Kennedy included, "...the belief that the rights of man come not from the generosity of the state, but from the hand of God." He later added words from Isaiah, "...undo the heavy burdens...and to let the oppressed go free." and further, "...asking His blessing and His help, but knowing that here on earth God's work must truly be our own."

President Franklin Roosevelt referred to the Mayflower Compact in his third address. There are many references to God found in that document.

Within the presidential State of the Union speeches, it is quite easy to find references to freedom, liberty and democracy. President Truman made a striking comparison between Democracy and Communism. Today we could add the word Terrorism along with Communism in President Truman's remarks and definitely make his address fit our current challenges.

Perhaps some of the most memorable words came from an address by FDR. "The destiny of America was proclaimed in words of prophecy spoken by our first President in his first inaugural in 1789 - words almost directed it would seem, to this year of 1941: The preservation of the sacred fire of liberty and the destiny of the Republican model of government are justly considered...deeply.....finally, staked on the experiment entrusted to the hands of the American people. If we lost

that sacred fire-if we let it be smothered with doubt and fear - then we shall reject the destiny which Washington strove so valiantly and triumphantly to establish...In the face of great perils never before encountered, our strong purpose is to protect and to perpetuate the integrity of democracy. For this we muster the spirit of America, and the faith of America. We do not retreat. We are not content to stand still. As Americans we go forward, in the service of our country, by the will of God."

Recently, President Trump took the lead in the National Day of Prayer and has mentioned God in numerous speeches. When the country has faced serious issues, he has asked the people of America to come together in our common love of country and faith in God to seek the answers that can only be resolved by a greater power than government or human understanding.

And so, the common thread of faith that is obvious in America's founding documents and part of the fabric of our early leaders has not yet been broken. For the most part, it transcends party lines, racial, or gender differences, or religious affiliations. Judeo-Christian values are the pillars that undergird us as a free country, and our First Amendment guarantees every citizen the right to worship freely.

Because the baton of religious liberty has been passed on to us, we must address our responsibility as American Christians today. Are we willing to ensure for tomorrow the faith and

freedom we were so blessed to inherit? Will we step up to the plate as did those who challenged the ruling hand of Britain, or struggled to preserve the Union and guarantee the God-given rights bestowed to all men and women? Are we willing to stand in the gap against the threats that erode our culture and threaten the well-being of the next generation?

President Reagan's Second Inaugural Address concluded with words that embody the spirit in which we have looked to God for the energy that has driven America. Whether or not that spirit continues is, in part, up to all of us.

"...It is the American sound. It is hopeful, big-hearted, idealistic, daring, decent, and fair. That's our heritage; that is our song. We sing it still. For all our problems, our differences, we are together as of old, as we raise our voices to the God who is the Author of this most tender music. And may He continue to hold us close as we fill the world with our sound—sound in unity, affection, and love—one people under God, dedicated to the dream of freedom that He has placed in the human heart, called upon now to pass that dream on to a waiting and hopeful world. God bless you and may God bless America." 🇺🇸

We are Gary and Joan, asking you to join us next time aboard the *White Hat Express*.



FYI:

Gary Carlson, Publisher of the *White Hat Express**, is a former Reagan Administration Political Appointee, a retired US Marine Corps Officer, and a former candidate for both the US Senate and the House of Representatives. He also teaches Political Science and the US Constitution at the Community College level.

Joan Carlson, *White Hat Express* Editor, has worked on Capitol Hill in three offices, testified before the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee, is a freelance writer, and currently owns *Outreach Enterprises*, a desktop publishing and promotional services business in Montana. Both Carlsons have held GOP positions and have been involved in Republican Party activities in four states; California, Minnesota, Montana and Virginia.

The term "**White Hat**" originates from Vietnam where Gary was a member of the 26th Marines, and the good guys were referred to as "**White Hats**".

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