

TOPIC

Changes of Command and the First Amendment

Text of the decision

During a recent change of command, the incoming wing commander stated, “First I’d like to thank God for the many blessings He’s given me and my family and the guidance in my life.” The commander proceeded to thank the many people who helped him along the way and closed with mission-focused remarks. Within approximately ten minutes of the conclusion of the change of command ceremony, at the same venue, the commander was promoted to the next higher grade. At this personal promotion ceremony, the commander said:

So first off, I just want to remind everyone I just took the oath of office to support and defend the Constitution of the United States and one of those things in the Constitution is our Freedom of Religion, and so I wholeheartedly agree with that and I believe that the diversity we have in the United States is incredible and I will defend that right with my life. But today, today is a little personal for me, so I just want to thank my God Jesus for his salvation and the things that he’s done in my life and the blessings he’s given me and my family.”

This OpJAGAF is in response to your request for guidance on whether a commander violates the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment and Air Force Instruction 1-1, *Air Force Standards*, 7 August 2012, Incorporating Change 1, 12 November 2014, if he or she thanks God and/or has an invocation at a change of command ceremony. It also addresses whether the analysis changes if the change of command is followed immediately by a personal promotion ceremony.

We conclude a commander may: briefly thank a Supreme Being (either generally, such as Providence, that Almighty Being, our Lord, or the Supreme Author of All Good; or specifically, such as Allah, Brahman, Christ, Ganesh, God, Yahweh, or even Beelzebub), have an invocation, and choose whomever he or she would like to provide the invocation. If the commander holds a personal promotion ceremony on the same day, a significant break must occur between the change of command and promotion ceremony in order for the commander to be freer in expressing his or her personal religious beliefs. If a break does not occur, the commander must limit his or her religious comments to comments that are appropriate at the official change of command.

Discussion

Changes of command are official events. The primary purpose is “to allow subordinates to witness the formality of command change from one officer to another. The ceremony should be official,

formal, brief, and conducted with great dignity.”¹ These events are distinguishable from personal promotions, individual award presentations (when done separately from an official meeting), or retirement ceremonies. Although these latter ceremonies have indicia of being official functions (for example, the playing/singing of the National Anthem, the recitation of the oath, the reading of official orders, the singing of the Air Force song), retirement, individual award, and individual promotion ceremonies are considered personal in nature and are not the focus of this discussion.

The Supreme Court has “long recognized that the military is, by necessity, a specialized society separate from civilian society.”² Further, “the rights of men in the armed forces must perforce be conditioned to meet overriding demands of discipline and duty.”³ However, the Religious Freedom Restoration Act⁴ places strict scrutiny on government actions that substantially burden a sincerely held religious belief. Additionally, Department of Defense Instruction 1300.17, *Accommodation of Religious Practices within the Military Services*, protects the rights of all Airmen, including commanders, to practice their respective religion or no religion at all.⁵

Consistent with the First Amendment and RFRA, Air Force Instruction 1-1 conveys that “[e]very Airman also has the right to individual expressions of sincerely held beliefs, to include conscience, moral principles, or religious beliefs, unless those expressions would have an adverse impact on military readiness, unit cohesion, good order, discipline, health and safety, or mission accomplishment.”⁶ Air Force Instruction 1-1 also discusses the balance between Free Expression of Religion and the Establishment Clause: “Leaders at all levels must balance constitutional protections for their own free exercise of religion, including individual expressions of religious beliefs, and the constitutional prohibition against governmental establishment of religion. They must ensure their words and actions cannot *reasonably* be construed to be *officially* endorsing or disapproving of, or extending preferential treatment for any faith, belief, or absence of belief.”⁷ (*Emphasis added*)

A brief statement at a change of command thanking a Supreme Being for the blessings the commander received is permissible, a personal free exercise of religion, and cannot “reasonably be construed to be officially endorsing or disapproving of, or extending preferential treatment for any faith, belief, or absence of belief.” It is not an *official* statement implying the Air Force prefers one belief or non-belief over another, or that the unit (wing, group, squadron, etc.) maintains one faith is truer than another. Rather, it is more reasonably construed as a *personal* statement of thanksgiving and humility, that something greater than oneself assisted the declarant in achieving

¹ Air Force Pamphlet 34-1202, *Guide to Protocol*, 10 January 2013 (Incorporating Change 1, 30 January 2015) paragraph 14.5.1. Paragraph 14.5.3 lists the sequence of events for changes of command. Required items include the opening narration, colors, national anthem, remarks by the presiding official, award presentation, remarks by the outgoing commander, change of command, remarks by incoming commander, closing narration, Air Force song, and departure. Optional items include an invocation, formation renders last salute, formation renders first salute, and reception.

² *Parker v. Levy*, 417 U.S. 733, 743 (1974).

³ *Id.*, quoting *Burns v. Wilson*, 346 U.S. 137, 140 (1953)(plurality opinion).

⁴ See Title 42, United States Code, Section 2000bb-1.

⁵ DoD Instruction 1300.17, *Accommodation of Religious Practices Within the Military Services*, February 10, 2009, Incorporating Change 1, Effective January 22, 2014, paragraph 4.a.

⁶ AFI 1-1, *Air Force Standards*, 7 August 2012, Incorporating Change 1, 12 November 2014, paragraph 2.11. DoDI 1300.17 contains similar language in paragraph 4.b.

⁷ *Id.*, at paragraph 2.12.

some accomplishment (in this case, selection for and installment as commander of a wing).⁸ Although thanking a Supreme Being is certainly distinguishable from seeing “In God We Trust” on our currency, a brief statement like the one in our fact pattern is as benign as saying, “Thank God,” when expressing relief, or saying, “God bless you,” after someone sneezes, or “What a Godawful mess” when discussing an unpleasant situation.

In this fact pattern, the commander thanked God, then proceeded to thank the many other people who helped him along the way. If he thanked his wife for her support, his gratitude could not reasonably be concluded as an assertion that no one’s spouse is as good as his spouse. Or that being married is a superior qualification for a commander than being single. He then closed with mission-focused remarks. If he belonged to the Fraternal Order of Freemasons or the Air Force Association and thanked said organization(s) for supporting of him throughout his career, a brief statement of appreciation would not reasonably be considered an improper endorsement of those non-federal entities, and those in attendance would not reasonably feel compelled to go join them. If a catering service catered the event and he thanked that organization and its staff; again, his words would not reasonably be considered to be an impermissible endorsement of that business, and those in the audience would not feel compelled to use that business themselves.

The Supreme Court has sustained government references to God, as well as prayers in government-sponsored public settings.⁹ However, these practices must be “uniquely suited to serve wholly secular purposes as solemnizing public occasions, or inspiring commitment to meet some national challenge in a manner that simply could not be fully served in our culture if government were limited to purely nonreligious phrases.”¹⁰ Courts have upheld these practices, referred to as

⁸ “The phrase ‘under God’ is in no sense a prayer, nor an endorsement of any religion, but a simple recognition of the fact noted in H.R. Rep. No. 1693, at 2: ‘From the time of our earliest history our peoples and our institutions have reflected the traditional concept that our Nation was founded on a fundamental belief in God.’ ... The recital, in a patriotic ceremony pledging allegiance to the flag and to the Nation, of the allegiance to the flag and to the Nation, of the descriptive phrase ‘under God’ cannot possibly lead to the establishment of a religion, or anything like it.” *Elk Grove Unified Sch. Dist. v. Newdow*, 542 U.S. 1, at 31-32 (2004) (Rehnquist, CJ, concurring)(internal citations omitted).

⁹ See *Marsh v. Chambers*, 463 U.S. 783 (1983); *Town of Greece, New York, v. Galloway*, 134 S. Ct. 1811 (2014).

¹⁰ *Katcoff v. Marsh at Twenty-Two: The Military Chaplaincy and the Separation of Church and State*, 38 U. Tol. L. Rev. 1137, 1162 (Richard D. Rosen, 2007), citing *Lynch v. Donnelly*, 465 U.S. 668, 717 (1984)(Brennen J., dissenting)(*emphasis added*).

“enlightened”¹¹ deism, “ceremonial” deism,¹² or “cultural”¹³ deism because they “do not convey a message of [official] endorsement of particular religious beliefs,”¹⁴ and can serve other valuable purposes in public life such as “the legitimate secular purposes of solemnizing public occasions, expressing confidence in the future, and encouraging recognition of what is worthy of appreciation in society.”¹⁵ Much as including a Nativity scene in a city government’s holiday display is permissible, humbly recognizing that the divine helped the commander achieve success in his position, while also thanking others and then focusing on the unit’s mission, is also permissible. Conversely, just as it would be impermissible for a city government to only display a Nativity scene with no other secular holiday decorations, it would be impermissible if the commander only discussed his or her faith and religious convictions during the change of command.

¹¹ *McCreary County v. ACLU*, 545 U.S. 844, 880 (2005) (The Court held the display of the Ten Commandments in Kentucky court house to violate the Establishment clause. In response to the dissent’s argument, Justice Souter noted “Washington’s religious belief was that of the enlightenment: deism.” Justice Scalia, with whom Chief Justice Rehnquist and Justice Thomas joined dissenting, discussed instances in which the Framers invited their audience to pray and cited Jefferson as saying in his second inaugural address, “I shall need, too, the favor of that Being in whose hands we are, who led our fathers, as Israel of old, from their native land and planted them in a country flowing with all the necessaries and comforts of life; who has covered our infancy with His providence and our riper years with His wisdom and power and to whose goodness I ask you to join in supplications with me that He will so enlighten the minds of your servants, guide their councils, and prosper their measures that whatsoever they do shall result in your good, and shall secure to you the peace, friendships, and approbation of all nations.”)

¹² *Engel v. Vitale*, 370 U.S. 421, 435 (1962) n.21 (A New York law required the School District’s principal to cause the following prayer to be said aloud by each class in the presence of a teacher at the beginning of each school day: “Almighty God, we acknowledge our dependence upon Thee, and we beg Thy blessings upon us, our parents, our teachers, and our Country.” Although the Court struck down the law as an Establishment Clause violation, the majority opined, “There is of course nothing in the decision reached here that is inconsistent with the fact that school children and others are officially encouraged to express love for our country by reciting historical documents such as the Declaration of Independence which contain references to the Deity or by singing officially espoused anthems which include the composer’s professions of faith in a Supreme Being, or with the fact that there are many manifestations in our public life of belief in God. Such patriotic or ceremonial occasions bear no true resemblance to the unquestioned religious exercise that the State . . . has sponsored this instance.”). See also *Elk Grove United Sch. Dist. v. Newdow*, 542 U.S. 1 (2004) (The Court determined a non-custodial father did not have standing to bring suit alleging the words “under God” in the pledge of allegiance violated the Establishment Clause.) (O’Connor, J., concurring. “[G]overnment can, in a discrete category of cases acknowledge or refer to the divine without offending the Constitution. This category of ‘ceremonial deism’ most clearly encompasses such things as the national motto (‘In God We Trust’), religious references in traditional patriotic songs such as The Star Spangled Banner, and the words with which the Marshal of this Court opens each of its sessions (‘God save the United States and this Honorable Court.’ These references are not minor trespasses upon the Establishment Clause to which I turn a blind eye. Instead, their history, character, and context prevent them from being constitutional violations at all.”)

¹³ *Lynch*, 464 U.S., at 691, 693 (O’Connor, J., concurring) (“Celebration of public holidays, which have cultural significance even if they have religious aspects, is a legitimate secular purpose.”)

¹⁴ *County of Allegheny v. ACLU, Greater Pittsburgh Chapter*, 492 U.S. 573, 631 (1989) (O’Connor, J., concurring). See also Stephen B. Epstein, *Rethinking the Constitutionality of Ceremonial Deism*, 96 Colum. L. Rev. 2083, 2083 (1996). See also *McCreary*, 545 U.S., at 895 (Scalia, J., dissenting) (“The beliefs of those [7 million Americans who adhere to religions that are not monotheistic] citizens are entirely protected by the Free Exercise Clause, and by those aspects of the Establishment Clause that do not relate to government acknowledgment of the Creator. Invocation of God despite their beliefs is permitted not because nonmonotheistic religions cease to be religions recognized by the religion clauses of the First Amendment, but because governmental invocation of God is not an establishment.”).

¹⁵ *Elk Grove*, 542 U.S., at 35, quoting *Lynch v. Donnelly*, 465 U.S. 668, 688 (1984) (inclusion of Nativity scene in city government’s Christmas display is permissible) (O’Connor, J., concurring).

As Rosen explains, the Courts permit “ceremonial” deism “in large part, as either ‘popular religious references [which], by virtue of repetition and acceptance by the masses, have lost their true religious character’ or are used by government for secular purposes.”¹⁶ For example, in *Van Orden v. Perry*, while dissenting with the Court’s decision that placement of the Ten Commandments on the Texas State Capital grounds did not violate the Establishment Clause, Justice Stevens opined, “[A]lthough Thanksgiving Day proclamations and inaugural speeches undoubtedly seem official, in most circumstances they will not constitute the sort of government endorsement of religion at which the separation of church and state is aimed.”¹⁷ Further, Justice Stevens asserted:

Our leaders, when delivering public addresses, often express their blessings simultaneously in the service of God and their constituents. Thus, when public officials deliver public speeches, we recognize that their words are not exclusively a transmission from *the* government because those oratories have embedded within them the inherently personal views of the speaker as an individual member of the polity.¹⁸ (*Emphasis in original*)

The Courts have not addressed the issue of whether a commander may thank God during a change of command. However, in *Newdow v. Bush*,¹⁹ the D.C. Circuit Court denied Mr. Newdow’s motion for a preliminary injunction that would enjoin the President and others from permitting clergy-led prayer at the 2005 Inauguration. The court discussed how inaugural prayer can be traced to the founding of this country.²⁰ From President Washington’s second inauguration in 1793 through President Franklin Roosevelt’s second inauguration in 1937, the inaugural prayer was moved from a church to the Senate chambers of the Capitol Building, where it was given during administration of the oath of the Vice-President.²¹ Moreover, at the same time that an inaugural prayer was being given by clergy at a church or at the Capitol, each of the Presidents (including several Founding Fathers) were also offering “supplications” to an Almighty Being in their inaugural addresses.²² Each Presidential inaugural amounts, in significant part, to a military change of command; indeed, it is a change of the Commander–In-Chief at which every military service leader is expected to be in attendance.

¹⁶ Rosen, 38 U. Tol. Rev., at 1162 (citing Lisa Shaw Roy, *The Establishment Clause and the Concept of Inclusion*, 83 Or. L. Rev. 1, 22 (2004)). See also *Van Orden v. Perry*, 545 U.S. 677, 699 (2005) (Breyer, J., concurring) (“[T]he Establishment Clause does not compel the government to purge from the public sphere all that in any way partakes of religion.”).

¹⁷ *Van Orden*, 545 U.S., at 723 (Stevens, J., dissenting).

¹⁸ *Id.*

¹⁹ *Newdow v. Bush*, 355 F. Supp. 2d 265 (D.C. Dist. Ct. 2005).

²⁰ *Id.*, at 286.

²¹ *Id.*

²² On 30 April 1789, the first Commander-in-Chief “stepped toward the iron rail, where he was to receive the oath of office. The diminutive secretary of the Senate, Samuel Otis, squeezed between the President and Chancellor Livingston and raised up the crimson cushion with a Bible on it. Washington put his right hand on the Bible, opened to Psalm 121:1: ‘I raise my eyes toward the hills. Whence shall my help come.’ The Chancellor proceeded with the oath: ‘Do you solemnly swear that you will faithfully execute the office of President of the United States and will to the best of your ability preserve, protect and defend the Constitution of the United States?’ The President responded, ‘I solemnly swear,’ and repeated the oath, adding, ‘So help me God.’ He then bent forward and kissed the Bible before him.” *Elk Grove*, 542 U.S., at 27 (quoting M. Riccards, *A Republic, If you can Keep It: The Foundation of the American Presidency, 1700-1800*, pp 73-74 (1987)). See the addendum for each President’s reference to a Supreme Being.

Following the rationale from *Newdow* and the historical precedent of prayers or supplications at the change of the Commander-In-Chief, a prayer or invocation is permissible at any military change of command. Commanders may invite chaplains or non-chaplains to provide an invocation. As a general rule, prayer constitutes protected religious expression. However, in official circumstances, or when superior/subordinate relationships are involved, superiors should still be sensitive to the potential that personal religious expressions may appear official or coercive. Accordingly, the commander should not be the one offering the prayer or invocation at his/her change of command ceremony.²³

Courts have also applied the reasoning in *Marsh* to uphold prayer by a paid legislative chaplain at the United States Congress²⁴ and prayer by a military chaplain at Army Bases.²⁵ In *Town of Greece, New York, v. Galloway*, the Supreme Court held the town's practice of inviting local ministers to give a prayer before each monthly meeting was not unconstitutional.²⁶ The Court determined the "content of the prayer is not of concern to judges," provided "there is no indication that the prayer opportunity has been exploited to proselytize or advance any one, or to disparage any other, faith or belief."²⁷ Accordingly, "[a]bsent a pattern of prayers that over time denigrate, proselytize, or betray an impermissible government purpose, a challenge based solely on the content of a prayer will not likely establish a constitutional violation."²⁸ A call to action, "directing the public to participate in the prayers, stand [when seated], bow their heads, or make the sign of the cross" is a factor in whether the invocation is constitutionally permissible.²⁹

Although neither the *Galloway* nor *Marsh* Courts define the terms "betray an impermissible government purpose,"³⁰ "proselytize," or "disparage"³¹, the 4th Circuit defined proselytize, stating "To 'proselytize' on behalf of a particular religious belief necessarily means to seek to 'convert' others to that belief[.]"³² *Lund* involved the Board of Commissioners of Rowan County, North Carolina, which opened its public meetings with an invocation delivered by a member of the

²³ We conclude that it would be impermissible for a commander to perform a religious invocation at any official government ceremony, but it is permissible for a commander to perform such an invocation at a private, personal ceremony.

²⁴ *Murray v. Buchanan*, 232 U.S. App. D.C. 42 (D.C. Cir. 1983); *Newdow v. Eagen*, 309 F. Supp. 2d 29 (D.D.C. 2004).

²⁵ *Katcoff v. Marsh*, 755 F.2d 223 (2d Cir. 1985).

²⁶ *Town of Greece, New York v. Galloway*. 134 S. Ct. 1811 (2014).

²⁷ *Id.*, at 1821.

²⁸ *Id.*, at 1824.

²⁹ "The analysis would be different if town board members directed the public to participate in the prayers, singled out dissidents for opprobrium, or indicated that their decisions might be influenced by a person's acquiescence in the prayer opportunity. No such thing occurred in the town of Greece. Although board members themselves stood, bowed their heads, or made the sign of the cross during the prayer, they at no point solicited similar gestures by the public. Respondents point to several occasions where audience members were asked to rise for the prayer. These requests, however, came not from town leaders but from the guest ministers, who presumably are accustomed to directing their congregations in this way and might have done so thinking the action was inclusive, not coercive." *Id.*, at 1826.

³⁰ "[I]n the general course legislative bodies do not engage in impermissible coercion merely by exposing constituents to prayer they would rather not hear and in which they need not participate." *Id.*, at 1826 (quoting *County of Allegheny*, 492 U.S., at 60).

³¹ Merriam-Webster's online dictionary defines "denigrate" as: (1) to attack the reputation of: defame; (2) to deny the importance or validity of: belittle." See <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/denigrate>.

³² *Lund v. Rowan Cty.*, 837 F.3d 407, 422 (4th Cir. 2016).

Board.³³ The court stated, “There is no prayer in the record asking those who may hear it to convert to the prayer-giver’s faith or belittling those who believe differently. And even if there were, it is the practice as a whole – not a few isolated incidents – which controls.”³⁴

The *Galloway* Court stated:

To hold that invocations must be nonsectarian would force the legislatures that sponsor prayers and the courts that are asked to decide these cases to act as supervisors and censors of religious speech, a rule that would involve government in religious matters to a far greater degree than is the case under the town’s current practice of neither editing or approving prayers in advance nor criticizing their content after the fact.³⁵

Further, the Court held, “Offense, however, does not equate to coercion. Adults often encounter speech they find disagreeable, and an Establishment Clause violation is not made out any time a person experiences a sense of affront from the expression of contrary religious views....”³⁶ However, if the commander thanked, “**the one** true God,” or if he said, “First I’d like to thank God for the many blessings He’s given me and my family and the guidance in my life. My faith and my Lord are the most important things in my life, and **I think they should be the same in your life,**” these comments would clearly be impermissible, as they deride other faiths and betray an impermissible governmental purpose. These examples connote that there is no other “true God” or that the commander has an expectation of a religious affiliation (i.e., they amount to proselytizing).

Congress has made clear that if a commander invites a chaplain to speak at an event, that chaplain cannot be required to “perform any right, ritual, or ceremony that is contrary to the conscience, moral principles, or religious beliefs of the chaplain.”³⁷ Accordingly, a Muslim or Jewish chaplain could not be required to end a prayer with the phrase “In Jesus’ name.” A commander could reach out to the wing chaplain to describe the event, and allow the wing chaplain to decide which

³³ The invocation delivered at the Board’s October 17, 2011, meeting is illustrative of what the Board members and the public in Rowan County would hear:

Let us pray. Father, we do thank you for the privilege of being here tonight. We thank you for the beautiful day you’ve given us, for health and strength, for all the things we take for granted. Lord, as we read the paper today, the economic times are not good, and many people are suffering and doing without. We pray for them; we pray that you would help us to help. We pray for the decisions that we will make tonight, that God, they will honor and glorify you. We pray that you would give us wisdom and understanding. We’ll thank you for it. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

The court held: “Such a prayer comes nowhere near the realm of prayer that is out of bounds under the standards announced in [*Galloway*]. Prayers that chastise dissenters or attempt to sway nonbelievers press the limits of the Supreme Court’s instruction and may not merit constitutional protection, but no such prayers have been proffered in this case.” *Id.* However, in a later case, *Lund v. Rowan Ct.*, 863 F.3d 268, 284-285 (4th Cir. 2017), the court listed several prayers purporting to confess spiritual shortcomings on the community’s behalf, and stated that “By portraying the failure to love Jesus or follow his teachings as spiritual defects, the prayers implicitly ‘signal[ed] disfavor toward’ non-Christians.”

³⁴ *Id.*

³⁵ *Galloway*, 134 S. Ct., at 1822.

³⁶ *Id.*, at 1826.

³⁷ *Rosen*, 38 U. Tol. Rev., at 1173.

chaplain is best equipped to provide the invocation at the event; or the commander can choose a particular chaplain who shares the commander's faith. This way, the government can "stay out of the business of writing or sanctioning"³⁸ prayers or invocations and leave that purely religious function to the chaplain.

Combined Changes of Command and Promotion Ceremonies

We have mentioned briefly in this and other opinions that the First Amendment analysis for official events (such as changes of command and annual award ceremonies) differs from those events of a personal nature (such as personal promotion and retirement ceremonies). Often, commanders are promoted on the same day they take command of their new unit. This creates a potential scenario in which a subordinate feels compelled to attend both the mandatory official event and the discretionary private event. If the change of command is followed immediately or closely by a promotion ceremony, subordinates who were required to attend the former may feel obligated to attend the latter. Or, there may be a temptation on members of the supervisory and command chain to direct the subordinates to stay for the personal promotion ceremony. These actions can lead to a negative impact on good order and discipline in the unit.

To reduce these risks, the commander must allow a significant time to pass between the two events to ensure those who do not want to attend the personal promotion event can depart without feeling as though someone was watching to see if they stay. The amount of time between events must be sufficient to ensure those who are departing early (or arriving early to the second event) are not conspicuous in their absence or "singled out ... for opprobrium."³⁹ This break in time between the two events would allow the reasonable person to conclude the later, personal ceremony is not mandatory. This will allow those who do not wish to attend the personal ceremony with time to leave without becoming the focus of watchful eyes looking to see who was leaving. It removes the coercive effect of forcing subordinates to attend the personal event. It will also allow those who could not attend the first event to have adequate time to arrive at the second event. It allows subordinates to avoid ridicule for getting up to leave after the official event or for arriving only for the personal event. More importantly to the commander, it will be very clear to all attending that this ceremony is the commanders personal promotion ceremony and thus provide him or her more latitude to express personal beliefs without creating the appearance that he or she is endorsing a particular religion.

Without this significant break in time between the two events, both events effectively become official. Therefore, if a commander chooses not to provide this significant break in time between the change of command and the promotion, the commander must limit his or her religious comments to the same type of brief statement that is appropriate for a change of command (for example, a brief statement thanking a Supreme Being for helping the commander get achieve this rank).

Under the facts presented to us, we conclude the commander's comments at the personal promotion ceremony were not an improper endorsement of religion, especially considering the context in which they were made. In reaching this conclusion, we consider that, due to an

³⁸ *Engel*, 370 U.S., at 435.

³⁹ *Galloway*. 134 S. Ct., at 1826.

insufficient break in time and place from the official change of command ceremony, this promotion ceremony lost its status as a private personal one.⁴⁰ We further find the commander's comments at the promotion ceremony would also have been permissible had they been made at the change of command.

Conclusion

Each inquiry remains fact-sensitive.⁴¹ A commander may thank God or any Supreme Being (or none at all) during his or her remarks; a commander may have an invocation at the change of command; and the commander may invite a chaplain or non-chaplain to provide the invocation. However, a commander in his or her remarks, or a military member providing an invocation, cannot denigrate others, proselytize, call others to action, or betray an impermissible government purpose.⁴² If the commander holds a personal promotion ceremony on the same day, a sufficient break must occur between the change of command and promotion ceremony in order for the commander to be freer in expressing his or her personal religious beliefs. If a break does not occur, the commander must limit his or her religious comments to comments that are appropriate at the official change of command.

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⁴⁰ By not providing for a sufficient break in time and/or place, there will be an inescapable focus on those who choose to leave after the official ceremony or come only to attend the private ceremony which can have the effect of putting subtle pressure on all to attend both. As a result, in such circumstances, both ceremonies must be viewed, in essence, as one and if either is official, both are official.

⁴¹ “[I]n all Constitutional cases, [judgment] must reflect and remain faithful to the underlying purposes of the [Establishment and Free Exercise] Clauses, and it must take account of context and consequences measured in light of those purposes. While the Court’s prior tests provide useful guideposts – and might well lead to the same result the Court reaches today, no exact formula can dictate a resolution to such fact-sensitive cases.” *Van Orden*, 545 U.S., at 700 (Breyer, J., concurring)(internal citations omitted).

⁴² *Galloway*, 134 S. Ct., at 1814.

Addendum – Commander-In-Chief Inaugural References to a Supreme Being

Washington

During his inaugural address as Commander In Chief, President Washington stated that “it would be peculiarly improper to omit in this first official act my fervent supplications to that Almighty Being who rules over the universe ... 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.”

Adams

President Adams concluded his inaugural address with, “And may that Being who is supreme over all, the Patron of Order, the Fountain of Justice, and the Protector in all ages of the world of virtuous liberty, continue His blessing upon this nation and its Government and give it all possible success and duration consistent with the ends of His providence.”

Jefferson

President Jefferson in his first inauguration stated, “Let us, then, with courage and confidence pursue our own Federal and Republican principles, our attachment to union and representative government. Kindly separated by nature and a wide ocean from the exterminating havoc of one quarter of the globe, ... acknowledging and adoring an overruling Providence, which by all its dispensations proves that it delights in the happiness of man here and his greater happiness hereafter – with all these blessings, what more is necessary to make us a happy and a prosperous people?” In his second inaugural, President Jefferson said, “I shall need, too, the favor of that Being in whose hands we are, who led our fathers, as Israel of old, from their native land and planted them in a country flowing with all the necessaries and comforts of life; who has covered our infancy with His providence and our riper years with His wisdom and power, and to whose goodness I ask you to join in supplications with me that He will so enlighten the minds of your servants, guide their councils, and prosper their measures that whatsoever they do shall result in your good, and shall secure to you the peace, friendship, and approbation of all nations.”

Madison

At his first inauguration, President Madison said, “In these my confidence will under every difficulty be best placed, next to that which we have all been encouraged to feel in the guardianship and guidance of that Almighty Being whose power regulates the destiny of nations, whose blessings have been so conspicuously dispensed to this rising Republic, and to whom we are bound to address our devout gratitude for the past, as well as our fervent supplications and best hopes for the future.” In his second inauguration, President Madison mentioned, “From the weight and magnitude now belonging to it I should be compelled to shrink if I had less reliance on the support of an enlightened and generous people, and felt less deeply a conviction that the war with a powerful nation, which forms so prominent a feature in our situation, is stamped with that justice which invites the smiles of Heaven on the means of conducting it to a successful termination.”

Monroe

President Monroe's first inauguration concluded, "Relying on the aid to be derived from the other departments of the Government, I enter on the trust to which I have been called by the suffrages of my fellow-citizens with my fervent prayers to the Almighty that He will be graciously pleased to continue to us that protection which He has already so conspicuously displayed in our favor." In his second inauguration he stated, "That these powerful causes exist, and that they are permanent, is my fixed opinion; that they may produce a like accord in all questions touching, however remotely, the liberty, prosperity, and happiness of our country will always be the object of my most fervent prayers to the Supreme Author of All Good." He concluded the speech with, "With full confidence in the continuance of that candor and generous indulgence from my fellow-citizens at large which I have heretofore experienced, and with a firm reliance on the protection of Almighty God, I shall forthwith commence the duties of the high trust to which you have called me."

Adams

President John Quincy Adams completed his inauguration with, "To the guidance of the legislative councils, to the assistance of the executive and subordinate departments, to the friendly cooperation of the respective State governments, to the candid and liberal support of the people so far as it may be deserved by honest industry and zeal, I shall look for whatever success may attend my public service; and knowing that "except the Lord keep the city the watchman waketh but in vain," with fervent supplications for His favor, to His overruling providence I commit with humble but fearless confidence my own fate and the future destinies of my country."

Jackson

President Andrew Jackson, in his first inaugural address, was more subtle, "The same diffidence induces me to hope for instruction and aid from the coordinate branches of the Government, and for the indulgence and support of my fellow-citizens generally. And a firm reliance on the goodness of that Power whose providence mercifully protected our national infancy, and has since upheld our liberties in various vicissitudes, encourages me to offer up my ardent supplications that He will continue to make our beloved country the object of His divine care and gracious benediction." In his second inauguration, he concluded by stating, "Finally, it is my most fervent prayer to that Almighty Being before whom I now stand, and who has kept us in His hands from the infancy of our Republic to the present day, that He will so overrule all my intentions and actions and inspire the hearts of my fellow-citizens that we may be preserved from dangers of all kinds and continue forever a united and happy people."

Van Buran

President Van Buran first stated, "So sensibly, fellow-citizens, do these circumstances press themselves upon me that I should not dare to enter upon my path of duty did I not look for the generous aid of those who will be associated with me in the various and coordinate branches of the Government; did I not repose with unwavering reliance on the patriotism, the intelligence,

and the kindness of a people who never yet deserted a public servant honestly laboring their cause; and, above all, did I not permit myself humbly to hope for the sustaining support of an ever-watchful and beneficent Providence.” He concluded with, “Beyond that I only look to the gracious protection of the Divine Being whose strengthening support I humbly solicit, and whom I fervently pray to look down upon us all. May it be among the dispensations of His providence to bless our beloved country with honors and with length of days. May her ways be ways of pleasantness and all her paths be peace!”

Harrison

President William Henry Harrison said, “However strong may be my present purpose to realize the expectations of a magnanimous and confiding people, I too well understand the dangerous temptations to which I shall be exposed from the magnitude of the power which it has been the pleasure of the people to commit to my hands not to place my chief confidence upon the aid of that Almighty Power which has hitherto protected me and enabled me to bring to favorable issues other important but still greatly inferior trusts heretofore confided to me by my country.”

Polk

President Polk “fervently invoke[d] the aid of that Almighty Ruler of the Universe in whose hands are the destinies of nations and of men to guard this Heaven-favored land against the mischiefs which without His guidance might arise from an unwise public policy. With a firm reliance upon the wisdom of Omnipotence to sustain and direct me in the path of duty which I am appointed to pursue, I stand in the presence of this assembled multitude of my countrymen to take upon myself the solemn obligation "to the best of my ability to preserve, protect, and defend the Constitution of the United States," and “enter[ed] the discharge of the high duties which have been assigned me by the people, again humbly supplicating that Divine Being who has watched over and protected our beloved country from its infancy to the present hour to continue His gracious benedictions upon us, that we may continue to be a prosperous and happy people.”

Taylor

President Taylor congratulated his fellow citizens “upon the high state of prosperity to which the goodness of Divine Providence has conducted our common country.”

Pierce

President Pierce stated, “But let not the foundation of our hope rest upon man's wisdom. It will not be sufficient that sectional prejudices find no place in the public deliberations. It will not be sufficient that the rash counsels of human passion are rejected. It must be felt that there is no national security but in the nation's humble, acknowledged dependence upon God and His overruling providence,” and concluded with, “I can express no better hope for my country than that the kind Providence which smiled upon our fathers may enable their children to preserve the blessings they have inherited.”

Buchanan

President Buchanan stated, "In entering upon this great office I must humbly invoke the God of our fathers for wisdom and firmness to execute its high and responsible duties in such a manner as to restore harmony and ancient friendship among the people of the several States and to preserve our free institutions throughout many generations," and concluded with, "I shall now proceed to take the oath prescribed by the Constitution, whilst humbly invoking the blessing of Divine Providence on this great people."

Lincoln

In his first inaugural address, President Lincoln said, "If the Almighty Ruler of Nations, 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 of the American people." He devoted half of his second inauguration to discussing how both sides in the civil war worshipped the same God. "Both read the same Bible and pray to the same God, and each invokes His aid against the other. It may seem strange that any men should dare to ask a just God's assistance in wringing their bread from the sweat of other men's faces, but let us judge not, that we be not judged. The prayers of both could not be answered. That of neither has been answered fully. The Almighty has His own purposes. "Woe unto the world because of offenses; for it must needs be that offenses come, but woe to that man by whom the offense cometh." If we shall suppose that American slavery is one of those offenses which, in the providence of God, must needs 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? Fondly do we hope, fervently do we pray, that this mighty scourge of war may speedily pass away. Yet, if God wills that it continue until all the wealth piled by the bondsman's two hundred and fifty years of unrequited toil shall be sunk, and until every drop of blood drawn with the lash shall be paid by another drawn with the sword, as was said three thousand years ago, so still it must be said "the judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether. With malice toward none, with charity for all, with firmness in the right as God gives us to see the right, let us strive on to finish the work we are in, to bind up the nation's wounds, to care for him who shall have borne the battle and for his widow and his orphan, to do all which may achieve and cherish a just and lasting peace among ourselves and with all nations."

Grant

In his first speech as Commander in Chief, President Grant stated, "In conclusion I ask patient forbearance one toward another throughout the land, and a determined effort on the part of every citizen to do his share toward cementing a happy union; and I ask the prayers of the nation to Almighty God in behalf of this consummation."

Hayes

President Hayes said, “Looking for the guidance of that Divine Hand by which the destinies of nations and individuals are shaped, I call upon you, Senators, Representatives, judges, fellow-citizens, here and everywhere, to unite with me in an earnest effort to secure to our country the blessings, not only of material prosperity, but of justice, peace, and union—a union depending not upon the constraint of force, but upon the loving devotion of a free people; ‘and that all things may be so ordered and settled upon the best and surest foundations that peace and happiness, truth and justice, religion and piety, may be established among us for all generations.’”

Garfield

President Garfield stated, “I shall greatly rely upon the wisdom and patriotism of Congress and of those who may share with me the responsibilities and duties of administration, and, above all, upon our efforts to promote the welfare of this great people and their Government I reverently invoke the support and blessings of Almighty God.”

Cleveland

President Cleveland concluded his first inaugural with, “And let us not trust to human effort alone, but humbly acknowledging the power and goodness of Almighty God, who presides over the destiny of nations, and who has at all times been revealed in our country's history, let us invoke His aid and His blessings upon our labors.”

Harrison

President Benjamin Harrison said, “No other people have a government more worthy of their respect and love or a land so magnificent in extent, so pleasant to look upon, and so full of generous suggestion to enterprise and labor. God has placed upon our head a diadem and has laid at our feet power and wealth beyond definition or calculation.”

Cleveland

President Cleveland opened his second inaugural address with, “In obedience of the mandate of my countrymen I am about to dedicate myself to their service under the sanction of a solemn oath. Deeply moved by the expression of confidence and personal attachment which has called me to this service, I am sure my gratitude can make no better return than the pledge I now give before God and these witnesses of unreserved and complete devotion to the interests and welfare of those who have honored me, “ and concluded with, “Above all, I know there is a Supreme Being who rules the affairs of men and whose goodness and mercy have always followed the American people, and I know He will not turn from us now if we humbly and reverently seek His powerful aid.”

McKinley

President McKinley began his first presidency with, “In obedience to the will of the people, and in their presence, by the authority vested in me by this oath, I assume the arduous and responsible duties of President of the United States, relying upon the support of my countrymen and invoking the guidance of Almighty God. Our faith teaches that there is no safer reliance than upon the God of our fathers, who has so singularly favored the American people in every national trial, and who will not forsake us so long as we obey His commandments and walk humbly in His footsteps,” and finished his speech with, “Let me again repeat the words of the oath administered by the Chief Justice which, in their respective spheres, so far as applicable, I would have all my countrymen observe: ‘I will faithfully execute the office of President of the United States, and will, to the best of my ability, preserve, protect, and defend the Constitution of the United States.’ This is the obligation I have reverently taken before the Lord Most High. To keep it will be my single purpose, my constant prayer; and I shall confidently rely upon the forbearance and assistance of all the people in the discharge of my solemn responsibilities.”

Roosevelt

President Theodore Roosevelt begin his inaugural address with, ‘My fellow-citizens, no people on earth have more cause to be thankful than ours, and this is said reverently, in no spirit of boastfulness in our own strength, but with gratitude to the Giver of Good who has blessed us with the conditions which have enabled us to achieve so large a measure of well-being and of happiness.’”

Taft

President Taft ended his address with, “Having thus reviewed the questions likely to recur during my administration, and having expressed in a summary way the position which I expect to take in recommendations to Congress and in my conduct as an Executive, I invoke the considerate sympathy and support of my fellow-citizens and the aid of the Almighty God in the discharge of my responsible duties.”

Wilson

President Wilson stated in his first inaugural address, “And yet it will be no cool process of mere science. The Nation has been deeply stirred, stirred by a solemn passion, stirred by the knowledge of wrong, of ideals lost, of government too often debauched and made an instrument of evil. The feelings with which we face this new age of right and opportunity sweep across our heartstrings like some air out of God's own presence, where justice and mercy are reconciled and the judge and the brother are one. We know our task to be no mere task of politics but a task which shall search us through and through, whether we be able to understand our time and the need of our people, whether we be indeed their spokesmen and interpreters, whether we have the pure heart to comprehend and the rectified will to choose our high course of action. This is not a day of triumph; it is a day of dedication. Here muster, not the forces of party, but the forces of humanity. Men's hearts wait upon us; men's lives hang in the balance; men's hopes call upon us to say what we will do. Who shall live up to the great trust? Who dares fail to try? I summon

all honest men, all patriotic, all forward-looking men, to my side. God helping me, I will not fail them, if they will but counsel and sustain me!" In his second address, he said, "We are being forged into a new unity amidst the fires that now blaze throughout the world. In their ardent heat we shall, in God's Providence, let us hope, be purged of faction and division, purified of the errant humors of party and of private interest, and shall stand forth in the days to come with a new dignity of national pride and spirit. Let each man see to it that the dedication is in his own heart, the high purpose of the nation in his own mind, ruler of his own will and desire."

Harding

President Harding opined, "Standing in this presence, mindful of the solemnity of this occasion, feeling the emotions which no one may know until he senses the great weight of responsibility for himself, I must utter my belief in the divine inspiration of the founding fathers. Surely there must have been God's intent in the making of this new-world Republic." He finished the speech with, "One cannot stand in this presence and be unmindful of the tremendous responsibility. The world upheaval has added heavily to our tasks. But with the realization comes the surge of high resolve, and there is reassurance in belief in the God-given destiny of our Republic. If I felt that there is to be sole responsibility in the Executive for the America of tomorrow I should shrink from the burden. But here are a hundred millions, with common concern and shared responsibility, answerable to God and country. The Republic summons them to their duty, and I invite co-operation. I accept my part with single-mindedness of purpose and humility of spirit, and implore the favor and guidance of God in His Heaven. With these I am unafraid, and confidently face the future. I have taken the solemn oath of office on that passage of Holy Writ wherein it is asked: 'What doth the Lord require of thee but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?' This I plight to God and country."

Coolidge

President Coolidge completed his address with the following: "America seeks no earthly empire built on blood and force. No ambition, no temptation, lures her to thought of foreign dominions. The legions which she sends forth are armed, not with the sword, but with the cross. The higher state to which she seeks the allegiance of all mankind is not of human, but of divine origin. She cherishes no purpose save to merit the favor of Almighty God."

Hoover

President Hoover opened his address stating, "This occasion is not alone the administration of the most sacred oath which can be assumed by an American citizen. It is a dedication and consecration under God to the highest office in service of our people. I assume this trust in the humility of knowledge that only through the guidance of Almighty Providence can I hope to discharge its ever-increasing burdens," and concluded with, "In the presence of my countrymen, mindful of the solemnity of this occasion, knowing what the task means and the responsibility which it involves, I beg your tolerance, your aid, and your cooperation. I ask the help of Almighty God in this service to my country to which you have called me."

Roosevelt

President Franklin D. Roosevelt referred to God in each address, with phrases such as, “In such a spirit on my part and on yours we face our common difficulties. They concern, thank God, only material things;” “In this dedication of a Nation we humbly ask the blessing of God. May He protect each and every one of us. May He guide me in the days to come;” “While this duty rests upon me I shall do my utmost to speak their purpose and to do their will, seeking Divine guidance to help us each and every one to give light to them that sit in darkness and to guide our feet into the way of peace;” “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;” “As I stand here today, having taken the solemn oath of office in the presence of my fellow countrymen—in the presence of our God—I know that it is America's purpose that we shall not fail;” and “The Almighty God has blessed our land in many ways. He has given our people stout hearts and strong arms with which to strike mighty blows for freedom and truth. He has given to our country a faith which has become the hope of all peoples in an anguished world. So we pray to Him now for the vision to see our way clearly—to see the way that leads to a better life for ourselves and for all our fellow men—to the achievement of His will to peace on earth.”

Truman

President Truman, in his first inaugural address, said, “The American people stand firm in the faith which has inspired this Nation from the beginning. We believe that all men have a right to equal justice under law and equal opportunity to share in the common good. We believe that all men have the right to freedom of thought and expression. We believe that all men are created equal because they are created in the image of God.” Further, he stated, “Steadfast in our faith in the Almighty, we will advance toward a world where man's freedom is secure. To that end we will devote our strength, our resources, and our firmness of resolve. With God's help, the future of mankind will be assured in a world of justice, harmony, and peace.”

Eisenhower

President Eisenhower, in his first address as Commander in Chief, began with a prayer: “My friends, before I begin the expression of those thoughts that I deem appropriate to this moment, would you permit me the privilege of uttering a little private prayer of my own. And I ask that you bow your heads: Almighty God, as we stand here at this moment my future associates in the executive branch of government join me in beseeching that Thou will make full and complete our dedication to the service of the people in this throng, and their fellow citizens everywhere. Give us, we pray, the power to discern clearly right from wrong, and allow all our words and actions to be governed thereby, and by the laws of this land. Especially we pray that our concern shall be for all the people regardless of station, race, or calling. May cooperation be permitted and be the mutual aim of those who, under the concepts of our Constitution, hold to differing political faiths; so that all may work for the good of our beloved country and Thy glory. Amen.” He said, “We are summoned by this honored and historic ceremony to witness more than the act of one citizen swearing his oath of service, in the presence of God. We are called as a people to give testimony in the sight of the world to our faith that the future shall belong to the free.” He concluded with, “This is the hope that beckons us onward in this century of trial. This is the

work that awaits us all, to be done with bravery, with charity, and with prayer to Almighty God.” During his second inauguration, he began with, “Before all else, we seek, upon our common labor as a nation, the blessings of Almighty God. And the hopes in our hearts fashion the deepest prayers of our whole people.”

Kennedy

President Kennedy also began his presidency invoking God: “For I have sworn before you and Almighty God the same solemn oath our forebears prescribed nearly a century and three quarters ago. The world is very different now. For man holds in his mortal hands the power to abolish all forms of human poverty and all forms of human life. And yet the same revolutionary beliefs for which our forebears fought are still at issue around the globe—the belief that the rights of man come not from the generosity of the state, but from the hand of God.” He concluded with, “Finally, whether you are citizens of America or citizens of the world, ask of us the same high standards of strength and sacrifice which we ask of you. With a good conscience our only sure reward, with history the final judge of our deeds, let us go forth to lead the land we love, asking His blessing and His help, but knowing that here on earth God's work must truly be our own.”

Johnson

President Lyndon B. Johnson began his presidency with, “My fellow countrymen, on this occasion, the oath I have taken before you and before God is not mine alone, but ours together. We are one nation and one people. Our fate as a nation and our future as a people rest not upon one citizen, but upon all citizens.”

Nixon

President Nixon said, “I have taken an oath today in the presence of God and my countrymen to uphold and defend the Constitution of the United States. To that oath I now add this sacred commitment: I shall consecrate my office, my energies, and all the wisdom I can summon, to the cause of peace among nations. ... Only a few short weeks ago, we shared the glory of man's first sight of the world as God sees it, as a single sphere reflecting light in the darkness. As the Apollo astronauts flew over the moon's gray surface on Christmas Eve, they spoke to us of the beauty of earth—and in that voice so clear across the lunar distance, we heard them invoke God's blessing on its goodness. ... Our destiny offers, not the cup of despair, but the chalice of opportunity. So let us seize it, not in fear, but in gladness—and, ‘riders on the earth together,’ let us go forward, firm in our faith, steadfast in our purpose, cautious of the dangers; but sustained by our confidence in the will of God and the promise of man.” During his second inauguration, he said, “We have the chance today to do more than ever before in our history to make life better in America—to ensure better education, better health, better housing, better transportation, a cleaner environment—to restore respect for law, to make our communities more livable—and to insure the God-given right of every American to full and equal opportunity. ... We shall answer to God, to history, and to our conscience for the way in which we use these years. ... Today, I ask your prayers that in the years ahead I may have God's help in making decisions that are right for America, and I pray for your help so that together we may be worthy of our challenge. ...

Let us go forward from here confident in hope, strong in our faith in one another, sustained by our faith in God who created us, and striving always to serve His purpose.”

Carter

President Carter quoted the Bible: “Here before me is the Bible used in the inauguration of our first President, in 1789, and I have just taken the oath of office on the Bible my mother gave me a few years ago, opened to a timeless admonition from the ancient prophet Micah: ‘He hath showed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God.’ (Micah 6:8)”

Reagan

President Reagan stated, “The crisis we are facing today does not require of us the kind of sacrifice that Martin Treptow and so many thousands of others were called upon to make. It does require, however, our best effort, and our willingness to believe in ourselves and to believe in our capacity to perform great deeds; to believe that together, with God's help, we can and will resolve the problems which now confront us. And, after all, why shouldn't we believe that? We are Americans. God bless you, and thank you.” In his second inauguration, he began with, “This day has been made brighter with the presence here of one who, for a time, has been absent—Senator John Stennis. God bless you and welcome back. There is, however, one who is not with us today: Representative Gillis Long of Louisiana left us last night. I wonder if we could all join in a moment of silent prayer. (Moment of silent prayer.) Amen.” He concluded with: “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.”

Bush

President George H. W. Bush stated, “And my first act as President is a prayer. I ask you to bow your heads: Heavenly Father, we bow our heads and thank You for Your love. Accept our thanks for the peace that yields this day and the shared faith that makes its continuance likely. Make us strong to do Your work, willing to heed and hear Your will, and write on our hearts these words: ‘Use power to help people.’ For we are given power not to advance our own purposes, nor to make a great show in the world, nor a name. There is but one just use of power, and it is to serve people. Help us to remember it, Lord. Amen.”

Clinton

President Clinton said, “From this joyful mountaintop of celebration, we hear a call to service in the valley. We have heard the trumpets. We have changed the guard. And now, each in our way, and with God's help, we must answer the call.” In his second inauguration, he concluded with,

“From the height of this place and the summit of this century, let us go forth. May God strengthen our hands for the good work ahead—and always, always bless our America.”

Bush

President George W. Bush commented in his first inaugural address, “And whatever our views of its cause, we can agree that children at risk are not at fault. Abandonment and abuse are not acts of God, they are failures of love,” and continued with, “And some needs and hurts are so deep they will only respond to a mentor’s touch or a pastor’s prayer. Church and charity, synagogue and mosque lend our communities their humanity, and they will have an honored place in our plans and in our laws. Many in our country do not know the pain of poverty, but we can listen to those who do. And I can pledge our nation to a goal: When we see that wounded traveler on the road to Jericho, we will not pass to the other side,” and concluded with, “God bless you all, and God bless America.” In his second address, President Bush said, “The rulers of outlaw regimes can know that we still believe as Abraham Lincoln did: ‘Those who deny freedom to others deserve it not for themselves; and, under the rule of a just God, cannot long retain it.’” Additionally, he stated, “We go forward with complete confidence in the eventual triumph of freedom. Not because history runs on the wheels of inevitability; it is human choices that move events. Not because we consider ourselves a chosen nation; God moves and chooses as He wills,” and concluded with, “May God bless you, and may He watch over the United States of America.”

Obama

President Obama mentioned God five times in his first address: “We remain a young nation, but in the words of Scripture, the time has come to set aside childish things. The time has come to reaffirm our enduring spirit; to choose our better history; to carry forward that precious gift, that noble idea, passed on from generation to generation: the God-given promise that all are equal, all are free, and all deserve a chance to pursue their full measure of happiness;” “This is the source of our confidence—the knowledge that God calls on us to shape an uncertain destiny;” “Let it be said by our children’s children that when we were tested we refused to let this journey end, that we did not turn back nor did we falter; and with eyes fixed on the horizon and God’s grace upon us, we carried forth that great gift of freedom and delivered it safely to future generations;” and “Thank you. God bless you. And God bless the United States of America.” In his second address he likewise mentioned God five times: “Today we continue a never-ending journey to bridge the meaning of those words with the realities of our time. For history tells us that while these truths may be self-evident, they have never been self-executing; that while freedom is a gift from God, it must be secured by His people here on Earth;” “We are true to our creed when a little girl born into the bleakest poverty knows that she has the same chance to succeed as anybody else, because she is an American, she is free, and she is equal, not just in the eyes of God but also in our own;” “That is how we will preserve our planet, commanded to our care by God. That’s what will lend meaning to the creed our fathers once declared;” “My fellow Americans, the oath I have sworn before you today, like the one recited by others who serve in this Capitol, was an oath to God and country, not party or faction—and we must faithfully execute that pledge during the duration of our service;” and “Thank you, God Bless you, and may He forever bless these United States of America.”

Trump

President Trump said, “The Bible tells us how good and pleasant it is when God’s people live together in unity. We must speak our minds openly, debate our disagreements honestly, but always pursue solidarity. When America is united, America is totally unstoppable. There should be no fear: we are protected, and we will always be protected. We will be protected by the great men and women of our military and law enforcement; and most importantly, we will be protected by God.” Additionally, he said, “And whether a child is born in the urban sprawl of Detroit or the wind-swept plains of Nebraska, they look up at the same night sky, they fill their heart with the same dreams and they are infused with the breath of life by the same Almighty Creator.” He concluded with, “Thank you. God bless you. And God bless America. Thank you. God bless America.”

See www.bartleby.com for full inaugural addresses.