

Abraham Lincoln, Theodore Roosevelt, and a Few Other Presidents

Abraham Lincoln

This is an excerpt from a speech given at Lewistown, IL on August 17, 1858. It is around the time that Lincoln consistently debated with Douglas against slavery. This is, as far as we know, a verbatim transcription:

In their [the Founders'] enlightened belief, nothing stamped with the Divine image and likeness was sent into the world to be trodden on, and degraded, and imbruted by its fellows. They grasped not only the whole race of man then living, but they reached forward and seized upon the farthest posterity. They erected a beacon to guide their children and their children's children, and the countless myriads who should inhabit the earth in other ages...their posterity might look up again to the Declaration of Independence and take courage to renew the battle which their fathers began—so that truth, and justice, and mercy, and all the humane and Christian virtues might not be extinguished from the land; so that no man would hereafter dare limit and circumscribe the great principles on which the temple of liberty was being built. [Loud cheers.]¹

This is an excerpt from Lincoln's interview with Eliza P. Gurney on October 26, 1862.

We are indeed going through a great trial—a fiery trial. In the very responsible position in which I happen to be placed, being a humble instrument in the hands of our Heavenly Father, as I am, and as we all are, to work out his great purposes, I have desired that all my works and acts may be according to his will, and that it might be so, I have sought his aid...and though with our limited understandings we may not be able to comprehend it, yet we cannot but believe, that he who made the world still governs it.²

This comes from his second inaugural address on April 10, 1865:

Both [North and South] read the same Bible, and pray to the same God; and each invokes His aid against the other. It may seem strange that any man 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...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.³

Some Other Presidents

[T]he teachings of the Bible are so interwoven and entwined with our whole civic and social life that it would be literally . . . impossible for us to figure to ourselves what that life would be if these teaching were removed.⁴

—Theodore Roosevelt

Franklin D. Roosevelt

We want to do it the voluntary way – and most human beings in all the world want to do it the voluntary way. We do not want to have the way imposed. . . . That would not follow in the footsteps of Christ.⁵

—Franklin D. Roosevelt

President Franklin D. Roosevelt not only led the nation in a six-minute prayer during D- Day on June 6, 1944, but he also declared:

If we will not prepare to give all that we have and all that we are to preserve Christian civilization in our land, we shall go to destruction;⁶

The Bill of the 110th Congress, Session 1, Resolution 888

There was a bill proposed in December of 2007 requesting that the first week in May be set aside to “affirm the rich spiritual and religious history of our Nation’s founding and subsequent history for the appreciation of and education on America’s history of religious faith.” It died before being ratified. However, here are some quotes used in the bill:

*The following quotes come from Resolution 888 of the 110th Congress, Session 1⁷

[The Bible] is the rock on which our Republic rests.

—President Andrew Jackson

Our faith teaches us 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.

—President William McKinley

America was born to exemplify that devotion to the elements of righteousness which are derived from the revelations of Holy Scripture.

—President Woodrow Wilson

American life is built, and can alone survive, upon . . . [the] fundamental philosophy announced by the Savior nineteen centuries ago.

—President Herbert Hoover

The fundamental basis of this Nation's law was given to Moses on the Mount. The fundamental basis of our Bill of Rights comes from the teachings which we get from Exodus and St. Matthew, from Isaiah and St. Paul.

—President Harry S. Truman

You will see, as you make your rounds, that this Nation was established by men who believed in God. . . . You will see the evidence of this deep religious faith on every hand.

President Harry S. Truman

Without God there could be no American form of government, nor an American way of life. Recognition of the Supreme Being is the first – the most basic – expression of Americanism. Thus, the founding fathers of America saw it, and thus with God's help, it will continue to be.

—President Dwight D. Eisenhower
later repeated with approval by President Gerald Ford

The rights of man come not from the generosity of the state but from the hand of God.

—President John F. Kennedy

¹ G.P., "Speech at Lewistown, Illinois, August 17, 1858," *Press and Tribune*, August 21, 1858, in *The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln*, 8 vols., ed. Roy B. Basler (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1953), 2:546-7.

² Abraham Lincoln, "Reply to Eliza P. Gurney," interview, October 26, 1862, in *The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln*, 8 vols., ed. Roy B. Basler (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1953), 5:478.

³ Abraham Lincoln, Second Inaugural Address, [electronic document transcript], April 10, 1865, series 3, General Correspondence 1837-1897, The Abraham Lincoln Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, accessed July 18, 2012, <http://www.ourdocuments.gov/doc.php?doc=38>.

⁴ Ferdinand Cowle Iglehart, D.D., *Theodore Roosevelt, The Man As I Knew Him* (New York: The Christian Herald, 1919), 307.

⁵ Franklin D. Roosevelt, "Christmas Greeting to the Nation," *American Presidency Project*, December 24, 1940, accessed July 19, 2012, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=15916>.

⁶ *Affirming the rich spiritual and religious history of our Nation's founding and subsequent history and expressing support for designation of the first week in May as "American Religious History Week" for the appreciation of and education on America's history of religious faith*, HR 888, 110th Cong., 1st sess., GovTrack.us database of federal legislation (December 18, 2007): 6, accessed July 19, 2012, <http://www.govtrack.us/congress/bills/110/hres888>.

⁷ *Affirming the rich spiritual and religious history of our Nation's founding and subsequent history and expressing support for designation of the first week in May as "American Religious History Week" for the appreciation of and education on America's history of religious faith*, HR 888, 110th Cong., 1st sess., GovTrack.us database of federal legislation (December 18, 2007): 6-7, accessed July 19, 2012, <http://www.govtrack.us/congress/bills/110/hres888>.