

INAUGURAL POLITICS

Leading up to the inauguration of President Barack Obama, several atheist organizations, including the Freedom From Religion Foundation, sought a preliminary injunction to prevent the saying of prayers and the use of the phrase “so help me God” at the end of the oath of office.

On January 15, U.S. District Court Judge Reggie Walton denied the request, saying the plaintiffs had failed to prove any “harm” would result from the invocation of God. He further ruled that he has no authority over the Presidential Inaugural Committee because it is not a government agent.

The judge’s ruling was a victory over mean-spirited nonbelievers who try to impose secular values on a country founded on religious principles, and where over 90% of the people profess a belief in God. Judge Walton saw through the atheists’ arguments, noting that the prayers do not appear “to give the impression that the government is endorsing religion.”

While we were happy at this result, we were not so pleased with Obama’s selection of Episcopal Bishop Gene Robinson to offer a prayer at an inaugural event. We wondered why Obama, who has expressed a desire to unite the American people, chose Robinson, the most polarizing figure in the Episcopal Church. Robinson—a homosexual—has a record of offending the Catholic Church.

In 2005, Robinson said: “I find it so vile that they [the Catholic Church] think they are going to end the child abuse scandal by throwing out homosexuals from seminaries. It is an act of violence that needs to be confronted.” He added that “Pope Ratzinger [sic] may be the best thing that ever happened to the Episcopal Church. We are seeing so many Roman Catholics joining the church.”

Late in 2008, Robinson admitted that he had led a retreat for gay Catholic priests. He stuck his nose in the affairs of the Church even further when he urged those priests to push for women priests, saying, "If you work for the ordination of women in your church, you will go a long way toward opening the door for the acceptance of gay priests."

Despite his choice of Bishop Robinson as an event speaker, President Obama—to his credit—did not shy away from mentioning God several times in his Inaugural Address.

However, we couldn't help but notice that the very same pundits and organizations that branded President George W. Bush a "theocrat" for referencing God were noticeably silent in their reaction to President Obama's God-talk.

Maybe their lack of outrage is due to the fact that they think the president is a closet secularist who is just going through the motions to please the faithful. At least that's what the American Humanist Association seemed to think: it took out a full-page ad in the *Washington Post* on Inauguration Day hailing Obama as "Living Proof that Family Values Without Religion Build Character."

In other words, it's not the religious message that atheists and others object to—it's the one who is delivering the message. If he's believable, he's a threat. If he's posturing, he's okay. How's that for character?