

The Sermon on the Hill

By [Tim Green](#)

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Religion is part and parcel of life, but in this day and age it should not be thrust upon the public as it was so powerfully from Capitol Hill during President Obama's inaugural ceremony. To be more specific the Reverend Rick Warren's invocation was ill advised. The benediction was terrific; smart and funny. There were still references to God, it was still given by a Reverend and it was still an enjoyable part of the ceremony.

Reverend Warren is the evangelical leader of a Church that has recently led a tirade against civil partnerships whilst Reverend Lowery, who gave the benediction, is co-founder of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (the other co-founder being Martin Luther King Jr.). Their respective records are not the problem though. Proposition 8; the newly approved Constitutional amendment Reverend Warren fought for in California banning same-sex marriage wasn't mentioned. Nothing he said was inflammatory in the slightest, in fact his message was one of unity, 'Help us, oh God, to remember that we are Americans, united not by race or religion or blood but to our commitment to freedom and justice for all.'

It was his delivery that didn't go down well; the preacher on a mount hijacking the world stage with the definitively Christian Lord's Prayer. The question that must be asked is where the supposed separation of Church and State was in this civil ceremony? It is only since 1937 that chaplains have been part of the inauguration, in fact the Presidential oath of office as prescribed in Article II of the Constitution doesn't contain the phrase 'so help me God'. It was allegedly said by George Washington at the first inauguration and has since been added at the discretion of the inaugurating Chief's Justice.

Prominent American atheist Michael Newdow filed a lawsuit prior to the inauguration on December 29th against the inclusion of 'so help me God' claiming it is unlawful to change Article II. The lawsuit also challenges the legality of prayer during the ceremony citing the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment: 'Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion'. Amongst the plaintiffs of this suit were 'unnamed children', the argument being that religion is forced upon unsuspecting children. This lawsuit had no effect, and isn't the way to go against traditions.

Reverend Lowery's prayer was great; he talked of goodness and hope in a religious way that is helpful towards people. The way Reverend Warren spoke 'made me not want to listen' as one viewer put it. Without any knowledge of his politics the tone of his sermon still did not suit the situation. Some points were positively laughable (his praise of President Obama's children drew titters from the crowd), he seemed ridiculous, like one of those TV evangelicals who heal people live on stage, people obsessed with screaming to the rooftops about their faith. Religion helps, no one can deny that it has done a lot of good in the world, but it should be a personal motivation rather than evangelical. If God is going to help the new President to do Good in the world then that is good for everyone, but lots of people don't have faith in God, they have hope in people. Hope fuelled President Obama's campaign and the world is optimistic about his Presidency.



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