

DALLAS BAPTIST UNIVERSITY REPORT



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DBU Creates New
WASHINGTON DISPLAY



DBU CREATES GEORGE WASHINGTON DISPLAY

“SO HELP ME GOD”

This past spring semester, DBU unveiled a brand new display on campus, the “So Help Me God” exhibit. Housed in the Hillcrest Great Hall of the John G. Mahler Student Center, the exhibit is modeled after a display that is located at George Washington’s Mount Vernon estate in Virginia.

In the spring of 2013, while Dr. Gary Cook, DBU president, and Andrew Briscoe, director of the Center for Service-Learning, were in Washington, D.C., attending a meeting of the Baptist World Alliance, they visited the George Washington Museum at Mount Vernon. Dr. Cook was so impressed by the exhibit showing Washington placing his hand on the Bible at the very first inauguration that he came back to campus and asked Dr. Blair Blackburn, DBU executive vice

president, to create a similar display at DBU. Dr. Cook took Dr. Blackburn to the Great Hall and asked him to see if the exhibit could be placed in the east corner where the balcony had been.

With support from Jonathan Teat, assistant vice president for administrative affairs, Collin Carlisle, coordinator of construction, and Shannen Smith, director of apartment life, Dr. Blackburn was able to create this display, which has become a wonderful addition to the University’s emphasis on the faith of the founding fathers, such as George Washington and John Adams.

The permanent display depicts Washington’s first inauguration, which took place on the balcony of Federal Hall in New York City on April 30, 1789. Three life-sized figures stand in the center: Robert Livingston, chancellor of the state of New York, who is delivering the oath; Samuel Otis, secretary of the U. S. Senate, who is holding the Bible; and George Washington. Painted behind the figures are various other government officials, including John Adams, who served as Washington’s vice president and later would become president.

Dr. Cook particularly wanted to pass on to future student generations the fact that George Washington, as the first president, chose to place his hand on the Bible and chose to close his oath of office by stating, “So help me God.” Even though it is not in the Constitution, this tradition established by George Washington continues to this day.



Washington’s hand placed on the Bible

the faith of George Washington

by Dr. Jim Denison

Founder, Denison Forum on Truth and Culture

On Thursday, April 30, 1789, General George Washington took the first oath of presidential office in American history. As he walked to the balcony of Federal Hall in New York City, thousands of people jammed into the street below gave him a thunderous ovation.

Suddenly the crowd became quiet as General Washington turned toward Judge Robert R. Livingston and placed his hand on an opened Bible and swore to “faithfully execute the office of the President of the United States.”

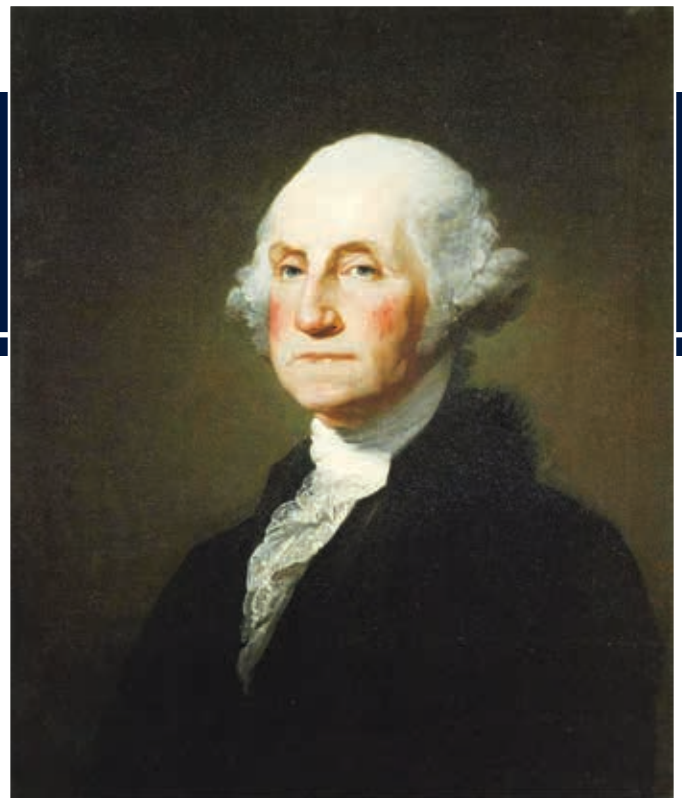
There was a pause. Then the nation’s first president added his own words, unscripted and unexpected: “I swear, so help me God.” The president bent over and kissed the Bible. Then Justice Livingston turned to the crowd below and cried out, “Long live George Washington, President of the United States!” People cheered. Church bells pealed. Cannons at the nearby fort fired a salute.

From that day to this, every president of the United States has followed George Washington’s precedent, concluding their oath of office with the words, “So help me God.” What did our first president mean by this confession of faith? And what does his faith say about our nation and our spirituality?

George Washington was a lifelong Episcopalian and worshiped regularly at Christ Episcopal Church in Alexandria, Virginia. According to Nelly Custis-Lewis, his adopted daughter, he rode 10 miles to church (two to three hours on horseback) whenever weather permitted.



The inauguration of George Washington as the first president of the United States of America, April 30, 1789, held on the balcony of Federal Hall in New York City, which at that time served as the site of the young nation’s capitol. Rendering by nineteenth-century artist Joseph Laing.



She said of his personal faith, “I should have thought it the greatest heresy to doubt his firm belief in Christianity. His life, his writings, prove that he was a Christian.” John Marshall, Chief Justice of the U. S. Supreme Court and Washington’s biographer, agreed: “He was a sincere believer in the Christian faith and a truly devout man.”

Washington testified to his belief in God the creator:

It is impossible to account for the creation of the universe, without the agency of a Supreme Being. It is impossible to govern the universe, without the aid of a Supreme Being. It is impossible to reason without arriving at a Supreme Being. If there had been no God, mankind would have been obliged to imagine one.

He trusted God as his helper, a fact he stated to his troops during the Revolutionary War:

The time is now near at hand which must probably determine whether Americans are to be freemen or slaves; whether they are to have any property they can call their own. . . . The fate of unborn millions will now depend, under God, on the courage and conduct of this army. . . . Let us therefore rely on the goodness of the cause and aid of the Supreme Being, in whose hands victory is, to animate and encourage us to great and noble actions.

It is clear that Washington was a man of deep and abiding faith in Christ. His last words attest to his confidence in his Lord: “It is well, I die hard, but I am not afraid to go.”

George Washington was truly the “father of our country,” not only as a military leader and president, but also as a spiritual model. His public commitment to Christ as his Lord legitimized the Christian faith in this new country. His frequent attribution of America’s blessings to the Creator gave glory to the God of all nations. And his refusal to promote one particular denomination over another encouraged a free church in a free state, one of the hallmarks of American democracy. As a result, his faith is still influencing our nation and world today.