



**THE DEDICATORY ADDRESS OF
CALVIN COOLIDGE
PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES
AT THE UNVEILING OF THE
EQUESTRIAN STATUE OF
BISHOP FRANCIS ASBURY
WASHINGTON, D.C.**

The Dedicatory Address of
CALVIN COOLIDGE
Thirtieth President of the
United States
at the Unveiling of the
**EQUESTRIAN STATUE OF
BISHOP FRANCIS ASBURY**
Washington, D.C.
October 15, 1924

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Center illustration: Dedication of Francis Asbury statue, Washington, D.C., October 15, 1924. Courtesy of Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division

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PREFACE

In October 15, 1924, Calvin Coolidge, the thirtieth president of the United States, stood to make a speech at the intersection of Mt. Pleasant and Sixteenth Street in our nation's capital. He was there to dedicate a statue of a horse and rider. People called it the fifteenth horseman to Washington. The first fourteen included Generals Washington, Sherman, Sheridan, Scott, Grant, Jackson, McClellan, Hancock, Greene, McPherson, Logan, Pulaski, and Joan of Arc. The fifteenth was a preacher on horseback, Francis Asbury. In this inspiring speech, the president remarked of Asbury, "He is entitled to rank as one of the builders of our nation." The inscription on the base of the statue reads, "The Prophet of the Long Road."

With sincere thanks to the American Presidency Project for their generous permission, Seedbed is

pleased to share the entirety of President Coolidge's historic speech in this small tract. In refreshing our memory, may the Holy Spirit resource our minds and mission with such bold valor in our time.

*For the Long Road,
John David "J.D." Walt Jr.
Sower-in-Chief
Seedbed*

This occasion cannot but recall to our minds in a most impressive way the sacrifice and devotion that has gone into the making of our country. It is impossible to interpret it as the working out of a plan devised by man. The wisest and most far sighted of them had little conception of the greatness of the structure which was to arise on the foundation which they were making. As we review their accomplishments they constantly admonish us not only that “all things work together for good to them that love God,” but that in the direction of the affairs of our country there has been an influence that had a broader vision, a greater wisdom and a wider purpose, than that of mortal man, which we can only ascribe to a Divine Providence. A wide variety of motives has gone into the building of our republic. We can never understand what self government is or what is necessary to maintain it unless we keep these fundamentals in mind. To one of them, Francis Asbury, the first American Bishop of the Methodist Episcopal Church, and his associates, made a tremendous contribution.

Our government rests upon religion. It is from that source that we derive our reverence for truth and justice, for equality and liberty, and for the rights

of mankind. Unless the people believe in these principles they cannot believe in our government. There are only two main theories of government in the world. One rests on righteousness, the other rests on force. One appeals to reason, the other appeals to the sword. One is exemplified in a republic, the other is represented by a despotism. The history of government on this earth has been almost entirely a history of the rule of force held in the hands of a few. Under our constitution, America committed itself to the practical application of the rule of reason, with the power held in the hands of the people.

This result was by no means accomplished at once. It came about only by reason of long and difficult preparation, oftentimes accompanied with discouraging failure. The ability for self government is arrived at only through an extensive training and education. In our own case it required many generations, and we cannot yet say that it is wholly perfected. It is of a great deal of significance that the generation which fought the American Revolution had seen a very extensive religious revival. They had heard the preaching of Jonathan Edwards. They had seen the great revival meetings that were inspired also by the preaching of Whitefield. The religious experiences of

those days made a profound impression upon the great body of the people. They made new thoughts and created new interests. They freed the public mind, through a deeper knowledge and more serious contemplation of the truth. By calling the people to righteousness they were a direct preparation for self government. It was for a continuation of this work that Francis Asbury was raised up. Our government rests upon religion. The religious movement which he represented was distinctly a movement to reach the great body of the people. Just as our Declaration of Independence asserts that all men are created free, so it seems to me the founders of this movement were inspired by the thought that all men were worthy to hear the Word, worthy to be sought out and brought to salvation. It was this motive that took their preachers among the poor and neglected, even to criminals in the jails. As our ideal has been to bring all men to freedom, so their ideal was to bring all men to salvation. It was preeminently a movement in behalf of all the people. It was not a new theory. The American Constitution was not a new theory. But, like it, it was the practical application of an old theory which was very new.

Just as the time was approaching when our country was about to begin the work of establishing a government which was to represent the rule of the people, where not a few but the many were to control public affairs, where the vote of the humblest was to count for as much as the vote of the most exalted, Francis Asbury came to America to preach religion. He had no idea that he was preparing men the better to take part in a great liberal movement, the better to take advantage of free institutions, and the better to perform the functions of self government. He did not come for political motives. Undoubtedly they were farthest from his mind. Others could look after public affairs. He was a loyal and peaceful subject of the Realm. He came to bring the gospel to the people, to bear witness to the truth and to follow it where so ever it might lead. Wherever men dwelt, whatever their condition, no matter how remote, no matter how destitute they might be, to him they were souls to be saved.

For this work, the bearing of the testimony of the truth to those who were about to be, and to those who in his later years were, sovereign American citizens, he had a peculiar training and aptitude. He was the son of a father who earned his livelihood by manual

labor, of a mother who bore a reputation for piety. By constant effort they provided the ordinary comforts of life and an opportunity for intellectual and religious instruction. It was thus that he came out of a home of the people. Very early, at the age of seventeen, he began his preaching. In 1771, when he was twenty six years old, responding to a call for volunteers, he was sent by Wesley to America. Landing in Philadelphia, he began that ministry which in the next forty-five years was to take him virtually all through the colonies and their western confines and into Canada, from Maine on the north, almost to the Gulf of Mexico on the south.

He came to America five years after the formation of the first Methodist Society in the city of New York, which had been contemporaneous with his own joining of the British Conference as an itinerant preacher and a gospel missionary. At that time it is reported that there were 316 members of his denomination in this country. The prodigious character of his labors is revealed when we remember that he traveled some 6,000 miles each year, or in all about 270,000 miles, preaching about 15,500 sermons and ordaining more than 4,000 clergymen, besides presiding at no less than 224 Annual Conferences.

The highest salary that he received was \$80 each year for this kind of service, which meant exposure to summer heat and winter cold, traveling alone through the frontier forests, sharing the rough fare of the pioneer's cabin, until his worn out frame was laid at last to rest. But he left behind him as one evidence of his labors 695 preachers and 214,235 members of his denomination. The vitality of the cause which he served is further revealed by recalling that the 316 with which he began has now grown to more than 8,000,000.

His problem during the Revolutionary War was that of continuing to perform his duties without undertaking to interfere in civil or military affairs. He had taken for the text of his first sermon in America these very significant words: "For I determined not to know anything among you save Jesus Christ and him crucified." When several of his associates left for England in 1775, he decided to stay. "I can by no means agree to leave such a field for gathering souls to Christ as we have in America," he writes, "therefore I am determined by the grace of God not to leave them, let the consequence be what it may." But he had no lack of loyalty to the early form of American government. When the inauguration of Washington took place

April 30, 1789, the Conference being in session, Bishop Asbury moved the presentation of a congratulatory address to the new President. His suggestion was adopted, and the Bishop being one of those designated for the purpose, presenting the address in person, read it to Washington. How well he fitted into the scheme of things, this circuit rider who spent his life making stronger the foundation on which our government rests and seeking to implant in the hearts of all men, however poor and unworthy they may have seemed, an increased ability to discharge the high duties of their citizenship. His outposts marched with the pioneers, his missionaries visited the hovels of the poor so that all men might be brought to a knowledge of the truth.

A great lesson has been taught us by this holy life. It was because of what Bishop Asbury and his associates preached and what other religious organizations, through their ministry, preached, that our country has developed so much freedom and contributed so much to the civilization of the world. It is well to remember this when we are seeking for social reforms. If we can keep in mind their sources, we shall better understand their limitations.

The government of a country never gets ahead of the religion of a country. There is no way by which we can substitute the authority of law for the virtue of man. Of course we can help to restrain the vicious and furnish a fair degree of security and protection by legislation and police control, but the real reforms which society in these days is seeking will come as a result of our religious convictions, or they will not come at all. Peace, justice, humanity, charity; these cannot be legislated into being. They are the result of a Divine Grace. I have never seen the necessity for reliance upon religion rather than upon law better expressed than in a great truth uttered by Mr. Tiffany Blake, of Chicago, when he said: "Christ spent no time in the antechamber of Caesar." An act of Congress may indicate that a reform is being or has been accomplished, but it does not of itself bring about a reform.

Perhaps, too, there is a lesson in contentment in the life of this devout man. He never had any of the luxuries of this life. Even its conveniences did not reach him, and of its absolute necessities he had a scanty share. Without ever having the enjoyment of a real home, constantly on the move, poorly clad, often wretchedly sheltered, much of the time insuf-

ficiently nourished, yet his great spirit pressed on to the end, always toward the mark of his high calling. His recompense was not in the things of the earth. Yet who can doubt that as he beheld his handiwork, as he saw his accomplishments grow, there came to him a glorious satisfaction and a divine peace? No doubt he valued the material things of this life, and certainly they ought to be valued and valued greatly, but he regarded it as his work to put a greater emphasis on the things of the spirit. He sought to prepare men for the sure maintenance and the proper enjoyment of liberty, and for the more certain production and the better use of wealth, by inspiring them with a reverence for the moral values of life.

What a wonderful experience he must have had, this prophet of the wilderness! Who shall say where his influence, written upon the immortal souls of men, shall end? How many homes he must have hallowed! What a multitude of frontier mothers must have brought their children to him to receive his blessing! It is more than probable that Nancy Hanks, the mother of Lincoln, had heard him in her youth. Adams and Jefferson must have known him, and Jackson must have seen in him a flaming spirit as unconquerable as his own. How many temples of

worship dot our landscape; how many institutions of learning, some of them rejoicing in the name of Wesleyan, all trace the inspiration of their existence to the sacrifice and service of this lone circuit rider! He is entitled to rank as one of the builders of our nation.

On the foundation of a religious civilization which he sought to build, our country has enjoyed greater blessing of liberty and prosperity than was ever before the lot of man. These cannot continue if we neglect the work which he did. We cannot depend on the government to do the work of religion. We cannot escape a personal responsibility for our own conduct. We cannot regard those as wise or safe counselors in public affairs who deny these principles and seek to support the theory that society can succeed when the individual fails.

I do not see how any one could recount the story of this early Bishop without feeling a renewed faith in our own country. He met a multitude of storms. Many of them caused him sore trials. But he never wavered. He saw wars and heard rumors of war, but whatever may have been the surface appearance, underneath it all our country manifested then and has continued to manifest a high courage, a remark-

able strength of spirit and an unusual ability, in a crisis, to choose the right course. Something has continued to guide the people. No tumult has been loud enough to prevent their hearing the still small voice. No storm has been violent enough to divert inspired men from constantly carrying the word of truth. The contests of the day have but been preparations for victories on the morrow. Through it all our country has acquired an underlying power of judgment and stability of action which has never failed it. It furnishes its own answer to those who would defame it. It can afford to be oblivious to those who would detract from it. America continues its own way unchallenged and unafraid. Above all attacks and all vicissitudes it has arisen calm and triumphant; not perfect, but marching on guided in its great decisions by the same spirit which guided Francis Asbury.

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