

Roots in Ripon

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Chuck Roots

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The Right of the People

Several presidential candidates were being interviewed on a television news program where questions were mostly coming from people in the audience. I was intrigued by a response Dr. Ben Carson gave when asked about his running for the office of President of the United States. He said that the first thing any voter should look for in a presidential hopeful is whether the candidate has a firm grasp and understanding of our Constitution. Here's the rub. A deplorable number of politicians in particular; and Americans in general, evince a dreadful knowledge of the Constitution and American History.

Since I have embarked on this attempt to teach and instruct my grandchildren about our nation and its core values and truths, I have been delightfully entertained while reading and rereading sacred documents that have been the bedrock of our Republic. That's right – I said Republic. Too many of our fellow-countrymen have forgotten that we are a Republic. We are not a Democracy. We share democratic ideals, but a true democracy would be a simple majority rule. Alexis de Tocqueville called such a government the "Tyranny of the Majority". This is not how we function. As a free people we elect those individuals we (hopefully) trust to represent us in the hallowed halls of government, from the local dog-catcher to the President of the United States. "We the People" can vote our representatives into office, and we can vote them out of office. We do not operate on the basis of a simple majority which the Founding Fathers knew would be disastrous since a majority can also be quite wrong. Eliminating majority rule removed the danger of elections becoming popularity contests, much like elections of student body leaders in high school.

I enjoy helping in Miss Ballatore's 2nd grade class at Colony Oak Elementary where my granddaughter, Alyssa, is a student. At the start of each school day each class stands, places their right hand over their heart, faces the American flag, and recites the Pledge of Allegiance. I stand and recite the pledge right along with them. To witness this participation in honoring our nation is truly heart-warming.

You may recall that the opening line in the Pledge of Allegiance says, "I Pledge allegiance to the flag of the United States of America, and to the Republic for which it stands." There's that Republic principle again.

One of the bones of contention over the Pledge has been the short phrase, "under God", which was officially added to the Pledge during the presidency of Dwight Eisenhower. Some have said it should not be used since it was not in there from the beginning. Actually, the original Pledge is markedly different from what we pledge today. Originally written by Colonel George Balch in 1887, the pledge went like this:

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"I pledge allegiance to my flag, and the republic for which it stands. I pledge my head and my heart to God and my country. One country, one language and one flag."

The original pledge included a specific reference to God. So it should come as no surprise that President Eisenhower authorized the addition of "under God" in the final revision. It took Congress until 1942 to officially recognize the Pledge for the first time. Now why does this not surprise me!?

In the early paragraphs of the Declaration of Independence we see a direct reference to "the Right of the People." This statement is so powerful as to be easily overlooked unless we know our World History. With perhaps the theocracy of Ancient Israel (and not even that), virtually no nation has ever been ruled by "the people". This is part of the reason that the formation of this new nation, the United States of America, was looked upon with utter fascination by the rest of the world, and referred to as that "American Experiment". And to be perfectly honest, no one really believed we would succeed as a nation. Yet in less than one hundred years the United States was the most powerful nation economically in the entire world, primarily because of our free market enterprise system and a strong work ethic with virtually no government interference.

Next week I will continue with more of the "Right of the People".