

July 2012

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Four Forsaken Words

... of making many books there is no end; and much study is a weariness of the flesh. Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man.
--Ecclesiastes 12:12-13

An insightful question for longtime readers: Name a 9,344 word manifesto dealing with basic human rights and expectations of all mankind? (A) The Magna Carta; (B) The Declaration of Independence; (C) The United Nations Declaration of Human Rights; or (D) None of the foregoing. Hint: There are so many “give-me(s)” crammed in the 44-page document, perhaps delegates decided to adopt it to find out what was in it—for them.

Sorry, “C” is not the correct response. But much of the UN document is indeed mirrored in a policy behemoth that was unfurled in Seattle on June 2 at the Democrat State Convention. Democrats call it their 2012 State Platform. Although similar to its world idol, the platform actually overshadows the UN Declaration—adding some 7,463 additional words. The daughter has become the mother!

After perusing the evolving principles and ideals of local Democrats, we can understand why barely a third of the seats reserved for delegates were occupied when the State Democrat Convention was gaveled to order. The AWOL-ees may have thought to themselves, “been there, done that!”

Meanwhile, State Republicans, meeting 30 miles south in Tacoma on the same weekend, filled all 1500 delegate slots, and then some. By contrast, their collective policy wish list was expressed in 1,118 words on three pages—at the very least, sparing the last old-growth fir of Wishka Valley.

After comparing both Republican and Democrat Party platforms with their two-year-old mid-term forerunners, we are unable to find much difference in the latest editions. In 2010, we pulled several planks from both parties for a side-by-side comparison. New subscribers should note the enclosure.

For all others, suffice it to say, vast and legion are the philosophical differences between the two parties—intoned somewhat even in the first sentences of their respective preambles:

“The Washington State Republican Party is dedicated to preserving...conservative values including: the sanctity of human life; ...a free society, free markets, and free trade; limited government; low taxes; minimal bureaucracy; strong national defense; and private property rights.”

“We, as Democrats, place the welfare of the people as our highest priority. We believe in the values of community, dignity, equality, opportunity, fairness, tolerance, respect, and the common good of the world we share.”

Then, there is the “God-factor.” The Republican document alludes to God, directly or indirectly, six times—the first three in their preamble. The Democrat platform does not acknowledge God, but does suggest in three instances, some measure of concern regarding “religion:”

We oppose: Organized prayer in public schools; [Education]

We call for: Supporting nations in their efforts to prevent the radicalization of religions; [Foreign Policy]

We call for: Strengthening the wall of separation between church and state by eliminating taxpayer funding for religious institutions or "faith-based" initiatives; [Government and Political Reform]

But we digress. Under momentary consideration are some of the historic “policy” documents undergirding Western Civilization. Specifically, are encyclopedic-length policy documents much like long speeches? Do they energize or anesthetize? Considering all presidential speeches from 1789 to present, is there one of more regard than Lincoln’s two-minute *Gettysburg Address*? Similarly, are there widely regarded “policy” papers that wrought change throughout the Western World—having climaxed in fewer than 9,344 words?

We believe the **Magna Carta** (1215) with 4,583 words is one. Although some historians consider *The Great Charter of the Liberties of England* a product of much bargaining over specific grievances rather than general principles of law, three clauses remain part of the uncodified constitution of England and Wales. And, like most pre-modernity public documents, the Magna Carta addresses religious liberties first:

FIRST, THAT WE HAVE GRANTED TO GOD, and by this present charter have confirmed for us and our heirs in perpetuity, that the English Church shall be free, and shall have its rights undiminished, and its liberties unimpaired... we have also granted, for us and our heirs forever, all the liberties written out below...

The **U.S. Constitution** (1789--) a work in progress, begins with a 4,501 word explanation of the relational functions of the three branches of the government of the United States. Immediately appended are the 492 words of the *Bill of Rights* (first ten amendments) to insure no misunderstandings as to the limits placed on the federal powers. Amazingly, 223 years and 17 subsequent amendments later, only 2,608 additional words have been added to the text of the U.S. Constitution.

The **Declaration of Independence** (1776) presents the grievances and intentions of America’s 13 colonies “to a candid world.” Crafted by Thomas Jefferson for submittal to King George III, America’s writ of divorcement from Great Britain also appealed “to the Supreme Judge of the world for the rectitude of our intentions,” doing so in only 1,338 words—8,006 fewer than the 2012 Democrat Platform.

The **Emancipation Proclamation** is an executive order issued by President Abraham Lincoln on January 1, 1863, during the American Civil War using his war powers. The 641-word document immediately freed 50,000 slaves and nearly three million more as Union armies advanced. The Proclamation concludes: *... And upon this act, sincerely believed to be an act of justice, warranted by the Constitution, upon military necessity, I invoke the considerate judgment of mankind, and the gracious favor of Almighty God.*

The **Mayflower Compact** (1620) was a concise document forming a governing authority for *Plimoth Colony*. Following an arduous North Atlantic crossing, the 102 exhausted Pilgrims agreed to a covenant calling them to subordinate their rights to a governing body to ensure their protection and survival. It marked the first time in history that free and equal men had voluntarily covenanted together to create their own new civil government. Considered a benchmark for the establishment of free governments under God, it was arguably a foundational forerunner to the U.S. Constitution. The 195-word compact begins:

...Having undertaken, for the Glory of God, and advancements of the Christian faith and honor of our King and Country, a voyage to plant the first colony in the Northern parts of Virginia.

Dare we include **The Ten Commandments** to our list of policy documents? Although etched in stone by the hand of God and issued to a certain peculiar Middle East nation, the 72-word document fits our criteria both for conciseness and impact upon Western Civilization. Quite simply, the laws of the United States of America (and most European nations) are rooted in The Ten Commandments.

Finally, during the Civil War, religious sentiment grew rapidly. Rev. M. R. Watkinson wrote Treasury Secretary Salmon Chase, “What if our Republic were not shattered beyond reconstruction? Would not the antiquaries of succeeding centuries rightly reason from our past that we were a heathen nation?” (Referring to the goddess of liberty). In turn, Chase wrote to the Director of the Mint on November 20, 1861, “No nation can be strong except in the strength of God, or safe except in His defense. The trust of our people in God should be declared on our national coins. You will cause a device to be prepared without unnecessary delay with a motto expressing in the fewest and tersest words possible this national recognition.”

C’mon party leaders, you can say it: “*In God We Trust!*”

Rick Forcier