

# JEFFERSON EDUCATIONAL SOCIETY

## Book Notes #186

October 2024

By Jefferson Scholar-in-Residence  
Dr. Andrew Roth

### 'Oath and Honor'



#### An Evening with Liz Cheney and Sister Joan Chittister

Thursday, Oct. 17 at 7:30 PM  
at the Bayfront Convention Center

##### About Liz Cheney:

Liz Cheney is the former U.S. Representative for Wyoming's congressional district from 2017 to 2023 where she chaired the House Republican Conference from 2019 to 2021 and served as the Vice Chair on the Select Commission to Investigate the January 6<sup>th</sup> Attack on the United States Capitol. Liz Cheney is the author of the newly released memoir *Oath and Honor*.

##### About Sr. Joan Chittister:

For over 50 years, Sister Joan Chittister has passionately advocated on behalf of peace, human rights, women's issues, and renewable and church-related. She is one of the most influential religious and social leaders of our time.



Moderated by:  
Sr. Joan Chittister



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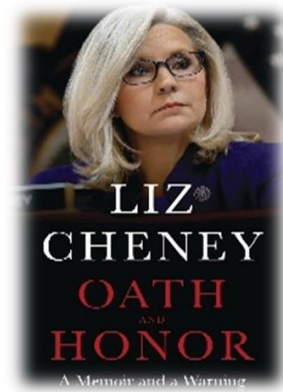
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“There is in everyone a call to something bigger than themselves.”

Sister Joan Chittister,  
O.S.B. [1]

*Presidential Oath of Office:*

“I do solemnly swear (or affirm) that I will faithfully execute the Office of President of the United States, and ***will to the best of my Ability, preserve, protect and defend the Constitution of the United States.***” Presidential Oath of Office, U.S. Constitution Article II, Section 1, Clause 8. [2] ***Emphasis Added.***  
*Senate, House of Representatives, and Federal Civil Service Employees Oath of Office:*



“I do solemnly swear (or affirm) that ***I will support and defend the Constitution of the United States against all enemies, foreign and domestic;*** that I will bear true faith and allegiance to the same; that I take this obligation freely, without any mental reservation or purpose of evasion; and that I will well and faithfully discharge the duties of the office on which I am about to enter. So help me God.” 5 U.S.Code S. 3331 [3] ***Emphasis Added.***

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Global Summit XVI, the Jefferson Educational Society’s impending annual feast of national and international speakers and leaders, begins this year on Thursday, Oct. 17 at 7:30 p.m. at the Bayfront Convention Center with an evening with Liz Cheney moderated by Sister Joan Chittister, O.S.B. Personally, I can’t think of a better or more important speaker with which to begin, because in a time when honor is in short supply, Cheney is one of the most honorable people of our time.

Which, I must add, is a line I never thought I would write. Cheney twice voted for Donald Trump for president. During his first impeachment, she played a coy game calling “the proceedings ‘shameful.’” [4] On most specific issues of public policy, I can’t think of many, if any, about which she and I would agree. As Cheney herself said of her relationship with former Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi,

We may have disagreed on pretty much everything else, but Nancy Pelosi and I saw eye to eye on the one thing that mattered more than any other: the defense of our Constitution and the preservation of our republic. [5]

But Cheney and I agree on this: yes, politics can be a rough game; often even a ruthless game. Only someone foolishly naïve ever thinks otherwise. But it ought to be permissible, even desirable, for hardnosed, determined competitors, to be honorable people who disagree honorably.

Which means what?

That they understand and accept “the rules of the game.” For without rules – without the law – what do you have? Imagine football without any rules; or ice hockey, lacrosse or any game; imagine politics without any rules; imagine society without any rules; what do you have?

You have chaos – you have Mel Gibson in *Mad Max* – that now eerily prophetic movie. Without rules, without the law, you have Caesarism, you have “thugocracy” in which the strong prey upon the weak. You have, in German filmmaker Werner Herzog’s memorable phrase, “Every man for himself and God against all.” When all sides claim God as an ally, then God effectively favors no one, for as Abraham Lincoln said in his “Second Inaugural,” “The Almighty has his own purposes.” [6]

The great genius of the American Founders was to craft a system – a system of laws and values – that checked and balanced all of the potentially lethal energy of the eternal struggle between the one, the few, and the many into a democratic republican system in which all might prosper to their own and their fellow citizens’ greater happiness. All the Founders asked (and for many 21st century plutocrats, both national and local, whose faces just flickered past my inner eye, it might be too much to ask), all the Founders asked is that each of us temper our private needs just a bit for the greater public good – the *commonweal*.

How? In answering that question, I ask another question, “When did it become un-American to answer that one preserves the American experiment by believing in the second paragraph of the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution of the United States, and the rule of law?”

Cheney and I agree that the great question of our time isn’t whether or not inflation could be lower; isn’t whether or not the Fed should raise or lower interest rates; isn’t what the correct policy for maintaining stability along our southern border might be; isn’t even the existential question of whether or not climate change is real; but it might be whether or not the U.S. Supreme Court was correct in *Trump v. the United States* in placing the president of the United States above the law; it might be whether or not we’ve arrived at that moment when, answering a question about what the Constitution had created as he exited the Constitutional Convention, Ben Franklin’s reply that it “created a republic if you can keep it” now meets its severest test: can we keep the republic the Founders’ genius created?

Cheney said it better when she accepted her position on the January 6<sup>th</sup> Committee:

The question for every one of us who serves in Congress, for every elected official across this great nation – indeed, for every American – is this: Will we adhere to the rule of law? Will we respect the rulings of our courts? Will

we preserve the peaceful transition of power? Or will we be so blinded by partisanship that we throw away the miracle of America? Do we hate our political adversaries more than we love our country and revere our Constitution? I pray that is not the case. I pray that we all remember, Our children are watching. As we carry out this solemn and sacred duty entrusted to us, our children will know who stood for truth, and they will inherit the nation we hand to them – a republic, if we can keep it.

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At the moment, I am fighting against the temptation to do one of my typical **Book Note** deep dives into Cheney's ***Oath and Honor: A Memoir and a Warning*** because I do not want to preempt her own story. I want you to go to the Convention Center on Oct. 17 to look her in the eye and have her look you in the eye (if only metaphorically) as she tells you the truth about Jan. 6, 2021 and former President Donald Trump's attempt to subvert the American republic.

**BTW** – you need to order tickets now, because it is approaching a sellout. Tickets can be purchased at Global Summit XVI here [Global Summit XVI - Jefferson Educational Society \(jeserie.org\)](https://www.jeserie.org/global-summit-xvi)

So, rather than a meticulously analytical summary, here, from my vantage point, are a few ***Oath and Honor*** notes of interest.

There is a saying that for evil to triumph all that is necessary is for good people to do nothing. A corollary, however, might be that even if good people are roused to action, they can be thwarted by a flock of cowards surrounding, protecting, and enabling the evildoer. In a section of her book titled “A Plague of Cowardice,” Cheney exposes the graven behavior of a gaggle of sycophantic enablers, like current Speaker of the House Mike Johnson (R-La.), who, like others were “especially susceptible to flattery from Trump and aspired to be anywhere in Trump’s orbit.” Johnson fabricated a letter supporting (in legal jargon an *amicus brief*) the state of Texas’ lawsuit disputing the election results in four states (one of which was Pennsylvania) all the while knowing that what he was doing was unfounded, but, as Cheney notes, “...he did not care.”

Or, as a sample of Republicans who privately mocked Trump but in public did his bidding, she quotes Rep. Mark Green (R-Tenn.). As Trump supporters mobbed the Capitol, Green, knowing Trump’s claims of election fraud were fabricated, muttered “The things we do for the Orange Jesus” as he signed an objection to the electoral count on Jan. 6. Puzzled by formerly rational colleagues who flipfopped into Trumpian sycophants, she singles out Elise Stefanik (R-N.Y.), who you may recall a year ago pilloried several college presidents during Congressional hearings. Cheney observes, “Many of us who had known Elise since before she

abandoned all principle were curious about how she had lost her sense of right and wrong.”

Questioning both then-House Speaker Kevin McCarthy’s intelligence and character, Cheney’s contempt for McCarthy (R-Calif.) bristles from the page as she recounts his pivot from condemning the former president on Jan. 6 as he and other representatives cowered in the besieged Capitol to a scant two weeks later his groveling performance at Mar-a-Lago as he sought Trump’s forgiveness and access to his donor lists. Or, on the evening of Jan. 6 itself, when Congress reconvened after the rioters had been cleared, northwestern Pennsylvania’s own U.S. Rep. Mike Kelly (R-16th Dist.), betraying his own male obliviousness, provided some unintended comic relief. Kelly, trying to articulate how betrayed he felt by Cheney’s defense of the Constitution and refusal to go along with Trump’s false election fraud claims, said, “It’s like you’re playing in the biggest game of your life and you look up and see your girlfriend sitting on the opponent’s side!” A number of Republican women representatives yelled back at him, “She’s not your girlfriend!” To which Cheney added, “Yeah, I’m not your girlfriend.”

**Aside:** Comic relief notwithstanding, one of the weaknesses in Cheney’s book is that while scathing in her contempt for Trump and his enablers, of whom she identifies legions, she ultimately cannot bring herself to identify who those donors might be other than a passing comment about lists of “small donors.” Of the plutocrats investing in Trump to deliver them business deregulation and tax cuts, she is silent. The same is true for the list of “small donors” who compose the “base” upon which Trump relies and who are the terror of Republican primaries. Cheney, herself, fell victim to them when her work on the January 6th Committee led to her defeat for reelection in Wyoming.

Given that her position regarding the former president is unambiguous, one wonders why the silence?

Could it be, as Laura Miller said in Slate magazine that “the base haunts **Oath and Honor** ... never ... does Cheney admit that Trump’s following is a Frankenstein monster that her Republican Party built to win elections, a monster that then turned against it.” [7] Miller makes a telling point, for even in northwestern Pennsylvania, the “base” has made eunuchs of formerly ethical Republicans. In the process, they have rendered the word “conservative” all but meaningless.

As I have detailed in numerous **Book Notes** and elsewhere in **The American Tapestry Project**, what Miller is getting at are the unrelenting culture wars unleashed by the Republican Party since Richard Nixon’s successful 1968 “southern strategy” through Ronald Reagan declaring his candidacy for the presidency in Philadelphia, Mississippi in 1980 (scene of the murders of four civil

rights workers in 1964) to George H.W. Bush's "Willie Horton ads" in 1988 to Newt Gingrich's scorched earth tactics in Congress to Pat Buchanan declaring a culture war for the soul of America at the 1992 Republican National Convention to – well, it's a long list and the chickens, as they will, do come home to roost.

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I will not detail it here, I am sure Cheney herself will on Oct. 17, but the major – somehow, I want to emphasize **MAJOR** – the major accomplishment of ***Oath and Honor*** is its scrupulous and detailed recounting of just what happened on Jan. 6, 2021. She precisely reports the planning and intrigue that preceded it, the brutally violent events of the day, and the attempted cover-up that followed it. As the January 6th Committee in its hearings and public presentations has meticulously documented, it was an attempted insurrection against the government of the United States and an assault on the very idea of America – those foundational values we hold to be self-evidently true – and an attack against government of, by, and for the people. I know this is asking too much, but every American needs to read the ***Final Report Select Committee to Investigate the Jan. 6 Attack on the United States Capitol***, which can be found [here](#).

It's long, but you need to at least scan, as Cheney exhorts us to do, the "Executive Summary" to truly understand what happened and could happen again. As Cheney details, the attack failed only because a few good people were in the right places and did their duty. What would happen if a second attempt is made and those stalwart Americans have been replaced by the flacks and flunkies peopling the "plague of cowardice"?

Among those brave Americans who did their duty, not the least of which was Vice President Mike Pence. Pence deserves more credit than he has received for having the courage to honor his oath of office. But it also includes, as Cheney repeatedly points out, decent people in the Department of Justice, in Congress, even in the White House, and, most importantly, in the Pentagon, who honored their oaths of office and defended the U.S. Constitution. And, maybe more important than even the Pentagon, it includes the Capitol Police, who under attack by their fellow citizens, defended the Capitol Building and the members of Congress. A documented 140 police officers were injured, at least five seriously, and one later died from the trauma of the day. Every American needs to know the heroism of Capitol Police officer Michael Fanone, who defending the Capitol's west entrance, was swarmed over by the mob. They ripped off his badge, stole his radio, and repeatedly tased him with an electric stun gun. As Officer Fanone testified, "I was electrocuted again and again and again with a Taser." [8]

The Capitol Police are genuine American heroes.



I often wonder about the mental gymnastics some people perform to convince themselves that white is black, up is down, and in is out when I see those who claim to be American patriots supporting the police with their blue line flags and flag stickers then claim nothing happened on Jan. 6. It was just a normal tourist day. It makes me wonder, who are they going to believe: Donald Trump, the clownish Rudy Giuliani, the unspeakable Laurie Loomer or their own “lying eyes”? They need to not only read the report , but also should watch this [Bing Videos](#). They may not do that either, and therein lies the mortal threat confronting American society in a post-truth world of Kellyanne Conway’s alternative facts. And here we are with the very real possibility of a sequel.

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The great question of our time: can we keep the republic our Founders bequeathed us?

It’s an open question, but as in the Sister Joan Chittister, O.S.B. quote with which this **Book Note** began, in our time the call to something bigger than ourselves is the call to defend the republic the founders created for us; the call is to defend the idea of America embedded in its founding documents; the call is to defend the Declaration of Independence, the U.S. Constitution, and the rule of law.

While I might not have agreed with her father, Dick Cheney, or with her on many (any?) issues of public policy, we are all in debt to Liz Cheney and to her father, who has stood beside her at every instance since Jan. 6, 2021, for their courage in defending America’s most precious values, for their having the courage, as Spike Lee said, to just “do the right thing”!

May we all have the courage to just “do the right thing!”



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**Photo Credit**

“*Liz Cheney Oath and Honor: A Memoir and a Warning*” at Little Brown Publishing available at [Oath and Honor by Liz Cheney | Hachette Book Group](#) accessed Sept. 28, 2024.

#### End Notes

1. Chittister O.S.B., Sister Joan. **Grace Filled Moments with Sr. Joan.** (New London, CT: Twenty-Third Publications, 2021), p., 71.
2. “*Oath of Office for the Presidency*” in the **Constitution of the United States of America**, Article II, Section 1, Clause 8. (Washington, D.C.: The Cato Institute, 2002), p.45.
3. Neal, Jeff, “*I do solemnly swear’ – The oath of office and what it means*” at **Federal News Network** available at [“I do solemnly swear” – The oath of office and what it means \(federalnewsnetwork.com\)](#) accessed Sept. 28, 2024.
4. Tanenhaus, Sam, “*Liz Cheney is eloquent on Trump, evasive about her role in the GOP,*” in **The Washington Post** (Dec. 10, 2023) available at [In ‘Oath and Honor,’ Liz Cheney is both eloquent and evasive - The Washington Post](#) accessed Sept. 29, 2024.
5. To avoid littering this **Book Note** with **End Note** numbers, all quotes from Liz Cheney are from her **Oath and Honor: A Memoir and a Warning** (Boston: Little Brown Co., 2023).
6. Lincoln, Abraham, “*Second Inaugural,*” quoted in Ronald C. White, Jr., **Lincoln’s Greatest Speech: The Second Inaugural.** (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2002), p. 18.
7. Miller, Laura, “*Waking Up with Fleas*” in **Slate.com** available at [Liz Cheney’s memoir, Oath and Honor, reviewed. \(slate.com\)](#) accessed Sept. 29, 2024.
8. Cheney, **cited above**, p. 216.

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