

GIFT TO JOHN F. KENNEDY?

Johnson Sworn In With Missal, Not Bible, After Assassination

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WASHINGTON—When Lyndon B. Johnson took the oath of office as the 36th President of the United States, his hand was resting not on a Bible but on a missal — the Roman Catholic book containing instructions in English and Latin for the celebration of the mass.

The missal was still wrapped in cellophane and resting in a cardboard box when it was found for the swearing-in ceremony aboard Air Force I after the assassination of John F. Kennedy in Dallas on Nov. 22, 1963.

A former Kennedy aide believes the missal used in the ceremony had been presented to the late President shortly before he arrived in Dallas. Its present whereabouts is unknown.

Book Gives Account

An account of how a Protestant President came to take the oath of office on a Catholic prayer book appears in "The Truth About the Assassination," a book by Charles Roberts, to be published next month by Grosset and Dunlap. Roberts, White House correspondent for Newsweek magazine, was one of two "pool" reporters who returned to Washington aboard the White House jet after having witnessed the swearing-in.

The Washington Post independently confirmed the use of the missal through an inquiry that began several weeks before it received Roberts' manuscript.

Presidential news secretary George Christian said the White House would issue no comment on these findings. It was known, however, that Mr. Johnson and U.S. Judge Sarah Hughes, who administered the 36-word oath, both believed that the small, leather-bound book was a Bible.

Mr. Johnson's employment of a missal in no way

affects the legality of the Presidential term that he served until he was elected President and took the same oath again—with a family Bible—before the Capitol on Jan. 20, 1965.

Neither the Constitution nor any federal law calls for the use of a Bible in the taking of federal oaths of office.

For varying reasons, three other chief executives—Thomas Jefferson, Theodore Roosevelt and Calvin Coolidge—failed to employ the Holy Book during Presidential oath-taking ceremonies.

A network of silence, evasion and misstatement arose around the secret use of a missal in the tragic circumstances that marked Mr. Johnson's sudden assumption of the Presidency.

Conclusion Erroneous

This led William Manchester to write incorrectly in a serialized version of "The Death of a President" that "President Kennedy always carried his personal Bible" in the bedroom cabin of Air Force I and that "on flights alone, the President had read it evenings before snapping off the night light."

Manchester went on to relate in Look magazine how the "Bible" used in the ceremony "remains untraced." Thus, he erroneously concludes that "the last item of Kennedy memorabilia to be left in Dallas, his most cherished

personal possession, was his Bible."

Manchester's version was commissioned in 1964 by the Kennedy family and was written with their full cooperation. Late last year, Mrs. John F. Kennedy denounced the book and sued in an effort to delete its personal passages.

A different account from Manchester's, obtained by Roberts and by the Washington Post, has been confirmed by several authoritative sources.

The Johnson staff assumed Judge Hughes would bring a Bible with her to the White House plane, then parked at Dallas' Love Field. She did not.

Too Late to Return

Judge Hughes boarded the plane at exactly 2:30 p.m. By then, it was too late for her to go back and return with a Bible, as she offered to do. Furthermore, Secret Service agents, for security reasons, were against permitting her to leave and were anxious to depart for Washington as soon as possible.

It was in these circumstances that Lawrence F. O'Brien came in from the bedroom compartment, aft of the conference room, carrying the missal. O'Brien, formerly chief of the White House congressional liaison staff, is now postmaster general in the Johnson Cabinet.

Except for Mrs. Kennedy, the party aboard the