



Can a Minority Deprive the Majority of Its Basic Rights?

President James K. Polk said in his Inaugural Address of March 4, 1845: "One great object of the Constitution was to restrain majorities from oppressing minorities or encroaching upon their just rights. Minorities have a right to appeal to the Constitution as a shield against such oppression.'

What that means is that Christians cannot persecute Jews or deprive them of their right to worship as they please, that Protestants cannot prevent Catholics from saying Mass, or that the followers of Islam cannot prevent an individual Muslim from converting to another religion. But does it also mean that a minority can deny the majority of exercising its God-given rights? According to some judges it does, for a small group of atheists can deprive a majority of Christians in our public schools of exercising their right to religious freedom.



For example, here is what one atheist student was able to achieve in a school in Rhode Island:

A prayer banner that has hung in a Rhode Island high school auditorium since 1963 is coming down. A federal judge ruled in January that the prayer banner at Cranston High School West is unconstitutional. He ordered to have it removed.

Now the school district has decided not to appeal the ruling.

The trouble began with a lawsuit filed on behalf of 16-year-old atheist Jessica Ahlquist, a student at Cranston West. Ahlquist argued that the banner, a gift from the school's first graduating class in 1963, showed the words "Heavenly Father" and "Amen," words she said didn't belong in a public school.

At a contentious meeting ... many Cranston residents made it clear they wanted the school to appeal the ruling. "We need to show them that we can fight for what they believe in, no matter what it takes," one Cranston resident said.

"We have to appeal for the students of Cranston High School West," another resident said. "And we have to appeal for the sake of our own community. God bless you all." But others wanted the school to avoid a costly court fight.

In other words, one atheist student was given the power by a federal judge to deprive the vast majority of students their right to express their religious views and honor God, the Creator of their lives. The banner did not establish a state religion. It simply acknowledged the existence of the same God our Founding Fathers believed in. Our Declaration of Independence states very clearly and strongly:

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by



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their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, and that among these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness. That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed.

The Bill of Rights of our Constitution states:

Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.

The federal judge who ruled that Jessica Ahlquist had been given the power by our Constitution to deprive the vast majority of her fellow students of their right to acknowledge what they owed to their Heavenly Father was acting unconstitutionally. The Constitution does not give the minority the right to deprive the majority of their Constitutional rights.

Also, the specious argument that the words “Heavenly Father” and “amen” are words that don’t belong in a public school is so ridiculous that only an atheist or politically correct judge could accept such reasoning. First of all, saying that certain words, because they pertain to religious belief, should be eliminated in a public school is saying that public schools now believe in censorship of perfectly good words that express the most positive sentiments of a grateful student body.

What portion of our Constitution has invested Jessica Ahlquist with that great power to deprive virtually all of the students in that school of the right to exercise their freedom of religion? Yet, the Constitution is being used as justification for removing all references to the God of the Bible from the public schools, the very same God on which our government is based.

There’s an atheist organization, Freedom From Religion Foundation, which recently was able to get the state of Colorado to cancel its Colorado Day of Prayer. It celebrated the ability of the minority to deprive the majority of its free exercise of religion. If these atheists want to live in a country that is free of religion, then they ought to move elsewhere. Are they not aware that the United States of America, its origin, independence, government, and culture are all based on the profound belief in the God of the Bible, and that our freedoms are the gifts of God’s providence?

George Washington said of God the Creator in the final words of his Inaugural Address on April 30, 1789:

He has been pleased to favor the American people with opportunities for deliberating in perfect tranquility, and dispositions for deciding with unparalleled unanimity on a form of government for a security of their union and the advancement of their happiness, so His divine blessing may be equally conspicuous in the enlarged views, the temperate consultations, and the wise measures on which the success of this Government must depend.

In other words, the success of our governmental system is dependent on the blessings of God. John Adams said in his Inaugural Address of March 4, 1797:

And may that Being who is supreme of all, the Patron of Order, the Fountain of Justice, and the Protector in all ages of the world of virtuous liberty, continue His blessing upon this nation and its Government and give it all possible success and duration consistent with the ends of His providence.

Would these words of Washington and Adams be banned from our public schools because they might offend some atheist student? Why doesn’t that atheist student and her family move to some other



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country where such oppressive language would not offend their ears?

Thomas Jefferson, often touted as a deist, said in his Second Inaugural Address of March 4, 1805:

I shall need, too, the favor of that Being in whose hands we are, who led our fathers, as Israel of old, from their native land and planted them in a country flowing with all the necessities and comforts of life; who has covered our infancy with His providence and our riper years with His wisdom and power, and to whose goodness I ask you to join in supplications with me that He will so enlighten the minds of your servants, guide their councils, and prosper their measures that whatsoever they do shall result in your good, and shall secure to you the peace, friendship, and approbation of all nations.

It is hard to imagine a statement more consistent with the belief of our Founding Fathers that God is the true author of our liberty, prosperity and happiness.

James Madison said in his Inaugural Address of March 4, 1809, that he placed his confidence in that “which we have all been encouraged to feel in the guardianship and guidance of that Almighty Being whose power regulates the destiny of nations, whose blessings have been so conspicuously dispensed to this rising Republic, and to whom we are bound to address our devout gratitude for the past, as well as our fervent supplications and best hopes for the future.”

Does the Freedom From Religion Foundation want to undo American history and ban the reading of these words in all the public schools of America? Perhaps the most heart-rending statement about God’s providence made by any president was expressed by Abraham Lincoln in his short but memorable Second Inaugural Address of March 4, 1865, just as the Civil War was winding down:

Neither party expected for the war the magnitude or the duration which it has already attained.... Both read the same Bible and pray to the same God, and each invokes His aid against the other. It may seem strange that any men should dare to ask a just God’s assistance in wringing their bread from the sweat of other men’s faces, but let us judge not, that we be not judged. The prayers of both could not be answered. That of neither has been answered fully. The Almighty has His own purposes. “Woe unto the world because of offenses; for it must needs be that offenses come, but woe to that man by whom the offense cometh.” If we shall suppose that American slavery is one of those offenses which, in the providence of God, must needs come, but which, having continued through His appointed time, He now wills to remove, and that He gives to both North and South this terrible war as the woe due to those whom the offense came, shall we discern therein any departure from those divine attributes which the believers in a living God always ascribe to Him?

It is obvious that Lincoln was a profound student of the Bible and tried to find in it the meaning of what the nation was going through in its savage civil war. Slavery had become an offense that had to be removed, and there was no limit to the cost. Indeed, one month later, on April 14, 1865, Lincoln was assassinated. His extraordinary life must be included in the cost of that struggle.



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