



The Prejudice of Atheists

Ever since the separation-of-church-and-state ruling in 1947, there has been an ever-intensifying effort to denude our public sphere of religious symbols and sentiments. The latest attack is a lawsuit to prevent "In God We Trust" and the Pledge of Allegiance from being engraved on the newly-built Capitol Visitor Center in Washington, D.C.



Filed by the Freedom from Religion Foundation, the suit claims that the mere presence of such engravings is an unconstitutional endorsement of religion. FoxNews.com [reports](#) on the story, telling us that the House and Senate passed resolutions earlier this month authorizing the engraving "in response to critics who complained Congress spent \$621 million on the new three-story underground center without paying respect to the nation's religious heritage."

So now the other side is speaking. The question is, do they really believe what they're saying? I ask because their position on establishment strains credulity. The relevant part of the First Amendment simply states, "Congress shall make no laws respecting the establishment of religion." It says nothing about the "separation of church and state"; in fact, the principle is found nowhere in the Constitution. Sure, the phrase had been mentioned during the founders' time — such as in Thomas Jefferson's famous letter to the Danbury Baptist Association in 1802 — yet many things were mentioned but never enshrined in the Constitution. And, like them, the separation of church and state never "made the cut." Why? Because it was a *minority view* when our nation was born.

Moreover, we should understand why Jefferson used the phrase. He was simply trying to reassure the Danbury Baptists that, should he ascend to the presidency, he wouldn't use federal power to impose his very unorthodox brand of Christianity on them. Jefferson's "wall" was a one-way filtration system. It kept government out of religion; it had nothing to do with keeping religion out of government.

Yet no amount of historical and legal argumentation can thwart the will of those bent on revising history and creatively "interpreting" law, and such sleight-of-hand will work if citizens consider suppressing public displays of religion a moral imperative. And people today do believe this for a simple reason: prejudice.

To understand this, consider the following example. Let's say that I'm obsessed with eliminating the many American Indian names dotting our map. And let's say that the cultural climate is conducive to this endeavor and I can thus find support and a legal basis for such a cultural rending. So I scour the nation looking for "offenses" and file lawsuits against Chappaqua, N.Y., Alabama, Illinois, and Kentucky as part of a long crusade. Would a clear-thinking person find this normal? Or, would he perhaps say I



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had a hang-up? In point of fact, it would be right to suspect that something very ugly, very secret — perhaps even sinister — drives me.

Now, if this would strike us as the ugliest of prejudice if the target were American Indian symbols and sentiments — or if it were Spanish or black symbols and sentiments — why don't we register the same revulsion when religion is placed in these crosshairs?

"Ah," says the critic, "But this is religion, not culture." Yes, and the Indian is a red man, not a white man. So? This is precisely the prejudice of which I speak. I'll illustrate my point.

I would ask atheist critics the following: if religious ideas really are handed down by the Creator of the Universe, the author of all, don't we have a duty to infuse our public square with them? Aren't we obligated to instill children with them in school?

Of course, we know atheists will respond with eye-rolling as they say, "Well, you may believe these ideas are divine, but we don't agree. They are just man-made." And from here checkmate is easy. Simply retort, "Okay, but if they're man-made, why do you discriminate against them? Why do you say that man-made ideas we happen to call "secular" may be in the public square, but man-made ideas we happen to call "religious" may not be? If they're all man's handiwork, good fellow, wherein lies the difference?

The point is, unthinkingly subjecting something to discrimination simply because it's labeled "religious" is no different than unthinkingly subjecting a group to discrimination because of its basic skin color. Sure, there can be legitimate discrimination, such as favoring 25-year-olds over 60-year-olds when hiring police or disallowing the false religious practice of human sacrifice in deference to the valid religious injunction, "Thou shalt do no murder." But the obsession with pushing religion to the back of the bus is nothing but blind prejudice. If you want to make a logical case for this bias, go ahead. If you want to play Christopher Hitchens' tune and say that "religion poisons everything," present your evidence. If you want to explain why man, a creature who has believed in gods for millennia, should suddenly make atheism the public default, marshal your arguments. Let's have the debate. But don't simply cite constitutional principles (illusory or not), as legality doesn't determine morality. And don't expect me to accept second-class status based on being the wrong philosophical "color."

Really, part of the problem is that militant secularists have so long heard the separation-of-church-and-state mantra that they've come to believe their anti-theistic prejudice is justifiable. In fact, they fancy it a virtue. It's much like a man who is raised believing that those of a given race are second class and have no right voicing their beliefs. He may feel quite righteous about stilling their tongues, but the fact remains he has a hang-up, an obsession with no basis in reality.

This prejudice is evident in the Freedom from Religion Foundation's lawsuit. Their position is, Fox writes, that "engraving them [the religious sentiments] at the entrance to the U.S. Capitol would discriminate against those who do not practice religion and unfairly promote a Judeo-Christian perspective."

Nonsense. Government institutions will always reflect certain values and ideas; it's just a question of what they will be. For example, most atheists have no problem indoctrinating children in school with multiculturalism, feminism, and environmentalism, which all involve values. Moreover, on what basis do secularists advocate them? If they would cite divine law, it would violate their own church/state separation principle. Yet, if these ideologies are just "man-made," why should we pay them any mind? It's a bit of a catch 22, isn't it?



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In reality, value neutrality is a myth. And we won't determine what values are actually moral by denying the only one who could possibly be a credible author of morality: God. The Founding Fathers understood this, that only God can ordain with credibility. It's why, for example, they emphasized that people's rights are "endowed by their creator."

It's also why they had no problem with religious elements in government. What would have outraged them are the very things most atheists support, today's secular "isms," high taxation and liberty-robbing laws. And given that the founders launched a revolution over King George III's far milder trespasses, what do you think they'd tell us to do with our secular tyrants? I think I know, and they'd wish us Godspeed in our efforts.



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