

Freedom from Religion

The First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution clearly grants American citizens the freedom of religion. However, it has become evident, through careful study of recent events and editorials in the paper, that perhaps our forefathers should have included freedom from religion in the Constitution.

On December 7, 2008, more than 500 people congregated on the steps of the Capitol Building in Olympia, WA to protest against the Atheist sign displayed there. Many banners expressing a different array of religion were present at the rally, including some religious banners, and a couple of anti-religions banners from members of the Revolutionary Communist Party. Many criticized Governor Chris Gregoire for allowing the Atheist sign in the Capitol Building. The protest was peaceful, however, it brought a lot of controversy across the state, and perhaps across the nation.

Furthermore, the Freedom From Religion Foundation (FFRF), the foundation that hung the Atheist sign in Olympia, installed a Winter Solstice sign stating that there are "no gods, no devils, no angels, no heaven or hell...only our natural world...Religion is but a myth and superstition that hardens hearts and enslaves minds." FFRF put up both the Atheist billboard sign and the sign in the Capitol Building in response to the nativity scene that was also displayed in the Capitol Building.

Green Bay, WI, home of FFRF, began their battle of religions before Washington State. The FFRF sued the mayor of Green Bay for permitting a crèche to be placed on top of City Hall. FFRF is also suing President George Bush and Wisconsin Governor Jim Doyle for issuing prayer proclamations. FFRF is also "seeking a declaration that Public Law 100-37, which sets the first Thursday in May as 'National Day of Prayer,' violates the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution," (FFRF).

Annie Laurie Gaylor, who wrote an article on "student-initiated prayers," inserted that "religious coercion is even worse at the hands of another student, subjecting students to peer pressure, pitting students in the majority against students in the minority, treating them as outsiders with school complicity." She believes schools that leave the decision on prayer in schools to the majority vote is teaching students to be "religious bullies" rather than teaching them about the purpose of the Bill of Rights.

In conclusion, it is difficult to separate church from state entirely as the Constitution states because America was founded almost on one belief system—Christianity. AS long as people cannot travel in time, the issue with religion and state will be next to impossible to solve. People become to fanatical and unreasonable when it comes to religious beliefs—or any beliefs for that matter. The best thing to "preach" to the general public is not to change or make laws about freedom from religion, but to keep an open mind to other people's perspectives.

Vocabulary

1. **FFRF:** Freedom from Religion Foundation
2. **Crèche:** A modeled representation or tableau of the nativity scene
3. **SMPA:** South Metropolitan Police Agency
4. **CCTV:** Television
5. **TMPD:** Tokyo Metropolitan Police Department
6. **Dokdo:** Small island off the coast of South Korea
7. **Comfort Women:** Sex slaves during WWII
8. **Halmoni:** Grandmother in Hangul
9. **Yasukuni Shrine:** A memorial site that honors more than two million Japanese who died in WWII, but also includes the remains of more than a dozen convicted war criminals
10. **Human Rights Day:** A day commemorating the United Nations' proclamation of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights
11. **Universal Declaration of Human Rights:** On December 10th, 1948, the General Assembly of the United Nations adopted and proclaimed the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. After this act, the Assembly called upon all members of the United Nations to publicize this declaration and "to cause it to be disseminated, displayed, read and expounded principally in schools and other educational institutions, without distinction based on the political status of countries or territories."