

## The U.S. Military Never has been Non-Religious.

On a Polaris submarine – the first one to be down six months and to travel under the north pole – a dozen of us Protestant/Catholic/Jewish religious leaders sat (in port at Charleston Naval Base) to consider how to train *lay chaplains* for the fleet (clergy chaplains being too few to provide one for each sub). Our four-day sessions (mostly on land), 41 years ago, included “generating the theological basis for a lay program that will meet the needs and interests of the largely young adult military community.” The Navy assumed that the scriptural foundation of “the theological basis” would be, as indeed it was, America’s scriptural foundation, namely, the Bible.

The Bible is the scriptural foundation of the American mind, including the mind of the American military. As the Navy Chief of Chaplains put it to us, “the understanding and use of the scriptures [that is, the Bible] will be a major emphasis in training for the lay ministry.” We twelve were all for the separation of church and state as *institutions*, and against the separation of *religion* and state – against what the American Civil Liberties Union is for (namely, forcing religion into privacy, creating something novel in American history, “the [religiously] naked public square” [as R.J. Neuhaus has long called it]).

1.....Until 1966 – the U.S. Supreme Court’s elimination of teacher-led prayer and devotional Bible-reading from our public schools – America had no official *religion-empty* public spaces. ACLU is our country’s leading push to expand that emptiness. In this light, the present “On Faith” question should be viewed:

“The ACLU has asked the U.S. Naval Academy to end prayers at mandatory meals, and yet all branches of the service employ chaplains. What is the proper role of religion in the military?”

2.....The “mandatory” that ACLU is interested in is the total exclusion of religious practice from the military – indeed, also from all *civil* public space - not just the “prayers at mandatory meals” at the U.S. Naval Academy. ACLU wants a very different America from what America has been. In this respect, ACLU is un-American.

3.....“The proper role of religion in the military” is (1) to provide military personnel with the religion-access they had as civilians, and (2) to honor the religious dimension of the American mind and way of life. Neither can be done perfectly, or without problems.

4.....The American way *establishes* no religion and *privileges* biblical religion. American historian Mark Noll correctly says that the U.S. has “two foundings.”

The 18th century task was to break free of Britain and of the European union of church and state. The Enlightenment and the Bible were tools fit to this task. The 19th century task was to choose an American way of worship, and America overwhelmingly chose evangelical Protestantism. The American mind is a weave of those two foundings, providing our nation with its now deeply threatened particular combination of stability and freedom, unity with diversity.

5.....Largely because of the secularization of our public schools since 1966 (implicitly teaching that religion is optional to the good life), America has been moving from the privileging of biblical religion (Protestant/Catholic/Jewish) through egalitarian pluralism (which teaches the equality of religions) to the privileging of religionlessness. The actional principle is offenselessness: if anybody is offended by anything religious in public, the mood is to drop whatever is causing the offense. Few seem to notice that instead of democracy, this amounts to *the tyranny of a minority*.

6.....The Army and Navy Academies have not yet decided what to do about officer-led religious words in “mandatory” situations. The Air Force Academy went from all to nothing, from one extreme (evangelical Protestant proselytism) to the other (silence) – in my opinion, wrong twice.

7.....Negative silence is the squelching of words. But *positive* silence provides soul-freedom from sounds, individual freedom for inward prayer or meditation or just relaxation. My guess is that the Naval Academy will compromise on “prayers at mandatory meals.” A half-minute of silence before seating would be good discipline for the assemblage, for the inner life, and for the digestion.

## Comments

Please report offensive comments below.

Dear Rev Elliot -

Thanks for the comments.

First, my apologies for my typo wherein I erroneously typed "would" rather than "may," an inexcusable mistake as I had correctly quoted your words via a cut-n-paste only three brief paragraphs earlier in the same post! That said, replacing my erroneous "would" with the correct "may" in the second "act" of the post in question doesn't alter the intent of my statement. To wit:

"I must say that I'm surprised that you float a canard like this: "anyone MAY...have enormous power to defeat long-held practices & customs in which historic social values are embedded." I'd guess that 95% of people reading that MAY immediately think of slavery and women being denied the vote, both "long-held practices & customs in which historic social values are embedded" that were thankfully defeated after centuries of legal "values" allowed such open discrimination."

I believe this is another instance of you splitting hairs. That said, I appreciate the nuance therein and your respect for (and even dependence upon) such nuance to make your points.

I'm a bit surprised that you accuse me of also posting under the moniker of "Freestinker." I have never posted under any moniker but Mr Mark, outside of those occasions where I forget to enter my moniker and end up with an "Anonymous" post. In any case, I always correct that situation by issuing a "that was me" post when that happens.

No, I don't hide behind other names, nor do I use multiple identities as a ruse to support my positions. What fun would that be? Why would I do such a thing when the WaPo could easily expose such a practice and ban me from their site?

Sorry, Quixote, but that particular windmill is entirely in your mind's eye!

As far as the two ACLU cases you mention:

I am in total agreement with their stand on the monstrosity of a cross that sits on public land in San Diego. That thing makes me embarrassed to call myself a Californian and an American. This whole sorry case is a matter of Xians rubbing the noses of every other faith and non-faith in the fact that they can get away with something simply because "it's always been that way," and because San Diego is a hotbed of conservative God's Own Party politics. This type of religious reference and prejudice on public land is EXACTLY what the ACLU should be challenging at every turn!

As far as the Salvation Army case, well, I disagree with the ACLU. After all, they call themselves the "Salvation" army, don't they? I refuse to donate to them for that reason alone. As one of the billions of people in the world who do NOT need saving, I'll pass on their self-aggrandizing religious mission.

I also refuse to donate to the Boy Scouts or the United Way for the same reason. The BSA has protection in law to legally discriminate against atheists and gays. The UW offers a helluva lot of financial assistance to the BSA, thereby endorsing the BSA's discriminatory stance. Ergo, my money goes elsewhere.

In this instance, I think the ACLU is wasting their time. A better alternative would be to direct the "offended" party to a charity that doesn't carry the onus of having a religious mission statement. There are options out there aplenty, so why fight this particular battle?

Gotta go.

RESPONSE TO MR. MARK:

1

You misquoted me. I said, "anybody who feels 'offended' may have enormous power...." (MAY have, could be). You changed this to an obvious impossibility: "...would have enormous power...." (WOULD have, COULD have). To distinguish between possibility & IMpossibility is not hair-splitting.

2

A second time you change my sense to nonsense. The ACLU takes only civil liberties cases, so is uninterested in anybody's being "offended" by anything other than what the offended considers a civil-rights violation. Out of context, you attribute to my sentence a concern for anybody who feels offended by ANYTHING!

3

You say, "The ACLU concerns itself with the CIVIL LIBERTIES of Americans, and that's it." That's it only if one understands that in the ACLU's language, "civil liberties" is an umbrella inclusive of such societal changes as would satisfy the organization's revolutionary goal of ousting religion entirely from the public sphere. July 24 on this chain, "Freestinker" (a cover-name for you?) said, "ACLU stands for" "absolute separation of government and religion." "Religion," not (as in the First Amendment) "church" (a specific religious institution). No debate here about the Founder's "original intent" (leading to my "strict construction"): there's to be no official FEDERAL church parallel with the official churches in some STATES. / To see what a huge umbrella or big tent this ACLU meaning of "civil liberties" is, check out [www.acluvsamerica.com](http://www.acluvsamerica.com). See also the book, "The ACLU vs. America: Exposing the Agenda to Redefine Moral Values."

4

Yes, changing perceptions of human values sometimes conflict with "historic social values." Almost always, when major change occurs, at least one dimension of change is that stronger religious forces overwhelm weaker religious forces. Did you think I have a problem with this? Rather, my problem-complaint is about the ACLU's using individual "offendeds" to spearhead aggressive secularizing pushes.

5

It's not hair-splitting to distinguish between "individual rights" (a POLITICAL agendum) & "individual autonomy" (a PHILOSOPHICAL agendum). To provide historical sanction for the latter, secularists read it back into the former & thus into the mind of America's Founders - an instance of anachronism.

6

You sent me a list of the ACLU's cases. I'll mention only two: (1) The 1989 effort, against the City of San Diego & the majority of local residents, to remove the cross from a war memorial; (2) The 2004 effort to force an evangelical Protestant organization, The Salvation Army, to open employment to applicants unsupportive of the organization's mission-statement.

Dear Rev Elliot -

Thanks for you response. I wish I could be a bit sanguine about some of the hot-button language you employ.  
Ex:

"With ACLU's help, anybody who feels "offended" may have enormous power to defeat long-held practices & customs in which historic social values are embedded."

Really? Anybody? The ACLU concerns itself with the CIVIL LIBERTIES of Americans, and that's it. If a person feels "offended" by something and that something doesn't involve their civil liberties, the ACLU won't get involved with the case.

But let's bring it back to civil liberties. What is wrong with "anybody" and even everybody standing up for their civil liberties as outlined in the Constitution? When does demand for our granted liberties become too much? Are some privileged to bring action to demand their rights while others aren't?

I must say that I'm surprised that you float a canard like this: "anyone would...have enormous power to defeat long-held practices & customs in which historic social values are embedded." I'd guess that 95% of people reading that would immediately think of slavery and women being denied the vote, both "long-held practices & customs in which historic social values are embedded" that were thankfully defeated after centuries of legal "values" allowed such open discrimination.

And, you seem to be engaged in yet more hair splitting. Our Constitutional rights are by their very nature "individual rights." Imagining that the ACLU defending individual rights is bad, or, as you put it, "Individual autonomy has become the sacred center of the Western mind, & ACLU shows a "preference" for this over against the earlier ideal of balancing individual & collective-societal values."

Gee. I thought that's why the Founders allowed for the Constitution to be AMENDED, so it could better reflect changes in "collective-societal values."

Your ox is now being gored, not that of the slave masters, so you find the ACLU to be unAmerican. But it is not the ACLU who has engaged in UnAmerican denial of individual rights. It is - in this case - the military.

Gotta go.

POSTED BY: MR MARK | JULY 30, 2008 5:57 PM  
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

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JYHUME: "free to "express" their belief, though not explicitly "promote"

A thin line indeed. I spent several years on a navy IT project. The Project OIC was a full bird captain. He would hold monthly 'all-hands' meetings requiring the attendance of all on the project; DOD employee/contractor alike. Mostly a pep talk, news of budget issues, meeting/greeting new people, QA time... Very often he would bring up a story about his wife, their church work, and his undeniable love for the baby Jesus. Even when discussing a system crash and the quick recovery time that WE analyzed and repaired, he would say something like 'the lord really helped us get through that one' or something to that effect. I started looking around the room when he would drift into one of these. I know he had no reason to think I was an atheist, since I don't look like one (teehee) but it was interesting that, (did I mention that this was an IT project?) of the all-hands crowd, his crew, a noticable percentage, at least a couple of dozen or more of the 150 of us were from India. Thin line? Did I ever complain or report him to his superiors or the ACLU? Heck no.... I wanted to keep my job... So I just sat there and silently let him ramble /preach / witness, whatever you want to call it, as did my foreign-born co-workers. I wish now that I had the courage, drive and dedication that those protesting midshipmen have shown. I salute them.

POSTED BY: POSSUM | JULY 30, 2008 5:43 PM  
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

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RESPONSE TO MR. MARK:

(This response is substantially as I sent it to you yesterday. But "On Faith" was making some structural changes, so it was lost, so here's my retyping.)

Your most recent comment was on my reference to "ACLU" preference (in pursuit of its individual-liberty) for excluding religion from public places (public schools, etc.)." / Your comment: "If people who object to public displays engage the ACLU, that's not an indication of the ACLU's preference."

1

My membership in ACLU goes back to the 1930s, & I dropped out only when the organization's atmosphere changed to aggressive secular. My father (a NY judge), who (as I said) was one of the founders of ACLU, also regretted this shift & dropped out.

2

A task-oriented organization reveals its mission & "preferences" in the tasks it chooses to engage in. ACLU reveals its preference in the cases it agrees to take & the issues it agrees to take on through these cases.

3

Please note (above) that I'm not (& never have been) critical of ACLU's "individual-liberty mission." "Eternal vigilance is the price of liberty," & everybody (including all organizations-institutions) needs watching. Thank God

for watchdogs, & may they become sufficient in number & courage.

4

In the Bible & generally in human life, human beings & their institutions are responsible not only for the quality of their intentions for also for the effects of their decisions, the consequences of their actions (insofar as these effects & consequences were foreseeable as probable). In single-mindedly fighting for INDIVIDUAL rights, ACLU has the COLLECTIVE effect of empowering more attackers than defenders of the historic American mind & ethos. (This I called "the tyranny of a minority" effect.) Individual autonomy has become the sacred center of the Western mind, & ACLU shows a "preference" for this over against the earlier ideal of balancing individual & collective-societal values. With ACLU's help, anybody who feels "offended" may have enormous power to defeat long-held practices & customs in which historic social values are embedded. The effect - whether or not the intent - is to denude the public square of the historic religious rootage of the American mind. This is the limited sense in which my entry called the ACLU "un-American."

POSTED BY: WILLIS E. ELLIOTT, PANELIST | JULY 30, 2008 5:35 PM  
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

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Actually, I think one Dr. Elliot's attempts at hair-splitting may have actually touched on the heart of the matter; it is the very precarious distinction between "promotion" and "expression" of the personal religious beliefs of those holding public office. I think Dr. Elliot agrees that public officials should be free to "express" their belief, though not explicitly "promote." And I would agree, in principle. But this can become problematic as people redefine "express" to mean something which other people find much closer to "promote." If I "express" my belief that my own religion is superior to all others by speaking and acting in ways that privilege my own beliefs, am I still merely "expressing," or am I "promoting?"

In the case at hand of Evangelicals in the military, when the officer corps requires exposure to Evangelical Christian prayer at mandatory meals and events, are they merely "expressing" their personal preference or are they "promoting" it? In my eyes, it is clearly promotion.

POSTED BY: JYHUME | JULY 30, 2008 4:33 PM  
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

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Ditto. I caught the same thing about the Declaration last night as the wapo system went down. Indeed, no such wording is found in the Constitution. Besides, when read in context, that line in the Declaration seems as much a plea for good luck before the coming storm, as anything else. They were, after all, calling down the thunder of the British Empire.

I honestly have no clue why Dr. Elliot is so hung-up on this ridiculous notion of "in the year of our Lord". To say that the use of a commonly accepted system of dating has important religious connotations is the height of absurdity. For the record, I am not a Christian; but I don't waste my time challenging our society's consensus that we are living in the year 2008 AD. Simply because I accept this date and use it every time I sign my name, that doesn't make me Christian. It makes me practical.

If that's the best evidence in the Constitution for a Christian nation... well, that ain't much.

POSTED BY: JYHUME | JULY 30, 2008 4:11 PM  
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

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Dear Possum -

You are correct in remarking that Rev Elliot has mistakenly referenced the DoI in making a claim about the Constitution.

I was going to point it out, but I was already beating up on him on another front. Respect for elders and all that rot.

Rev Elliot has fled the field for the moment. Perhaps he'll return?

POSTED BY: MR MARK | JULY 30, 2008 4:01 PM  
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

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"in spite of the fact that immediately preceding the signatures is a reference to God as the one on whom these Christians were relying: "with a firm reliance on the protection of Divine Providence, we mutually pledge to each other our lives, our fortunes, and our sacred honor."

You sure that's not the Declaration of independence you're thinking of?

As you said earlier : " From the standpoint of sound scholarship, the point in (sic) not minor"

I certainly see the annotation "In the year of our lord" I just don't attribute anything religious to it any more that the use of the word 'Monday' implies belief in or even respect for Germanic Paganism. This is a HUGE stretch to assign any religious significance to the "Year of our lord" dating method. Like I said before, they had the time, space and ability to add any and all praises to god or shout-outs to Jesus that they wanted. They simply did not. ". . . upbringing and surrounding culture was Christian " So what? So is mine. History will one day reveal that I am the son of a minister, a former church board member, and a one-time applicant to a seminary, but as you can plainly see, that does not mean that what I think, write, or vote for is at all respectful or supportive of Christianity. I did not cast doubt on the founders' Christian zeal, I merely stated that it was moot with regards to the creation of the new nation's government.

POSTED BY: POSSUM | JULY 30, 2008 12:06 PM  
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

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Dear Willis Elliott

Since you reply to comments, which indicates that read the comments, I thought you might be my best bet here.

The website is in major dysfunction. When I click on "all the panelists" I get only a list of "titles" with no pictures and no names, so I have to guess in trial and error to get the panelist I am interested in, and then, all that appears are the history of archives, and not the current topic.

Do you think you could let the WaPo people know about this so they could fix it?

POSTED BY: ANONYMOUS | JULY 30, 2008 11:25 AM  
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

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Response to POSSUM:

Besides failing to note that the Constitution includes "in the year of our Lord," you claim that the document is only secular in its wording - in spite of the fact that immediately preceding the signatures is a reference to God as the one on whom these Christians were relying: "with a firm reliance on the protection of Divine Providence, we mutually pledge to each other our lives, our fortunes, and our sacred honor."

Further, you question whether they were all really Christian. My reference was not to the extent or quality of their Christian commitment but only to the fact that their upbringing and surrounding culture was Christian rather than that of any other religion or no religion.

POSTED BY: WILLIS E. ELLIOTT, PANELIST | JULY 29, 2008 1:04 PM  
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

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Rev Elliot writes:

". But Mr. Mark was attacking my entry for something I hadn't mentioned, & not commenting on what I had mentioned - namely, ACLU's preference (in pursuit of its individual-liberty mission) for excluding religion from public places (public schools, etc.)."

Boy, this is frustrating.



I provided a partial list of actions the ACLU has taken to SUPPORT religious practices in PUBLIC PLACES. I DISAGREE that the ACLU has a "preference" for "excluding religion from public places."

Now, it may well be that the ACLU ends up representing more people who have a problem with some religious display in a public space, but that only speaks to the people who seek their assistance and what they are objecting to. It has NOTHING to do with any "preference" of the ACLU. If more people who object to religious displays engage the ACLU, that's not an indication of the ACLU's preferences.

I am a member of the ACLU. I do not always agree with the cases they champion, but the one thing that I can be sure of is that they take their cases on the MERITS and not on any bias, real or imagined.

Now, Rev Elliot, would you care to respond to my post of a few days ago that puts the lie to your basic premise about the ACLU? Believe me, I'm just as stubborn as you, I'm younger and I'm in great physical shape. We could be at this until hell freezes and I still have the better chance of winning the argument! ;)

Thanks.

POSTED BY: MR MARK | JULY 29, 2008 12:56 PM  
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

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"As for "in the year of our Lord" after the Constitution's signatures, I said that the phrase showed the signers were (in some sense, each) Christians"

The phrase immediately preceding the signatures is not "in the year of our lord", it is in fact: "In Witness whereof We have hereunto subscribed our Names" Meaning only that they were witnesses to a ratification/signing NOT that they were Christians.

Yours is just another David Barton-esque leap of logic and bending of history. The FF's had ample opportunity to establish a christian nation, they had every opportunity to lift up Jesus' name, or to praise God and his creation.. but they did not; in the constitution or the bill of rights. Regardless of personal opinions and personal writings of the founders, or the wording of the Mayflower Compact, or any other non-ratified U.S. document, to set the foundation, and lay the framework for the U.S.GOVERNMENT they debated and chose to leave the government religion neutral. This says nothing, absolutely nothing about the hearts and minds of the FF's or the population at large. That was left entirely to their own preference, devoid of interference or discrimination by the government. I belong to a social club. The club has bylaws and rules and ceremonies and celebrations. Looking around in one of our rare meetings or just a check of surnames and you will find European-Americans, Irish, British, Polish, etc. I have no doubt that most if not all of the members would fall into the 'christian' category. (I can't say for sure since I haven't asked) I'm pretty sure many of the members are devout and lifelong Christians.

The fact that the members are of Christian stock, could lead one to make the claim that we are a Christian organization. I assure you, and you can check the bylaws and rules, we are a secular organization. Our soul purpose is to get together twice a year for a good meal and to drink, and extol the virtues of good beer. There is no charity work, no fundraising for good deeds, there is no prayer or sacred ritual. We meet, eat, and chat about and drink beer. (we are employees/former employees of a brewery)

Whether or not the founding fathers were or were not Christian is debatable, since we do not know their hearts. It is also beside the point. The constitution they ratified, the foundation, framework, and definition of the U.S. government, like the bylaws of the club I belong to are, by design, completely secular.

Just because a Christian does a secular thing certainly does not mean that secular thing is now a Christian thing.

POSTED BY: POSSUM | JULY 29, 2008 12:34 PM  
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

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Eh, JY. Language gets that thin, you know someone's trying to justify something. Why, is the question.

POSTED BY: PAGANPLACE | JULY 28, 2008 10:13 PM  
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

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## RESPONSES TO SOME COMMENTERS:

JYHUME:

No, I'm not saying our government was "founded as a Christian body." I said it was founded by Christians (of various types; & that the "options" for a federal establishment of religion were Christian institutions (or denominations) - e.g.,

Episcopal-Anglican in VA & Congregational in MA. / In U.Hawaii I taught the worlds "religions," & not one of them in an "institution" (organization). / The Constitution is, rightly, not about "We the Church" but about "We the people." It is secular in that it defines the legal structure of a state, not of a church: we believe in the "separation" of "state" institutions from "church" institutions.

The signatories were Christians determined to avoid the Old World's unions of church & state, but their signatures appeared after the words "in the year of our Lord" ("our" being added to the Latin A.D. ("the Lord," not "a lord" - though Latin has neither "a" nor "the"). / Your last paragraph does not distinguish between "promote" & "express." A government job is to "promote the general welfare," not one's personal religion. But Obama has it right: all Americans, whatever their job, should be free to express their personal convictions when explaining to the public their actions/intensions/proposals.

PAGAN PLACE:

You say "The Mayflower Compact is not a founding document of the United States of America." It is in social historians' lists, not in political historians' lists.

POSTED BY: WILLIS E. ELLIOTT, PANELIST | JULY 28, 2008 9:37 PM  
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

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Dr. Elliot,

Could you please clarify your statement:

"To say that [the First Amendment is] against "establishing a religion" is nonsense: "establish" referred to institutions, & no religion is an institution. Many of the colonies had an "established" particular church (or denomination): the First Amendment's first clause blocks the federal government from choosing any one denomination (the options then being the various Christian churches) as the official church of the U.S.A."

You say that "establish" is in reference only to institutions, and by "institution" you apparently mean "denomination" of Christianity, since those were "the options" available at that time. The implication you seem to make is that our government was founded as a Christian body, but barred only from "establishing" particular denominations. Is that a fair reading of your statement?

Two things: first, you state that "no religion is an institution." How is it that "no religion" can be considered a denomination of Christianity, thus barred from establishment? Maybe I misread that part.

Second, this Christian (non-denominational) Nation thesis ignores the historical record that counters this claim. The Constitution has always been, and remains, a deeply secular document. It's powers are derived from "We the People," not god or Jesus Christ. Explicit attempts to alter this were rejected at the constitutional convention, such as William Williams' proposed preamble (deriving power from "the one living and true God, the creator and supreme Governour of the world, in his universal providence and the authority of his laws; that he will require of all moral agents an account of their conduct; that all rightful powers among men are ordained of , and mediately derived from God..."). Our government's powers are not just non-denominational, they are plainly secular.

Also, the Constitution pursues very secular goals: "to form a more perfect union, establish justice, insure domestic tranquility, provide for the common defense, promote the general welfare, and secure the blessings of liberty to ourselves and our posterity." I have yet to find the passage describing our government's goal of glorifying God and our savior Jesus Christ, not even in a "non-denominational" sense. It's just not there.

The question that I think you are ignoring is: What positions should agents of our government be taking, in the official capacity of the office they hold? Many of us feel that the promotion of any sort of religious belief is not in the job description for those who hold secular offices. What they do on their own time, however, is their own business.



POSTED BY: JYHUME | JULY 28, 2008 8:43 PM  
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

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"Most of our founding documents, beginning with the Mayflower Compact (1620), privilege biblical religion. "

The Mayflower Compact is not a founding document of the United States of America. Note the date.

It has more in common with Cromwell than Continental Congress. You'd be better off looking for roots in the Iroquois Confederacy, who, it may be noted, weren't Christian at all.

POSTED BY: PAGANPLACE | JULY 28, 2008 6:05 PM  
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

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"But scholars have noted that "A.D." does not mean "in the year of OUR Lord": it means only "in the year of the Lord.""

Or 'A Lord.' Latin has no particles.

POSTED BY: PAGANPLACE | JULY 28, 2008 5:59 PM  
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

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Right now, Free? Yes, in fact, by backing off.

'Reasonable Accommodation' is a very good policy, in principle. Some have just abused it of late, though. Maybe there's always been that risk, but, hey, the price of freedom is eternal vigilance. I can live with that.

I think that in a climate of real civility and equality, there can be a little more wriggle-room, \*but not before.\* Wars always seem to bring civil rights issues to the fore, cause there's no way they can wait. So be it.

In civilian life, racists and sexists and religious bigots can sequester themselves from ever having to see as a human the people they despise. The military has \*always,\* of necessity, had to be the first to see the reality of our mutual humanity, and honor it.

It should not be trying to reinforce the bigotries, just cause it's been infiltrated by Fundie agendas. Those types \*want\* to cast it in terms of 'Domination For Evangelicals, Or They'll Be Burning Bibles, Next.'

That's not how it is.

People just need the time to figure it out.

POSTED BY: PAGANPLACE | JULY 28, 2008 5:54 PM  
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

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More responses to mainly commenters:

1

I am refreshed & enlightened by the high level of intelligence & human concern in many recent comments on my current entry.

2

I apologize to "Mr. Mark" for my failure to read him closely (a failure I rightly accused him of!). On July 24, he defended ACLU as defending "Christians and their rights to practice their religion...in this country." I responded that I'd not mentioned any particular religion, or the rights of any people to practice their religion in America ("this country"). My father, a N.Y. judge, was one of ACLU's founders; & I've always been for the defence of individual rights. But Mr. Mark was attacking my entry for something I hadn't mentioned, & not commenting on what I had mentioned - namely, ACLU's preference (in pursuit of its individual-liberty mission) for excluding religion from public places (public schools, etc.).

3

Many commenters are unclear or wrong on what the First Amendment has to say about religion. To say that it's against "establishing a religion" is nonsense: "establish" referred to institutions, & no religion is an institution. Many of the colonies had an "established" particular church (or denomination): the First Amendment's first clause blocks the federal government from choosing any one denomination (the options then being the various Christian churches) as the official church of the U.S.A. The second clause blocks the federal government from impeding the "free exercise" of religion. The Amendment says nothing about religion's freedom to influence government, or government's freedom to support religion and use religious language in support of (i.e., as sanction for) government.

4

The Constitution, a legal document with no need of religious reference, was considered inadequate, & in need of Amendments, including religious references. Now, we use "the Constitution" to include the Amendments - so it is untrue to say "the Constitution" doesn't mention religion. As for "in the year of our Lord" after the Constitution's signatures, I said that the phrase showed the signers were (in some sense, each) Christians: I did not say that the phrase shows "Christian endorsement." But scholars have noted that "A.D." does not mean "in the year of OUR Lord": it means only "in the year of the Lord."

From the standpoint of sound scholarship, the point is not minor.

5

I agree with Jefferson that in federal action, there should be no "legal ascendancy of one sect over another." (By "sect" he meant organized religion.) But our government's occasional NONlegal recognition of Christianity as our founding religion has been normal practice throughout our history - a practice now challenged (1) by forces interested in repressing knowledge of the religion factor in America's founding, & (2) by the egalitarian doctrine that no religion should be privileged (even by historical reference) over any other.

6

A commenter's claim that "our founding documents" do not privilege-by-recognition any religion over any other is false. Most of our founding documents, beginning with the Mayflower Compact (1620), privilege biblical religion. I said this was & is "the American way" of life - though of course no religion is, or should be, privileged in American LAW.

7

Of course the present American mind is not "homogeneous." The founding American mind had diversity, but its scriptural base (as I said) was the Bible.

8

A "religious public square" need not violate our separation of church & state. In a park near my residence is a stone slab engraved with the Ten Commandments. The separation of church & state derives partly from some of the values in this proclamation in the Bible, America's scriptural foundation. I consider un-American the pressures to remove such a symbol of America's spiritual foundation: pressures we now call "naked public square." As it is, our children are already too ignorant of America's founding mind.

9

No tyranny, please of either the majority or any minority! The majority gives stability, minorities give freedom & diversity. The art of politics includes balancing these interests.

10

This I consider untrue: "Getting religion out of the public schools and the military strengthens religion." But yes to this: The separation of church & state has strengthened religion in American history.

11

Another needed balance: between mandatory & voluntary.

12

Again, thank you for your thoughtful comments.

POSTED BY: WILLIS E. ELLIOTT, PANELIST | JULY 28, 2008 5:50 PM  
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

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Paganplace,

Once the government opens it's mouth at all on the subject, whatever they say, some people will be left out. So government silence IS real respect for everyone's religious liberty (and by extension, religious diversity). How else can government show real respect? Seriously?

POSTED BY: FREESTINKER | JULY 28, 2008 5:42 PM  
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

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"Is there a better way to respect everyone's religious liberty than having the government remain absolutely silent on matters of religious opinion?"

Yes. Real respect for diversity. Mutual giving and sharing and comradeship.

But apparently some ain't ready for that.

Silence will do for now.

POSTED BY: PAGANPLACE | JULY 28, 2008 5:33 PM  
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

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Paganplace,

Please note that I differentiate between absolute government silence and a mandatory moment of silence, which is practically the same as a mandatory prayer.

Is there a better way to respect everyone's religious liberty than having the government remain absolutely silent on matters of religious opinion?

POSTED BY: FREESTINKER | JULY 28, 2008 5:25 PM  
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

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And on this, Freestinker, if I can articulate maybe a more moderate position on the practicalities:

"Absolute Government silence on matters of religious opinion is the only way to ensure complete neutrality."

I don't think it's the *\*only\** way, just our best idea whenever there's the slightest doubt right now. Things are just that polarized, and, frankly, the Evangelicals have been abusing reasonable accomodation for some time, now, then claiming to be 'oppressed' when someone wants to curb that over-stepping.

I think *\*policy\** needs to be absolutely fair.

But right *\*now\** a lot of Christians have got it in their heads that *\*not\** kneeling at their command is somehow oppressing them. You see it when they come door-to-door. They think they have a 'religious right' to convert everyone, and not-complying with their demands constitutes 'oppression' even if they're standing on your doorstep and insulting you.

This kind of thing needs some cooling off.

Maybe especially in the contained environment of military units, we ought to *\*have\** some official silence, or affirmation of diversity, and let our troops really *\*meet\** each other again. As Americans. Not in a context where some extremists want to conflate Conservative Christianity with being 'real' Americans at all.

Cause let me tell you, no one holds our freedoms more dear than those who haven't quite gotten to take em for granted.

POSTED BY: PAGANPLACE | JULY 28, 2008 5:04 PM  
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

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Silence is a good place to *\*start\** after the words got all messed up, I find. What folks like Rev. Eliott always forget is that, contrary to certain notions of a necessity to *\*impose\** religion and *\*demand\** conformity, (or else be a 'party-poopers,') is that when people start from a point of neutrality and equality, we usually find a way to get along.

Whereas if you set some above others, you get not only injustices, and divisions, but atrocities.

People in military units have \*every\* interest in getting along. They depend on each other for their very lives, and dividing the troops among themselves for an Evangelical agenda not only is actively oppressive and dangerous, ....it gives our fighting people really short credit for being able to work things out.

In an environment where everyone's secure and equal, it's much easier to say a friendly 'Yeah, go ahead, Padre,' than it is when that same priest comes in and demands special authority or privilege over you.

POSTED BY: PAGANPLACE | JULY 28, 2008 4:48 PM  
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

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6.....The Army and Navy Academies have not yet decided what to do about officer-led religious words in "mandatory" situations. The Air Force Academy went from all to nothing, from one extreme (evangelical Protestant proselytism) to the other (silence) – in my opinion, wrong twice.

Mr. Elliott,

Absolute Government silence on matters of religious opinion is the only way to ensure complete neutrality. A mandatory moment of silence is not necessary, absolute silence is. This way everyone who wants to pray before meals can do so freely without disturbing or coercing others. It's a really simple and fair solution that equally respects everyone's religious liberty.

POSTED BY: FREESTINKER | JULY 28, 2008 4:28 PM  
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

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And, by the way, were I over there 'fighting for our freedom,' the \*last\* fricking thing I'd need is some Fundie Chaplain trying to convince the majority religion that 'The American Mind' doesn't necessarily feel those freedoms have to apply to me.

POSTED BY: PAGANPLACE | JULY 28, 2008 4:27 PM  
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

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Rev. Elliott:

"2

An "official religion-empty public space" is any public space (school, park, government property, government assemblage, military gathering, etc.) where religion is forbidden. ACLU wants religion forbidden in ALL public spaces (not just, as now, public schools). Do you agree with ACLU here? I said I don't."

I think where you and many Evangelicals are confused is that there's a difference between 'abolishing' your religion and \*not mandating it.\*

The public space is meant to be \*religion-neutral,\* not promoting \*yours\* and calling it 'abolishing religion' if the government doesn't provide a microphone to try and demand the obedience or marginalization of others.

You cry 'Oppression' when the government won't put \*orders graven in stone to \*command\* worship of your God and only your God\* between the common people and the justice system, yet you can't see that just maybe dividing comrades against each other over a nice meal, the price of which is to pray for the Fundies or single yourself out for discrimination.... Probably isn't what the military ought to be doing?

Or, for that matter, representing your religion well?

POSTED BY: PAGANPLACE | JULY 28, 2008 4:21 PM  
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

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"The Bible is the scriptural foundation of the American mind, including the mind of the American military"  
This is a false premise. As pointed out earlier America, and it's Military are not a singular consciousness. A 'majority' belief system certainly, but the founding of this nation in 1776, when the Constitution was agreed upon and ratified spelled out that this country was in and of itself of the people, for the people, and by the people; ALL the people, not just the majority. Mentions and sanctions of specific religions and deities were debated and deliberately left out of the constitution. The constitution is a secular document, just like laws and ordinances relating to speeding, theft and arson. There is no mention of a god because this is a document that outlines the rules for the United States of America, not God's kingdom.

I laughed when I read your comments that included the mention of "Year of our Lord". I am shocked that a man of your purported intelligence doesn't see the absolute silliness of your claim that this benign, common annotation is somehow proof of Christian endorsement. After all, other included words like Sunday, July, March, and January, also pay religious homage to gods, just not yours.

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POSTED BY: POSSUM | JULY 28, 2008 2:24 PM  
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

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Dr. Elliot, I commend you for reading and responding to these entries. The last statement of your post makes the most sense to me:

"A half-minute of silence before seating would be good discipline for the assemblage, for the inner life, and for the digestion."

If this is all that you are advocating, I suspect you would find very few objections.

However, some of your responses here are making it difficult for me to take you seriously. Particularly, you seem to be talking yourself in circles in order not to address Mr Mark's point about the ACLU.

Your words: "'official religion-empty public space' is any public space (school, park, government property, government assemblage, military gathering, etc.) where religion is forbidden. ACLU wants religion forbidden in ALL public spaces (not just, as now, public schools)."

Yet Mr Mark is citing numerous cases of the ACLU supporting the expression of religious belief in these very same "public spaces." How does this not undercut your assertions about the ACLU?

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POSTED BY: JYHUME | JULY 28, 2008 11:43 AM  
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

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RHINEHAJ - You've made an excellent point in your post that is completely overlooked and/or ignored by Christians everywhere. If we accept that the person called Jesus of Nazareth lived, then he was indeed a messenger rather than the message.

The fact that Alan Watts was well grounded in Eastern religions and Zen in particular was no doubt the basis for his admonition to resist taking the finger pointing the way for the final goal. As the Buddha said, when the other shore is reached, one has no further need of a boat.

The practice of religion is not the final goal, and messengers of Truth are no more or less divine than their followers.

Christians everywhere follow the obverse belief - that Jesus the person was the message, in the form of a divine avatar & savior. As a consequence, people disbelieve in their own ability and their own obligation to find salvation individually. Searching through the vast historical morass of religion in order to find the nuggets of real truth contained therein is hard, tedious and often lonely work. Finding the true path for each seeker of truth is the first step.

When religion becomes a social phenomenon, as is the present case, the original intent of religion is lost in the process of reifying myth and ritual as literal phenomenological/historical fact, rather than allegorical symbology in need of deeper interpretation. Instead, religion is lost in it's own cultural matrix.

In short, this explicates the vast gulf between 'exoteric' and 'esoteric' presentations of various religious faiths.

The religion of the many (based on faith) in contrast to the religious practice of the few (based on real knowledge of the divine). One wonders if the twain shall ever meet.....

POSTED BY: PERSPECTIVE | JULY 28, 2008 9:15 AM  
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

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Armies throughout history used religion to con dying soldiers into believing that they will pass into the glorious afterlife, e.g. the Vikings, the Romans, the Crusaders, and the Jihadists.

POSTED BY: WISED UP | JULY 28, 2008 1:43 AM  
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

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<http://www.OneNewsNow.com>

for an in depth look at what the Kenneth Copland ministry is doing to America.

only religions own real estate including gas and oil wells. Nice to see a republican senator going after them.

POSTED BY: ANONYMOUS | JULY 27, 2008 2:44 PM  
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

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"The American way establishes no religion and privileges biblical religion."

If that's true -- and I challenge the writer to cite this principle from any of our founding documents -- it is very, very wrongheaded. No religion should be "privileged" in our society. And I speak here as a lifelong Christian.

POSTED BY: LOCO\_MOCO | JULY 27, 2008 1:28 PM  
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

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Willis E. Elliott wrote: "The Navy assumed that the scriptural foundation of "the theological basis" would be, as indeed it was, America's scriptural foundation, namely, the Bible."

I think you misunderstand the chaplain service. The service is to provide religious comfort wherever service men and women are. It is NOT at all a service to define the morality of the navy. All you have to do is see how muslim chaplains are now in the chaplain service to see it is there to meet individual needs, not high level military policy.

Willis E. Elliott wrote: "The Bible is the scriptural foundation of the American mind, including the mind of the American military."

You seem to think the American mind is homogenous. It is not.

Willis E. Elliott wrote: "As the Navy Chief of Chaplains put it to us, "the understanding and use of the scriptures [that is, the Bible] will be a major emphasis in training for the lay ministry."

Again, I think you misunderstand the chaplain service.

Willis E. Elliott wrote: "We twelve were all for the separation of church and state as institutions, and against the separation of religion and state -- against what the American Civil Liberties Union is for (namely, forcing religion into privacy, creating something novel in American history, "the [religiously] naked public square" [as R.J. Neuhaus has long called it])."



This is a completely conflicting statement. How can you be for separation of church/state yet admonish the ACLU for advocating a non-religious public square? Once you have a religious public square, church and state are no longer separate.

Willis E. Elliott wrote: ""The ACLU has asked the U.S. Naval Academy to end prayers at mandatory meals, and yet all branches of the service employ chaplains. What is the proper role of religion in the military?"

You cannot seem to differentiate between a mandatory prayer session and the voluntary visit to the chaplain. The two are very different since one is compulsory and the other is voluntary.

Willis E. Elliott wrote: "2.....The "mandatory" that ACLU is interested in is the total exclusion of religious practice from the military – indeed, also from all civil public space - not just the "prayers at mandatory meals" at the U.S. Naval Academy. ACLU wants a very different America from what America has been. In this respect, ACLU is un-American."

As other posters have noted, the ACLU has fought FOR the religious freedom to practice religion. But the state cannot establish a religion or favor one. Mandatory lead prayers are a very different thing from voluntary visits to the chaplain, which the ACLU is not trying to eliminate, or are you saying the ACLU is fighting to remove all chaplains from the military? I doubt it since the military balances the religions and makes visiting a chaplain voluntary.

Willis E. Elliott wrote: "3....."The proper role of religion in the military" is (1) to provide military personnel with the religion-access they had as civilians, and (2) to honor the religious dimension of the American mind and way of life. Neither can be done perfectly, or without problems."

Agreed, so it needs to be monitored for moving from voluntary religious practice to mandatory religious practice. Do you agree having a mandatory prayer at a meal is a mandatory religious practice, not a voluntary one?

Willis E. Elliott wrote: "4.....The American way establishes no religion and privileges biblical religion. American historian Mark Noll correctly says that the U.S. has "two foundings."  
The 18th century task was to break free of Britain and of the European union of church and state. The Enlightenment and the Bible were tools fit to this task. The 19th century task was to choose an American way of worship, and America overwhelmingly chose evangelical Protestantism. The American mind is a weave of those two foundings, providing our nation with its now deeply threatened particular combination of stability and freedom, unity with diversity."

You seem to think the separation of church and state is voluntary. It is not. I agree much of American law has a religious basis, but that is not the establishment of religion anymore than murder in Saudi Arabia is established by the Koran and thus an establish of Islam. America's choice of religion may mean there are more Protestant churches, but it should have nothing to do with what our government establishes, because government cannot establish any religion.

Willis E. Elliott wrote: "5.....Largely because of the secularization of our public schools since 1966 (implicitly teaching that religion is optional to the good life), America has been moving from the privileging of biblical religion (Protestant/Catholic/Jewish) through egalitarian pluralism (which teaches the equality of religions) to the privileging of religionlessness."

Wow, I guess you don't mind public schools teaching your religion. Would you also not mind if your public school teacher, say one from Pakistan, taught Koranic morality? You would probably argue that America "chose" Protestant morality, but you forget the government cannot choose any religion.

Willis E. Elliott wrote: "The actional principle is offenselessness: if anybody is offended by anything religious in public, the mood is to drop whatever is causing the offense. Few seem to notice that instead of democracy, this amounts to the tyranny of a minority."

No, the tyranny is of a majority religion forcing it into the public square. America, through its Constitution, decided not to allow government to establish religion nor prevent the free expression of religion. When government tells you that you cannot build a church or religious school, then we can talk about tyranny. To help

you in future considerations of this topic, just replace Islam with Protestant and maybe you will see how establishing religion through government is not what you want.

Willis E. Elliott wrote: "6.....The Army and Navy Academies have not yet decided what to do about officer-led religious words in "mandatory" situations. The Air Force Academy went from all to nothing, from one extreme (evangelical Protestant proselytism) to the other (silence) – in my opinion, wrong twice."

Why is the second wrong? Again, what if the words were Islamic? You see, the Constitution was not written for the majority, it was written for the individual. YOU have a right not to have government force you to sit through a mandatory prayer, whether it be Protestant or Islamic. If you cannot understand that then you are not a very good American. Read your Constitution!

Willis E. Elliott wrote: "7.....Negative silence is the squelching of words. But positive silence provides soul-freedom from sounds, individual freedom for inward prayer or meditation or just relaxation. My guess is that the Naval Academy will compromise on "prayers at mandatory meals." A half-minute of silence before seating would be good discipline for the assemblage, for the inner life, and for the digestion."

On this we agree. Your main problem as I read your article is that you ignore the tyranny of the majority AND you ignore the Constitution. I suggest you study both to become a better American. This principle is truly what makes Americans the most religious people on earth, the most free, and all without the government making anything religious mandatory, except its FREE practice by those who wish without any government mandatory expression of religion. You could say getting religion out of public schools and the military strengthens religion. Would you agree? If not one has to wonder why religion has grown in popularity in America since 1966.

POSTED BY: FATE | JULY 27, 2008 10:19 AM  
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

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OoooooppssaaaDAiSY; Wrong Blog; Meant For CHUCKy boy & Jealousicals!

POSTED BY: ANONYMOUS | JULY 27, 2008 7:10 AM  
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

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Dear Rev Elliot -

Thanks for responding.

You wrote:

"An "official religion-empty public space" is any public space (school, park, government property, government assemblage, military gathering, etc.) where religion is forbidden. ACLU wants religion forbidden in ALL public spaces (not just, as now, public schools). Do you agree with ACLU here? I said I don't."

Here's where I get confused.

If you read my post of JULY 24, 2008 1:54 PM, you'll find a list of actions that the ACLU has joined to permit religion to be present in public spaces. To wit:

ACLU Defends Right of Individual Christian to Display Nativity Scene on Public Property

ACLU Fights for Christmas Tree

ACLU of New Jersey Joins Lawsuit Supporting Second-Grader's Right to Sing "Awesome God" at Talent Show

ACLU of WA Wins Right of Christian Minister to Preach in Spokane Plaza

ACLU Defends Rights of Christian Group to Make Religious Protest at Funerals

ACLU Defends Christian Street Preacher in Las Vegas

ACLU Defends Church's Right to Run "Anti-Santa" Ads in Boston Subways

Following Threat of ACLU of Virginia Lawsuit, Officials to Agree Not to Ban Baptisms in Public Parks

ACLU Defends Families Fighting Removal Of Religious Symbols from Florida Cemetery

ACLU Supports Right of Iowa Students to Distribute Christian Literature at School

ACLU Argument In Support of the Display of a Christian Cross in a Public Forum

ACLU Defends Free Speech Rights of Christians And Others On Main Street Plaza

ACLU Defends Christian Group's Anti-Abortion Ads On Phoenix Buses

ACLU Offers To Represent Private Prayer on Public Property

How do any of these actions comport with your claim that, "ACLU wants religion forbidden in ALL public spaces (not just, as now, public schools)?"

POSTED BY: MR MARK | JULY 26, 2008 11:42 PM  
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

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Response to Mr. Mark:

Thank you for struggling to understand my entries.

I speak precisely, but often not simply. I'll try to speak more plainly while not reducing precision.

We're both "confused." I'm confused as to what you're asking in your latest post. You quote four of my statements: are you asking me to explain them? Your reading my responses to other commenters on my present entry might help. My numerals here correspond to what you quote from me.

1

I don't see how I can make this statement clearer.

2

An "official religion-empty public space" is any public space (school, park, government property, government assemblage, military gathering, etc.) where religion is forbidden. ACLU wants religion forbidden in ALL public spaces (not just, as now, public schools). Do you agree with ACLU here? I said I don't.

3

ACLU wants "the total exclusion of religious practice" from military & civil assemblages (in the Neuhaus phrase I used, ACLU wants a religiously "naked public square"). Do you agree with ACLU here? I said I don't.

4

I said "The American way establishes no religion and privileges biblical religion." Again, I can't see how to make this clearer - but I can explain it in detail, & have done so in replying to some other commenters on my present entry.

Again, thanks for trying to sweat me out! God bless you.

POSTED BY: WILLIS E. ELLIOTT, PANELIST | JULY 26, 2008 11:00 PM  
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

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I agree with lepidopteryx.

I have never understood why people who want to pray need to have someone else say the words for them. Nobody is forbidding them to do it, not even in public. We just don't want to be forced to participate if we don't believe. When I'm in an assemblage that is praying, I feel as though my own participation would be hypocrisy, since prayer doesn't hold any great value for me. So, then in my effort to avoid feeling hypocritical, I feel like my

pointed non-participation is making more of a deal than I want to make, too. I don't want to NOT participate -- I don't want to be put in a position where I feel compelled to put my beliefs on display.

But you know, I think this whole thing would bother people a lot less if there were a broader range of military chaplains (Catholic, Protestant, Jewish, Muslim) and at least rotated the grace among them, also having nights with silence or nothing at all. At least that way, everyone would be making room for the others.

But Christians need to understand that there are multiple faiths in this country, including those with faith in humankind or mother nature, all of these faiths believed in with equal sincerity. What galls many among us is that just because there are more self-defined Christians among us, they think their religion is superior.

This is the military of the United States of America, it is not the military of a particular religion. And every person in the military owes allegiance to the United States of America with its Constitution. They are not soldiers of some god.

POSTED BY: LXP19 | JULY 26, 2008 10:43 PM  
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

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"The Bible is the scriptural foundation of the American mind"

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I substitute "moral" for "scriptural" & ethos" for "mind". As a primarily European group, early immigrants were indeed basing their morals on the Bible, or said so. I say this because I could give a fairly long lecture on how many principles in the bible we do NOT use as our ethos, such as murdering one's son for leaving his father's faith. People pick only those parts of the bible they WANT to use.

As for historical worship, I think you need to keep in mind that America is different & changing & will keep changing. Looking fondly back on a 19th century in which we were moving away from a European focus while at the same time decrying continuing change is a contradiction. If our country is indeed moving away from a moral foundation, we are in big trouble, but if we're moving away from a moralistic, self-righteous bigotry, we will become a better people for it.

For instance, on your 5th point, I agree that if public life is totally offenseless, we would indeed be pandering to minorities.

Which leads me to ask, what is "offense"? If I am a devout believer in Jesus as God's only Son, it would be like fingernails on a blackboard to hear someone else say Jesus was just a human teacher, but that doesn't mean I KNOW what Jesus was, it's my desire to BELIEVE he was more than that (that's why it is called "belief" and not "fact"). So, how far should society go in pandering to my wants? Until it offends society. And I think that's what's happened with the mandatory prayer.

Which is why I believe we should teach basic moral principals in school, but NOT any organized religion. Society has to have basic agreement on behaviors. "Thou shall not commit murder" is quite a good principle for any society to have, it doesn't matter where it came from. It offends me very much if someone tries to kill me. So we need to agree on what the most important "offenses" are, and teach those.

I like what Alan Watts said in the 60's and 70's. Watts said religion is supposed to be "a finger pointing the way". The finger is not the way, it is a guide, we make a mistake when we try to worship the finger.

Figure out where Jesus wanted people to go, & stop focusing on Jesus. He was the messenger, not the message.

POSTED BY: RHINEHAJ | JULY 26, 2008 10:39 PM  
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

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Ghalib:  
"What a simpleton !"

\*sigh\* No, I'm a simpleton. I can't formulate an intelligent question, let alone retort to anything this gentleman Willis E. Elliott has written.

Eye opening! I shamefully admit.

But I can talk to the likes of you, Ghilab.

A modicum of respect would benefit you.

But.. theres always reading for my problem and a miracle for yours.

Ok, one comment then. My brother was in subs. Henry L. Stimson, 655. 1976 or so.

God bless you, sir.

POSTED BY: ZEROKNOTS | JULY 26, 2008 10:26 PM

[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

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Response to John the Skeptic:

Ineptly, you identify my "American way" with the U.S. Constitution, which rightly speaks narrowly of the American way of LAW (not broadly, of LIFE).

Scholars studying the original "American way of life" consult ALL of America's founding documents, beginning with the Mayflower Compact (1620). Most of these documents "privilege biblical religion" in the sense of referencing it & no other religion. (In these documents, "God" never means any other than the Bible's God.)

Further, the signers of the Constitution were Christians (with various admixtures of Enlightenment thinking). And the Constitution ends with a reference to Jesus: "in the year of our Lord...." (written out, not abbreviated "A.D." [Anno Domini, the "Dominus" of the Latin phrase being Jesus]).

POSTED BY: WILLIS E. ELLIOTT, PANELIST | JULY 26, 2008 9:47 PM

[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

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Dear Rev Elliot -

OK, I'm confused.

You write:

"The Bible is the scriptural foundation of the American mind, including the mind of the American military."

You then go on to make the following statements:

"Until 1966 – the U.S. Supreme Court's elimination of teacher-led prayer and devotional Bible-reading from our public schools – America had no official religion-empty public spaces. ACLU is our country's leading push to expand that emptiness."

"The "mandatory" that ACLU is interested in is the total exclusion of religious practice from the military – indeed, also from all civil public space - not just the "prayers at mandatory meals" at the U.S. Naval Academy. ACLU wants a very different America from what America has been. In this respect, ACLU is un-American."

You then make this statement:

"The American way establishes no religion and privileges biblical religion"

I really don't see how I'm misreading you here. I admit that I find your writing style confusing to follow, but I really do try to decipher your thoughts. Indeed, I don't post comments to your columns very often because I usually can't make sense of them. When I do post - as in this instance - I read your columns at least twice (and SLOWLY!) to better understand what you're saying.

Obviously, I'm either not able to understand your points, or your writing style needs work...or maybe, both.

Response to Bgone:

Thanks for your good questions:

1

"The word 'created' wasn't created at the time the Bible was written was it?" Yes, about the time the English Bibles began to appear - 16th century. The authority on such questions is The Oxford Universal Dictionary on Historical Principles, which relates "create" first to God and gives Genesis 1:1 ("In the beginning, God created heaven and earth.") as its first reference. (In the Hebrew Bible, the subject of "create" is always God.) The first printing of Darwin's "Origin of Species," in its last sentence, credits "the Creator" with life's beginning. When the Declaration of Independence was first read (by the crier in each town of the English colonies in America), everybody was Bible-literate enough to think of the Bible's first verse when hearing "created" (today, Americans are not that Bible- literate).

2

"And 'equal' is from where?" Again, 16th-century English, the earliest reference being 1526: God "meant his children to be all equal." I credited it, in "created equal," to the Enlightenment because our political use of it gained recognition in the 18th century. (Again, all info from the OED.)

Further, your comment contains two ERRORS:

1

It's not true that "under God" in the Pledge of Allegiance "violates the first amendment." It's second clause frees religion from government, & its first clause forbids government from "establishing" (i.e., making official) one church as the state church. Period. No prohibition against government's use of religious language.

2

It's not true that it's "clearly unconstitutional" for our public schools to teach the Bible. The U.S. Supreme Court says it's constitutional, & encourages our public schools to do so - but forbids the devotional reading of the Bible in our public schools. (The notion that the Bible is "a hoax" is dismally ignorant, & I regret that you are a victim of it.)

"The American way establishes no religion and privileges biblical religion."

Such a fundamental misunderstanding of the Constitution is more than a little disturbing, coming from a person who purports to be an academic.

Nothing in the Constitution gives ANY preference to the Bible, or to any other religious text.

Willis, I keep reading the DI and can't locate the place where they mention "created" being taken from the Bible. The word "created" wasn't created at the time the Bible was written was it? The notion of "creation" predates the Bible a little?

And "equal" is from where? The notion of "equal" as regards "all men" goes way back. The signers of the DI had the same "equal" in mind too. They had no intention of declaring "black men", non white men of all colors or any "women" equal. Neither did the other "equal" democracies like those "created" by the Greeks and Romans.

Our tradition of saying "under God" when reciting the pledge goes way back, all the way back to 1956. "It's a tradition" is a weak argument for violating the first amendment. The argument that the government officially recognizing religions does not establish them is an "equal" weak argument that stands only because of the tradition of wholesale violations of the first amendment.



The Bible is a proved hoax so if that's the only place to find "created" we're in more trouble than realized. The public schools should teach a hoax as facts? Isn't enough of that going on outside the public schools already? In no time at all absolute facts from the hoax will become a tradition and an excellent reason to continue teaching them even though it's clearly unconstitutional to say nothing of it's erroneous basis otherwise.

POSTED BY: BGONE | JULY 26, 2008 7:34 PM  
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

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Response to Geoff:

I said nothing about "career opportunity" but agree with you: no favoritism should be shown to anyone on the basis of religion.

And I agree also with you on this: No "favoritism to servicemen/women who practice Christianity over other religions." In the Polaris project I mentioned, we were strict about this in the training of lay chaplains.

Finally, a comment on your statement that there should be no "favoritism to...monotheism...." American education should include the overcoming of ignorance about American history, America's founding documents, and the roots of the American mind (though "favoritism" is a malappropriation to this educational process). In the Declaration of Independence, one phrase - "created equal" speaks both roots of the basic American mind. "Created" is from the BIBLE, and "equal" is from the ENLIGHTENMENT. Education emphasizing only one of these two roots is inaccurate and imbalanced, as now our public schools show (yes!) "favoritism" to the Enlightenment.

POSTED BY: WILLIS E. ELLIOTT, PANELIST | JULY 26, 2008 6:13 PM  
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

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Second response to Mr. Mark:

Again, you mis-read me, this time in my post to you. I did not say, as you claim, that I "didn't mention the religion Christianity" in my post. Rather, I said that Christianity is "a religion I did not mention in my point about ACLU."

Obviously, you are not illiterate. Equally obviously, you have trouble reading ACCURATELY material you disagree with (if not all material).

I hope you comment on "my point about ACLU," since you seem concerned to defend ACLU.

POSTED BY: WILLIS E. ELLIOTT, PANELIST | JULY 26, 2008 5:49 PM  
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

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RELIGION POISONS EVERYTHING AND EVERYONE IT TOUCHES! GET IT OUT OF OUR ARMED SERVICES PLEEZE JEZUS!!

POSTED BY: WILLIAM KRAAL | JULY 26, 2008 5:32 PM  
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

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What's with the beret? What's wrong with a simple American baseball cap? Ergo, it's un American. Wait a minute ! Why does he have a beard and a beret and a smirk? Is he a terrorist? Good Golly, Miss Molly, he probably eats French fries instead of Freedom fries and hates us for our freedoms and our attempts to save our humanly bestowed rights. I'll get that dang wabbit !

POSTED BY: ALCIBIADES | JULY 26, 2008 4:06 PM  
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

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What a simpleton !

I can only presume that his Church has very low standards for the intellectual qualities expected of a priest, or in his case, of a Bible-thumper. I would not say that he is un American. That is a word used by those who mark other people to be picked up by the secret police. Perhaps if he shaved his beard we could see his smirk a little better.

POSTED BY: GHALIB | JULY 26, 2008 4:01 PM  
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

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Apocalyptic belief is a function of faith - that luminous inner conviction that needs no recourse to evidence. It is customary to pose against immovable faith the engines of reason, but in this instance I would prefer that delightful human impulse - curiosity, the hallmark of mental freedom.

Organized religion has always had - and I put this mildly - a troubled relationship with curiosity. Islam's distrust, at least in the past two hundred years, is best expressed by its attitude to those whose faith falls away, to apostates who are drawn to other religions or to none at all.

In recent times, in 1975, the mufti of Saudi Arabia, Bin Baz, in a fatwa, quoted by Shmuel Bar, ruled as followed "Those who claim that the earth is round and moving around the sun are apostates and their blood can be shed and their property can be taken in the name of God." Bin Baz rescinded this judgment ten years later. Mainstream Islam routinely prescribes punishment for apostates that ranges from ostracism to beatings to death. To enter one of the many websites where Muslim apostates anonymously exchange views is to encounter a world of brave and terrified men and women who have succumbed to their disaffection and intellectual curiosity.

And Christians should not feel smug. The first commandment - on pain of death if we were to take the matter literally - is Thou shalt have no other Gods before me.

In the fourth century, St. Augustine put the matter well for Christianity, and his view prevailed for a long time: "There is another form of temptation, even more fraught with danger. This is the disease of curiosity. It is this which drives us to try and discover the secrets of nature which are beyond our understanding, which can avail us nothing, and which man should not wish to learn."

And yet it is curiosity, scientific curiosity, that has delivered us genuine, testable knowledge of the world and contributed to our understanding of our place within it and of our nature and condition. This knowledge has a beauty of its own, and it can be terrifying. We are barely beginning to grasp the implications of what we have recently learned.

And what exactly have we learned?

I draw here from a Stephen Pinker essay on his ideal of a university: Among other things we have learned that our planet is a minute speck in an inconceivably vast cosmos; that our species has existed for a tiny fraction of the history of the earth; that humans are primates; that the mind is the activity of an organ that runs by physiological processes; that there are methods of ascertaining the truth that can force us to conclusions which violate common sense, sometimes radically so at scales very large and very small; that precious and widely held beliefs, when subjected to empirical tests, are often cruelly falsified, that we cannot create energy or use it without loss.

Ian McEwan. "End of The World Blues."

POSTED BY: DANIEL | JULY 26, 2008 1:54 PM  
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

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Dear Ernest C Clark -

More of god's word from Matthew:

"Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword. For I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter in law against her mother in law. And a man's foes shall be they of his own household. He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me."

POSTED BY: MR MARK | JULY 26, 2008 11:53 AM  
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

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How long did you serve? Where? Did you earn the "combat infantry badge?" What you think the old military was like is so far astray from the truth you'll probably overshoot when you hear the truth.

They issued condoms, mandatory they be taken and a court martial-able offense to contract VD. VD is a weapon used by European powers and the US ever since it was discovered how easy it is to spread. A soldier can be killed a lot of ways besides bullets. Ideally, enemy soldiers are only wounded so they become a burden. VD is a self inflicted wound according to regulations. It incapacitates the soldier just like a bullet from an enemy gun but doesn't kill so the "wounded" soldier becomes a burden, liability rather than an asset.

We had two Irish lads that got drunk Christmas eve, (highly unusual). Feeling bad about their laxity in "faith" they decided to go to mass after being up all night drinking and one ended up in the brig. There were only 6 people at that mass and this one fell asleep. When the chaplain shook him to wake him up he hit the chaplain, an officer. He wasn't very polite otherwise either. All that Jesus love chaplains bring to the military has limits.

I'm left to wonder what the Army is like now. If I believe what I see written here they must wear robes, carry prayer books and go into battle singing hymns threatening to kiss the enemy to death. If you look at the film from WW2, Marines landing on Iwo for example they always show them getting religion before the landing. And it looks like all of them. It was a handful, 20 or 30 out of 15,000. I'll bet there are stats that say over 90% but those doing the statistics weren't there.

I really think they still make war the way they used to but then Haliburton didn't operate restaurants selling meals at \$22 each paid for by the government, eat'em or not in those combat zones. I understand the kill or be killed rule is still valid and a violation of the 5th commandment. I'll bet "faith" has a loophole for getting around the 5th commandment. Would Jesus really approve of war or was that some saint, (Augustine?) that needed to expand political possibilities?

POSTED BY: BGONE | JULY 26, 2008 11:14 AM  
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

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The Commandments say "Thou shalt not kill." They do NOT say "Thou shalt not kill except under the following circumstances."

POSTED BY: BOB FIELD | JULY 26, 2008 10:34 AM  
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

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Although the vast majority of the founding fathers held Christian beliefs, they had significant diversity in those beliefs. So much so, that they promulgated the "establishment clause" in the first amendment of the Constitution. Some were monotheists. Some were deists. Some were agnostics. (Don't recall any polytheists, though.)

However, they had the good sense to proscribe state supported establishment of religion as a first principle in our Constitution.

Therefore, the US military or a representative thereof, by showing favoritism to servicemen/women who practice Christianity over other religions, or monotheism over other beliefs, is in direct conflict with the first amendment of the Constitution.

An atheist should be afforded as much career opportunity as a monotheist. A person who practices Shinto, Hinduism or Islam should be afforded as much career opportunity as a Christian. Anything else would be unconstitutional and un-American.

POSTED BY: GEOFF | JULY 26, 2008 9:10 AM  
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

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God's word at Matthew 5: 43, 44" You heard that it was said, 'You must love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' However, I say (Jesus)to you: continue to love your enemies and pray for those persecuting you.

POSTED BY: ERNEST C. CLARK | JULY 26, 2008 7:40 AM  
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

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Willis E. Elliott, panelist writes:

"Response to Mr. Mark:

Thank you for your list of ACLU actions on behalf of adherents of a religion I did not mention in my point about ACLU."

Dear Rev -

Thanks for your response.

I'm puzzled as to your assertion that you didn't mention the religion Christianity in your post. Rereading your post, you mention "The Bible." The last I looked, The Bible was comprised of the Old and New Testaments. The last I looked, the only religion that holds that the Old and New Testaments are the be-all and end-all of their faith basis is Christianity. The Jews don't bother with the NT and Islam has books beyond The Bible.

I would hope that when you reference "The Bible" in your writings that you do so with the understanding that your readers immediately think of the Xian Bible, not some version of the Bible that omits the NT.

I would aver that - contrary to your assertion that my comment was irrelevant to your point - my comment was spot on.

Sorry, Rev, but your response to my post is too clever by half and rings as false as does the existence of the imaginary gods you worship.

;) )

POSTED BY: MR MARK | JULY 25, 2008 1:30 PM  
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

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Response to Mr. Mark:

Thank you for your list of ACLU actions on behalf of adherents of a religion I did not mention in my point about ACLU.

While your comment was irrelevant to my point, I commend you for the civic virtue of advocacy for truth and fairness.

POSTED BY: WILLIS E. ELLIOTT, PANELIST | JULY 24, 2008 11:21 PM  
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

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Now THIS is the worst column I've seen from Rev Elliot. He's either lying or totally uniformed.

Here's a list of actions that the ACLU has taken in the past decade to defend Christians and their rights to practice their religion in this country.

In every example, the ACLU is defending the right of a Christian to speak as a Christian or to practice Christianity:

ACLU Defends Christian Librarian Disciplined for Refusing to Promote Harry Potter

ACLU Defends Christian Worker Required to Remove Bible from Desk at Government Job

ACLU Defends Right of Individual Christian to Display Nativity Scene on Public Property

ACLU Defends Christians Protesting Gay Rights in Florida

ACLU Champions Religious Freedom Of Mormon College Student

ACLU Fights for Christian Church's Mission to Feed the Poor

ACLU Fights for Christmas Tree

ACLU Files Suit to Protect Free Speech Rights of Christian Protesting Wal-Mart's Policy on Gays

ACLU of Georgia and Baptist Church File Religious Discrimination Lawsuit

ACLU of Rhode Island Files Appeal on Behalf of Christian Prisoner Barred from Preaching at Religious Services

ACLU of Michigan Defends Catholic Man Coerced to Convert to Pentecostal Faith in Drug Rehab Program

ACLU of New Jersey Joins Lawsuit Supporting Second-Grader's Right to Sing "Awesome God" at Talent Show

After ACLU Intervention on Behalf of Christian Valedictorian, Michigan High School Agrees to Stop Censoring Religious Yearbook Entries

ACLU Helps Free New Mexico Street Preacher From Prison

ACLU of WA Wins Right of Christian Minister to Preach in Spokane Plaza

ACLU Fights for Baptist Preacher in Illinois

ACLU Defends Rights of Christian Group to Make Religious Protest at Funerals

ACLU Backs Christian Abortion Protester in Ohio

ACLU of Oregon Defends Religious Liberty Of Adventist School Boys Basketball Players

ACLU Backs Missouri Nurse Penalized for Wearing Cross-Shaped Lapel Pin

ACLU Defends Christian Street Preacher in Las Vegas

ACLU Argues for Legal Recognition of Small Christian Church

ACLU of MA Defends Students Punished for Distributing Candy Canes with Religious Messages

ACLU of Nebraska Defends Church Facing Eviction by the City of Lincoln

ACLU Defends Church's Right to Run "Anti-Santa" Ads in Boston Subways

ACLU Defends Inmate's Access to Material from the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints

Following Threat of ACLU of Virginia Lawsuit, Officials to Agree Not to Ban Baptisms in Public Parks

ACLU Defends Families Fighting Removal Of Religious Symbols from Florida Cemetery

ACLU Supports Right of Iowa Students to Distribute Christian Literature at School

ACLU Argument In Support of the Display of a Christian Cross in a Public Forum

ACLU Defends Free Speech Rights of Christians And Others On Main Street Plaza

ACLU Defends Prisoner's Rosary Beads

ACLU Defends Christian Group's Anti-Abortion Ads On Phoenix Buses

ACLU Pledges to Back Church in a Zoning Battle

ACLU of PA Files Discrimination Lawsuit Over Denial of Zoning Permit for African American Baptist Church

ACLU Offers To Represent Private Prayer on Public Property

ACLU Joins Falwell To Fight For Church Incorporation Rights

You can read the details of each case by clicking on the appropriate links, here:

<http://www.aclufightsforchristians.com/>

Go and read, Rev Elliot. Then, sin (bearing false witness) no more.

POSTED BY: MR MARK | JULY 24, 2008 1:54 PM  
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

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"I have recently been examining all the known superstitions of the world, and do not find in our particular superstition (Christianity) one redeeming feature. They are all alike, founded upon fables and mythologies."

Thomas Jefferson in a letter to Dr Woods.

POSTED BY: DANIEL | JULY 24, 2008 12:43 PM  
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

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The study of theology ,as it stands in Christian churches, is the study of nothing; it is founded on nothing; it rests on nothing; it proceeds by no authorities; it has no data; it can demonstrate nothing.

Thomas Paine 1737-1809 "The Age of Reason".

POSTED BY: T.PAINE | JULY 24, 2008 12:40 PM  
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

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The study of theology ,as it stands in Christian churches, is the study of nothing; it is founded on nothing; it rests on nothing; it proceeds by no authorities; it has no data; it can demonstrate nothing.

Thomas Paine 1737-1809 "The Age of Reason".

POSTED BY: T.PAINE | JULY 24, 2008 12:39 PM  
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

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Why mandate a moment of silence?

I offer thanks before eating. I do so without fanfare, and I do not expect others to wait for me to finish before digging in. I don't consider it rude or disrespectful of them to eat while I pray.

Why not let those who wish to say grace before eating do so without imposing on those around them, and let those who do not wish to say grace get down to the business of eating as soon as their cheeks hit the chair? Surely the entities being thanked for the meal will be able to hear the words of gratitude over the scraping of flatware against plates.

POSTED BY: LEPIDOPTERYX | JULY 24, 2008 12:26 PM  
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

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The comments to this entry are closed.



