

Celebrate Your Freedom

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Freedom of Religion is one of the most important rights that all Americans enjoy. The first two clauses of the First Amendment to the Constitution, the start of our Bill of Rights, establish two separate limitations on the government and, therefore, rights of the people, with the following language:

"Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion or prohibiting the free exercise thereof."

The Bill of Rights originally only provided limitations on the Federal Government. The Fourteenth Amendment, adopted shortly after the Civil War, made these limitations applicable to all State governments as well.

The percentage of people in this country who are agnostic or only vaguely connected with any organized religion has increased dramatically in the last 40 years. Those who don't care about exercising their right to practice religion should still rejoice at the "establishment clause", more accurately called the "no establishment clause". Unlike many modern states, there is not, and never has been, an official religion of the United States. It is our tradition that religion and government are exclusive of each other. This is one of our strongest freedoms.

Our government collects and disburses taxes for a plethora of programs in pursuance of an enormous number of policies, many of which are highly controversial, but it does not use tax money to promote one religion over another or over no religion. The resentment the "no establishment clause" prevents is incalculable.

The contours of this guarantee are constantly evolving. Robust debate occurs over the propriety of such things as any aid to parochial schools, prayer in school, teaching of religious subjects, and the establishment of religious clubs in colleges and high schools. While certainty in the law is desirable, there will always be issues exploring the limits of the right legislatures to commit public money to assist religious schools, or to impact public schools, in any way in the area of religion.

We need to look no further than the front pages of the newspaper to see the potential for calamity when governments are religious bodies themselves. Celebrate your freedom to live where no religion is established.