

FREEDOM OF RELIGION UNDER THE U.S. CONSTITUTION

The place in history of "1776 in the Americas" is in the move toward intellectual and spiritual freedom. The move away from the divine rights of Kings, actually the total repudiation of that intellectual tyranny, is our gift to human rights in the world. Religious freedom in this world is still limited to small geopolitical areas, such as the United States as protected under the Bill of Rights. Freedom itself is totally dependent upon religious and intellectual tolerance. Before our Bill of Rights religious and intellectual freedom had never been possible for everyone, anyplace or anywhere in history.

I am a latter-day deist, who sees the Biosphere as the height of my spiritual aspirations, to live my life in harmony with my species and with all of life. Observation and contemplation of the biosphere and the known universe supply all the beauty and guidance I need to live a fulfilled human life. I seek beauty and truth in these places.

My spiritual truths are in accord with my Native American background. As to *God*, I would suppose there must have been some prime mover, some beginning or some ending, of this Universe. I do not believe there ever was "nothing" or that "nothing" can be anything but a concept that applies to spatial emptiness within a greater "something." *God*, for all of human history, has been a way of defining the unknown, all the things we humans cannot define, explain or control.

God has always been a misused concept when defined by one person or group of persons who *define* and *create* "God" in order to assume the right to control the lives of other people. Such persons unjustly seek control of society or control of all Humankind through the logical imperatives implied by their concept of "God."

Spiritual leadership has provided some common good throughout human history, but not always. Religious persecution, common in our world, is the reason we must value the right of all persons to escape the *religious truths* of other persons within our democratic society. Freedom of religion is not only the freedom to practice religion but is freedom from any religion advocated by any other persons or by any government. My *Truth* is my civil right. A personal concept of *religion* or *Truth* is the right guaranteed by the Bill of Rights in the U.S. Constitution, which implies the freedom of every person from the "religion" or "Truth" of every other person or group in our democratic republic. Our bill of rights prohibits the establishment of any religion by government. Behavior is subject only and entirely to our system of civil and criminal law. No person is subject to any other person's *moral law* or pronouncements of *religious Truth*.

From my viewpoint, those persons who proclaim to know the "Truth" direct from "God" lack humility and do not seek "God." All persons can know those things that can be known about God without any help from another person. All persons who seek *God* can grow in their knowledge of *God*. A young person can grow in spiritual knowledge by the experience of *being*. No one spiritual *Truth* is believed universally. Not one universal religious *Truth* is accepted everywhere on our planet or everywhere in our democratic republic. Therefore, individuals can reasonably decide their own *Truth*.

To avoid divisive sectarian conflicts implied by use of a sectarian definition of *God* our forefathers used the broad term *Nature's God* in the Declaration of Independence and did not use the word *God* anywhere in the U.S. Constitution. Our continued *Freedom of Religion* as guaranteed by the U.S. Constitution in the *Bill of Rights* depends upon honoring the broad concept of *Nature's God* and the diverse beliefs of our citizens.

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