

June 29, 2005: Supreme Beings - Investor's Business Daily

Investor's Business Daily

June 29, 2005

The Law: While the U.S. prints copies of the Quran for its mortal enemies, its highest court bars public display of the roots of its religious heritage and its political freedom. What is wrong with this picture? The U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom regularly publishes its "Countries of Particular Concern" list on which can be found such stellar proponents of religious freedom such as China, Sudan and North Korea. In the wake of the Supreme Court decision permitting display of the Ten Commandments only in a historical context, perhaps the U.S. should be added to the list. One wonders if the Supreme Court noticed the words of Thomas Jefferson as inscribed on his memorial before they made their ruling and will now order them sandblasted lest anyone be offended. On the monument to the man credited with the phrase "separation of church and state" are the words, "I have sworn upon the altar of God eternal enmity against every form of tyranny over the mind of man." What would the man who swore "upon the altar of God eternal" think of the court's decision? Probably not much. Maybe when Jefferson spoke of separation of church and state he meant government should be neutral toward religion not hostile to it and that freedom of religion does not mean freedom from it. The phrase "separation of church and state" in fact appears not in the Constitution, but in a letter Jefferson wrote in 1802 assuring some religious leaders that the First Amendment prohibited Congress from setting up a national church, like the Church of England. It did not prohibit government association with religion, and was not meant to be used as a club to drive all signs of religion from public life. Indeed, on the very next day after the first Congress passed the First Amendment, it set aside a national day of prayer and Thanksgiving. America's founders had fled the same religious persecution shown by those now determined to drive every expression of faith, however innocuous, from the public square. "God" appears nowhere in the Constitution. But it was clearly on the minds of those who wrote it, as shown by an earlier document, the Declaration of Independence. In it, the signers observed that we are endowed, not by government or the Supreme Court, but by the "Creator" with the "inalienable rights" they sought to protect. Is posting George Washington's prayer at Valley Forge on a school wall an unconstitutional establishment of religion, but suspending a crucifix in a jar of urine constitutionally protected free speech? The Supreme Court seems to be saying that when it opens each session with the prayer, "God save the United States and this Honorable Court," not to worry, because it doesn't really mean it. Which brings us to the scary part of the ruling striking down a display in a Kentucky courthouse. It was struck down because, even though the display included nonreligious elements and therefore satisfied the court's historical context rule, the motives of those who put up the display were more religious than secular. Add to the powers of the judiciary the power to read minds and discern the contents of your heart before deciding if your actions are constitutional. Can you say "thought police"? We agree that government shouldn't shove religion down people's throats. But banning all religious symbols from public display is an odious form of censorship and an affront to our history.