

# FAITH MATTERS

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## WAR ON 'FREE EXERCISE' OF RELIGION

BY PHYLLIS SCHLAFLY

Americans who believe in God had better wake up and realize that a well-orchestrated campaign is moving to fundamentally transform the United States into a scrupulously secular nation. If this succeeds, we will no longer enjoy our First Amendment right of “free exercise” of religion but will be forbidden to speak or display any prayers, Bible quotations, or other evidences of religion in any public place or event.

The major strike force working to accomplish this consists of the ACLU plus various atheist groups. They are always ready to file lawsuits to get some supremacist judge or school superintendent to restrict religious expression and even religious music.

This effort is magnified by two other organizations that have a major impact on our culture: the military who feel the temptation to be politically correct and the liberal bureaucrats in public schools who now feel free to teach their leftwing views. Barack Obama's fingerprints are not on most of these acts, but his anti-religious

attitudes are widely enough known to encourage those on the public payroll to charge ahead with extremist politically correct policies.

We'd like to know if Pentagon officials have met with any Christian leaders to balance the aggressive lobbying by those who want to silence all religious expression by members of the military. Nine senior Army or Navy officers were dismissed this year, and some wonder if this was a purge of senior officers suspected of not toeing the Obama party line.

A U.S. Air Force chaplain has come under fire for posting a column in the Chaplain's Corner section of his base's website entitled “No Atheists in Foxholes; Chaplains Gave All in World War II.” An outfit called the Military Religious Freedom Foundation sent an irate letter to the base commander claiming that 42 anonymous airmen had complained. Col. Kenneth Reyes was then ordered to remove his article. The anti-religion group wasn't satisfied; it then called for further punishment of the chaplain, complain-

ing that the title “No Atheists in Foxholes” is a “bigoted, religious supremacist phrase,” and the article is an “anti-secular diatribe.”

You may be wondering what exactly was in Col. Reyes’s column. The answer is it was a very innocuous message. He summarized the World War II origins of the “no atheists in foxholes” phrase and commented that faith could be religious or secular. There was no mention of atheists outside of the historical phrase or to any particular religion. There was no implication that faith has to be in any particular God. Col. Reyes’s column merely implied that everyone has faith in something. Incidents like this build a climate of intimidation and discrimination against Christians in the military. It is really the atheists attacking Col. Reyes who are spreading a climate of hate.

A Young Marines program in Louisiana, which has been helping at-risk youth for 25 years, lost its federal funding because its graduation ceremony mentions God. The oath says simply, “I shall never do anything that would bring disgrace or dishonor upon my God, my country and its flag, my parents, myself or the Young Marines.” Graduation also includes a voluntary and non-denominational prayer that, in 25 years, no one ever complained about. But Obama’s Department of Justice discovered the oath and prayer in a random audit and then demanded that both be removed or else the government would cut off its \$15,000 in federal funding.

The U.S. Air Force Academy has ordered the removal of the phrase “So help me God” from the Cadet Oath, the Officer Oath, and the Enlisted Oath in the Academy Cadet Handbook. Parents are attacking this move as a disservice to the men and women who want to include the oath as a solemn reminder that they are pledging their fidelity to God and their country. As Chaplain Ron Crews said, “This phrase is a deeply rooted American tradition which George Washington began as the first president of the United States, and many who take an oath of service to our Country still state it.” Parents are calling on the Air Force to restore the oath so that cadets who come from faith backgrounds would be supported in solemnizing their oath with the words that generations of officers before them have used.

Some public school busybody bureaucrats are trying to suppress any and all religious mention on school property. Their orders are far more extreme than anything courts have ever held to be violations of the First Amendment.

Sports are a favorite target of the anti-religious crowd. A high school football coach, Marcus Borden, was forbidden even to bow his head or “take a knee” during voluntary student-led prayers before the games. In Texas, a boy’s track relay team ran its fastest race of the year and defeated its closest rival by seven yards, which should have enabled it to advance toward the state championship. The team’s anchor runner pointed to the



sky to give glory to God as he crossed the finish line, but someone didn't like the gesture so the authorities disqualified this winning team because of it.

In North Carolina, a high school junior knelt for a brief two-second prayer before a wrestling match, and the referee penalized him a point for doing so. High school officials in Kountze, Texas, and a Wisconsin atheist group called Freedom From Religion made a tremendous effort to stop the cheerleaders from displaying a banner before a football game that read: "And let us run with endurance the race God has set before us."

The ACLU and an atheist group called the Freedom From Religion Foundation sued a little school district in Jackson City, Ohio, to force the school to take a picture of Jesus off the school wall. The picture

was one of 24 famous historical figures displayed in small frames ever since 1947. The school agreed to remove the picture of Jesus, but the school is now required to pay the ACLU \$80,000 for its attorney's fees plus \$15,000 to reward five anonymous plaintiffs.

A senior at Tomah High School in Wisconsin was given a zero on an art project because he added a cross and the words "John 3:16 A Sign of Love" to his drawing of a landscape.

Christmas has come under attack in many schools, trying to ban Christmas observance far beyond what supremacist judges have ever called for. The choir director in Wausau West High School in Wisconsin told the press that he was given three choices by school officials. He could eliminate all Christmas music, he could cancel all December

performances, or he could perform one religious song for every five secular songs at all performances, and the district had to approve every selection. The choir director said he would cancel all performances. Parents and the public were outraged. After a stormy school board meeting, the obnoxious orders were rescinded and the kids sang their Christmas carols.

The ACLU in Rhode Island filed a lawsuit to force Cranston High School to remove a prayer banner in the auditorium, even though there had been no complaints in 38 years. The banner reads in part: “Our Heavenly Father: Help us to be good sports and smile when we lose as well as when we win. Teach us the value of true friendship, help us always to conduct ourselves so as to bring credit to Cranston High School.” The sad part of this lawsuit is that it will cost the city of Cranston and Cranston High School a lot of money to pay the attorneys to defend the banner.

You can laugh at the following rule issued by the principal at Heritage Elementary in Madison, Alabama, but she was downright serious. She allowed Easter observances including a costumed rabbit, but she issued this imperious warning, “Make sure we don’t say ‘the Easter bunny’ because that would infringe on religious diversity.”

America was founded on very different beliefs about government actions. As

Alexis de Toqueville, the Frenchman who traveled around our country in the mid-19th century, wrote: “Upon my arrival in the United States, the religious aspect of the country was the first thing that struck my attention. The Americans combine the notions of Christianity and of liberty so intimately in their minds, that it is impossible to make them conceive the one without the other.”

Barack Obama has repeatedly shown his disdain for any public acknowledgment of God, Christianity or religion. This year when he recorded his reading of the Gettysburg Address on the 150th anniversary of that famous speech, he purposely omitted Abraham Lincoln’s famous words “under God” after “one nation.” In at least one of his Thanksgiving Day addresses, he thanked a lot of worthy people, but somehow God didn’t make the cut.

Obama’s goal seems to be to shrink our First Amendment right of the “free exercise” of religion to what he calls “freedom of worship,” which means it would still be OK to go inside your church, shut the doors and say a prayer; but you would be prevented from speaking about your faith or religion at any public meeting, event, or school. The best source for more information about this is *No Higher Power: Obama’s War on Religious Freedom* by Phyllis Schlafly and George Neumayr (available at [eagleforum.org](http://eagleforum.org) and other websites and bookstores).



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MRS. SCHLAFLY was named by Ladies' Home Journal as one of the 100 most important women of the 20th century. Such recognition is due in part to her founding of Eagle Forum, a national volunteer, non-profit, pro-life, pro-family advocacy organization. She is a world-renowned author/editor of numerous books on subjects as varied as family and feminism, nuclear strategy, education and the judicial system. Mrs. Schlafly is a member of the Catholic Advisory Board of Ave Maria Mutual Funds and receives remuneration for her board duties.



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