



Written by [Dave Bohon](#) on May 14, 2012

Judge Suggests Cutting Four Commandments in Religious Display Case

A judge in the latest ACLU-generated Ten Commandments display case has suggested that the targeted high school cull out four commandments that refer to God in order to avoid a full-blown lawsuit. As reported by the [Associated Press](#), the ACLU of Virginia has filed a complaint against the Narrows, Virginia, high school on behalf of an unnamed student who claimed the display, which is part of a larger exhibit of historically significant documents, makes him feel like an outsider because he is an atheist.



The ACLU is arguing that the display violates the First Amendment's supposed separation clause, while the Giles County School Board, represented by the conservative legal advocacy group [Liberty Counsel](#), insists that the Ten Commandments represent a crucial part of America's historic foundation, and should be included with the other documents and illustrations in the display.

"Filing this lawsuit has not been easy, and I would not have done it if I were not genuinely disturbed by the Ten Commandments in the school," the student in the case, referred to as "Doe 1," said in a court document filed April 30. "I have had to go against school officials who have influence over my life and future."

The school board is asking U.S. District Judge Michael Urbanski in Roanoke to rule that the Ten Commandments can stay, explaining that a private citizen had paid to put up the exhibit of historic documents and illustrations. The board insisted that the exhibit isn't intended to be an endorsement of Judeo-Christian faith, but is an effort to show students some of the documents that were important to America's founding.

Liberty Counsel noted that in addition to the Ten Commandments, the display of documents and illustrations, known as the Foundations of Law and Government, include the Magna Carta, the Declaration of Independence, the Mayflower Compact, the First Charter of Virginia, the Fundamental Orders of Connecticut, a depiction and quote of Patrick Henry, a depiction of the Minutemen, a depiction of George Washington, Washington's Farewell Address, a depiction of Thomas Jefferson, Jefferson's letter to the Danbury Baptists, Jefferson's letter to Reverend Samuel Miller, Jefferson's 1779 Thanksgiving Proclamation, the Northwest Ordinance, and a document explaining the significance of each.

The Giles County School District has a lengthy record of contention over Ten Commandments displays. "The county's two high schools and three elementary/middle schools had posted the Ten Commandments for more than a decade," reported the AP. "The Freedom From Religion Foundation, the ACLU's co-counsel in the lawsuit, objected to the displays in 2010 and requested their removal. School officials replaced them with the Declaration of Independence."



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But after an uproar from local residents over outside groups determining what can and can't be displayed in their schools, the school board unanimously voted in January 2011 to return the displays, only to remove them again several weeks later over constitutional concerns. Giles County residents again applied pressure to the school board, which decided to once again display the Ten Commandments as part of a larger historical exhibit.

That action prompted the ACLU to once again intrude with threats of a lawsuit against the school district. But Liberty Counsel said that the atheist group is on thin ice with its demands that the district remove the Ten Commandments, noting that in tracing America's foundations, secular textbooks from such prominent publishers as Prentice Hall and McGraw-Hill include the Ten Commandments in their lists of important historic documents. In fact, the parents of the student, who are named as co-plaintiffs "Doe 2" in the case, conceded that studying the group of documents in the display is appropriate in a textbook and that the Ten Commandments were significant in the development of law and government. Liberty Counsel noted that not even the ACLU argues against curriculum that includes the Ten Commandments as part of various subjects of study. But the secular group nonetheless insisted that the Commandments must be excluded from the display because of their religious background.

"The ACLU has done everything it could to run from the facts and the law that control this case," said Matthew Staver, president of Liberty Counsel. "The Foundations of American Law and Government display has been upheld by multiple federal courts of appeal. It is clearly appropriate to include the Ten Commandments in a display on law, because there is no dispute that they helped shape American law and government."

Perhaps the most curious development in the case was Judge Urbanski's suggestion that in order to prevent further legal action, the school district should simply cut out the four commandments that refer to God and worship. The four "offending" commandments, laid out with the other six in Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5, are:

- I am the Lord your God, you shall have no other gods before me.
- You shall not make for yourself any carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth; you shall not bow down to them nor serve them.
- You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain, for the Lord will not hold him guiltless who takes His name in vain.
- Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy.

At a hearing on the case Urbanski, who hoped to resolve the issue without a costly and lengthy trial, explained the reasoning behind his suggestion of cutting out some of the commandments. "If indeed this issue is not about God," Urbanski wondered, "why wouldn't it make sense for Giles County to say, 'Let's go back and just post the bottom six?' But if it's really about God, then they wouldn't be willing to do that."

It is unlikely that the school board, or the citizens of Giles County, will be content with a Ten Commandments display denuded of the mention of their author. To do so would discount the importance that America's early generations placed on faith in God, and how that faith influenced their dealings with others.

[Fox News' religion correspondent Lauren Green](#) noted that the Ten Commandments are composed of two sections. The first four — those Judge Urbanski suggested cutting — deal with mankind's



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relationship to God. The last six — those that would remain under the judge’s suggestion — deal with mankind’s relationship to each other.

“In the New Testament, Jesus summed up the commandments with just two,” wrote Green. “First was to love the Lord God with all your heart, soul and mind, and the second was ... to love others as yourself.”

The problem with cutting out the commands to love and worship God, Green explained, is that what is left “are nothing more than suggestions. The reason those six come second is because the Bible is saying that only when God is revered can mankind avoid the pitfalls of committing adultery, murder, stealing, etc. It’s by putting God first that we can put all other loves in perspective.”

Added Green: “Separating the Ten Commandments as if they were mere suggestions negates the whole of the law. As Dostoyevsky said in *The Brothers Karamazov*: ‘If there is no God, then everything is permissible.’”

While earlier generations understood the crucial connection between faith in God and justice on earth, it has become obscured in an increasingly secularized society. Noted Green: “If we could really live out those six commandments on our own, as the judge suggests, then it would seem likely that we wouldn’t have need for the judicial system in the first place. But the very fact that the court systems are clogged with murderers, thieves and con artists, is a testament to another reality.”



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