

CHAPTER 444 (SJR 57)

A JOINT RESOLUTION relating to the display of historic documents that include a depiction of the Ten Commandments.

WHEREAS, in the Preamble to Kentucky's Constitution, the Framers acknowledged Almighty God as the source of the people's liberty and invoked His blessings on the citizens of the Commonwealth:

"We, the people of the Commonwealth of Kentucky, grateful to Almighty God for the civil, political and religious liberties we enjoy, and invoking the continuance of these blessings, do ordain and establish this Constitution"; and

WHEREAS, in 1992, the Kentucky General Assembly enacted KRS 158.195 to prevent the censorship or suppression of the official Acts of Congress or the writings and speeches of America's Founders and Presidents which contain references to God or the Bible; and

WHEREAS, the Ten Commandments appear over the bench where the United States Supreme Court Justices sit, thus showing the source from whence our laws and the governmental power of the state are derived; and

WHEREAS, America's colonial governments adopted the Ten Commandments not as an object of worship or an icon, but as the basis for their civil and criminal law, as illustrated on April 3, 1644, when the New Haven Colony Charter was adopted establishing that: "the judicial laws of God, as they were delivered by Moses be a rule to all the courts in this jurisdiction"; and

WHEREAS, when signing the Declaration of Independence on August 2, 1776, Samuel Adams, the "Father of the Revolution," emphasized its Biblical presuppositions:

"We have this day restored the Sovereign to whom all men ought to be obedient. He reigns in heaven and from the rising to the setting of the sun, let His kingdom come"; and

WHEREAS, on August 20, 1789, Congressman Fisher Ames from Massachusetts proposed the wording of the First Amendment which was adopted by the House of Representatives in the first session of the Congress of the United States; and his writings clearly demonstrate that the Framers never intended the First Amendment to be so interpreted as to remove the Bible from public school classrooms:

"We are spending less time in the classroom on the Bible which should be the principal text in our schools"; and

WHEREAS, in a letter dated August 18, 1790, President George Washington wrote to the Hebrew Congregation in Newport, Rhode Island, "All possess alike liberty of conscience and immunities of citizenship. . . . May the children of the stock of Abraham, who dwell in this land, continue to merit and enjoy the good will of the other inhabitants; while every one shall sit in safety under his own vine and fig tree, and there shall be none to make him afraid"; and

WHEREAS, in his "Farewell Address" of September 19, 1796, President George Washington pointed out the connection between the faith of the Nation and its political prosperity when he declared:

"Of all the dispositions and habits which lead to political prosperity, religion and morality are indispensable supports. . . ."; and

WHEREAS, acknowledging the Bible as an integral part of the fabric of our society, on September 11, 1777, the Continental Congress adopted a resolution to import 20,000 Bibles from Holland and Scotland, as the colonies were at war with England; and

WHEREAS, on May 29, 1845, the day before his death, President Andrew Jackson stated:

"My lamp of life is nearly out, and the last glimmer has come. I am ready to depart when called. The Bible is true. The principles and statutes of that Holy Book have been the rule of my life, and I have tried to conform to its spirit as nearly as possible. Upon that sacred volume I rest my hope for eternal salvation, through the merits and blood of our blessed Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ"; and

WHEREAS, President John Quincy Adams, the sixth President of the United States, wrote concerning the civil function of the Mosaic law:

"The law given from Sinai was a civil and municipal as well as a moral and religious code; it contained many statutes . . . of universal application -- laws essential to the existence of men in society and most of which have been enacted by every nation which ever professed any code of laws"; and

WHEREAS, in a June, 1778 letter to her son, John Quincy Adams, Abigail Adams reinforced noble values and a sense of ultimate accountability to God which she believed to be the foundation of true greatness:

"Great learning and superior abilities, should you ever possess them, will be of little value and small estimation, unless virtue, honor, truth, and integrity are added to them. Adhere to those religious sentiments and principles which were early instilled into your mind, and remember that you are accountable to your Maker for all your words and actions"; and

WHEREAS, on February 29, 1892, the United States Supreme Court, in a unanimous decision which has never been overruled, cited sixty-six organic authorities which show the Bible's singular influence on America:

"There is no dissonance in these declarations. There is a universal language pervading them all, having one meaning; they affirm and reaffirm that this is a religious nation. These are not individual sayings, declarations of private persons; they are organic utterances; they speak the voice of the entire group. These authorities were collected to support the historical conclusion that: 'no purpose of action against religion can be imputed any legislation, state or nation, because this is a religious people. This is historically true. From the discovery of this continent to the present hour, there is a single voice making this affirmation . . . we find everywhere a clear recognition of the same truth . . . this is a Christian nation' "; and

WHEREAS, on May 7, 1911, President Woodrow Wilson, addressing the Tercentenary Celebration of the Translation of the Bible into the English Language, stated:

"Moreover, the Bible does what is so invaluable in human life -- it classifies moral values. It appraises us that men are not judged according to their wits, but according to their characters -- that the last of every man's reputation is his truthfulness, his squaring his conduct with the standards that he knew to be the standards of purity and rectitude. How many a man we appraise, ladies and gentlemen, as great today whom we do not

admire as noble! A man may have great power and small character"; and WHEREAS, President Woodrow Wilson's letter to the soldiers and sailors of the United States during World War I, recorded in the Congressional Record, advised them:

"The Bible is the word of life. I beg that you will read it and find this out for yourselves -- read not little snatches here and there, but long passages that will really be the road to the heart of it. You will find it full of real men and women not only, but also of things you have wondered about and been troubled about all your life, as men have been always; and the more you read, the more it will become plain to you what things are worthwhile and what are not, what things make men happy -- loyalty, right dealings, speaking the truth, readiness to give everything for what they think their duty, and, most of all, the wish that they may have the real approval of the Christ, who gave everything for them -- and the things that are guaranteed to make men unhappy -selfishness, cowardice, greed, and everything that is low and mean. When you have read the Bible, you will know that it is the Word of God, because you will have found it the key to your own heart, your own happiness, and your own duty"; and

WHEREAS, in his book, "Sources of Power," President Jimmy Carter acknowledged the importance of the Mosaic law as a foundation:

"As we face changes and challenges, we need to hold on to the things that don't change, the foundations on which we can build our lives despite the uncertainty and danger of the future. God's law is the greatest of these foundations"; and

WHEREAS, in his February 22, 1990 proclamation designating 1990 as The International Year of Bible Reading, President George Bush declared:

"The Bible has had a critical impact upon the development of Western civilization. Western literature, art, and music are filled with images and ideas that can be traced to its pages. More important, our moral tradition has been shaped by the laws and teachings it contains. It was a biblical view of man -- one affirming the dignity and worth of the human person, made in the image of our Creator -- that inspired the principles upon which the United States is founded. President Jackson called the Bible 'the rock on which our Republic rests' because he knew that it shaped the Founding Fathers' concept of individual liberty and their vision of a free and just society. The Bible has not only influenced the development of our Nation's values and institutions, but also enriched the daily lives of millions of men and women who have looked to it for comfort, hope, and guidance. On the American frontier, the Bible was often the only book a family owned. For those pioneers living far from any church or school, it served both as a source of religious instruction and as the primary text from which children learned to read. The historic speeches of Abraham Lincoln and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., provide compelling evidence of the role Scripture played in shaping the struggle against slavery and discrimination. Today the Bible continues to give courage and direction to those who seek truth and righteousness. In recognizing its enduring value, we recall the words of the prophet Isaiah, who declared, 'The grass withereth, the flower fadeth; but the word of our God shall stand forever.' Containing revelations of God's intervention in human history, the Bible offers moving testimony to His love for mankind. Treasuring the Bible as a source of knowledge and inspiration, President Abraham Lincoln called this Great Book 'the best gift God has given to man.' President Lincoln believed that the Bible not only reveals the infinite goodness of our Creator, but also reminds us of our worth as individuals and our responsibilities toward one another";

NOW, THEREFORE,

Be it resolved by the General Assembly of the Commonwealth of Kentucky:

Section 1. The Kentucky Department of Education, with assistance as necessary by the Legislative Research Commission, shall electronically transmit KRS 158.195 and this resolution to all public school teachers in the Commonwealth.

Section 2. Documents depicting the Ten Commandments may be posted in classrooms by any public school teacher and on other public property, when incorporated into an historical display along with other historic documents as described in KRS 158.195. The purpose of the display shall not be to advance religion, but to advance the important secular purpose of illustrating how the Bible and the Ten Commandments have influenced the faith, morals, and character of American leaders who, in turn, have shaped American law, public policy, and institutions. For that reason, the General Assembly expresses no preference as to which version of the Ten Commandments is displayed or whether the display is in English, Hebrew, or a foreign language being taught in the classroom. To advance the secular purpose of making citizens of the Commonwealth more knowledgeable concerning the founding of America, the intent of the nation's Founders, and the formative influence of the Bible and the Ten Commandments on American leaders, institutions, and law, a copy of this resolution shall be made a prominent part of any historic display on public property which includes any depiction of the Ten Commandments.

Section 3. No fiscal court, city council, or school board shall mandate the posting of any historical displays set forth in KRS 158.195 which incorporate a depiction of the Ten Commandments until that governing body first sets forth by resolution or policy its secular purpose for erecting the historical display. This historical display shall not advance religion.

Section 4. Each historical display which incorporates a depiction of the Ten Commandments shall be accompanied by clearly legible copies of this resolution and of KRS 158.195; and the cost of posting and maintaining the displays may be paid for by voluntary private contributions.

Section 5. The Legislative Research Commission shall remit a sufficient number of copies of this resolution to the Department for Local Government for distribution by the department, in the manner it deems most efficient, to all elected officials of each city and county of the Commonwealth.

Section 6. The Legislative Research Commission shall remit a sufficient number of copies of this resolution to the Secretary of State for distribution by the Secretary of State, in the manner he deems most efficient, to the statewide elected officials of the Commonwealth.

Section 7. The General Assembly finds the Ten Commandments to be the precedent legal code of the Commonwealth which has provided the foundation for many of the civil and criminal statutes enacted into law throughout the history of the Commonwealth.

Section 8. The Department for Facilities Management shall relocate the monument inscribed with the Ten Commandments which was displayed on the Capitol grounds for nearly three decades to a permanent site on the Capitol grounds near Kentucky's floral clock to be made a part of a historical and cultural display which shall include the display of this resolution in order to remind Kentuckians of the Biblical foundations of the laws of the Commonwealth.

Approved April 21, 2000