

Statement of John Freshwater

April 16 2007---Mt. Vernon, Ohio

Today, in compliance with a directive from my superiors in the Mount Vernon City Schools, I have removed the 10 Commandments from the "collage" on my classroom windows. Although I am convinced that the Decalogue has tremendous historical significance in our culture I understand that the courts have ruled that their placement in a public-school is not permitted. The US Supreme Court ruled in the 1980 Case Stone V Graham that:

"If the posted copies of the Ten Commandments are to have any effect at all, it will be to induce the schoolchildren to read, meditate upon, perhaps to venerate and obey. However desirable this might be as a matter of private devotion, it is not a permissible state objective under the Establishment Clause."

Clearly the courts do not want children to read the 10 Commandments.

In addition, my superiors have ordered me to remove the Bible from the desk of my classroom. Because the Bible is personal, private property and the source of personal inner-strength in my own life the removal of it from my desk would be nothing short of infringement on my own deeply held, personal religious beliefs granted by God and guaranteed under the "free-exercise clause" of the First Amendment to the United States Constitution.

The First Amendment reads:

Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, **or prohibiting the free exercise thereof;** (emph. mine) or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the government for a redress of grievances.

My question today is if Congress can make no law prohibiting the "free exercise" of my faith, from where does the Mt. Vernon City Schools obtain the power to restrict it?

Until the Mount Vernon City Schools can demonstrate to me how I can remove the Bible from my desk without sacrificing my own God-given right to free exercise of my faith, I cannot in good-conscience comply with their directive.

I do not forfeit my right to free expression of my faith when I walk into the school and because I strongly object to the "Christian censorship" being promoted in our schools I respectfully reject the request to remove the Bible.