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Freedom of Religion - Bahai, House of Worship and the Spaghetti God

The First Amendment, part of the Bill of Rights of the Constitution of the United States of America, was passed by the Congress in 1791 and primarily contains the following fundamental rights:

1. freedom of speech
2. freedom of religion
3. freedom of assembly
4. freedom of the press

This amendment prohibits by law the Congress (the legislative body of the United States based in the Capitol, Washington D. C.) to restrict any of these rights or the right to petition. It was only in the course of my further travels and many conversations that I understood which liberal ideals, which are probably not comprehensible to some Europeans in that form, formed the basis of the four mentioned and fundamental civil rights of a US citizen.

Regarding freedom of religion, the first amendment caused me mixed feelings. On the one hand, Congress is obligated by law to be absolutely neutral with regard to religion, which, according to my observations, is only possible in theory. Because on the other hand, if you look at the election campaigns on the municipal and local level, you will see that there is only a thin line between paying homage to a prophetic figure and a politician, sometimes depending on hairstyle and skin color. My attempt to understand this ended with two conclusions.

1. there is no national religion in the USA and it is not allowed to establish one
2. Politics is also interpreted in a religious context, with an immense diversity, because everyone is free in his faith.

In summary, everyone can believe what he wants. The freedom to believe is unlimited. But the state intervenes when faith crosses a certain border. Especially the interpretation of this border confused me deeply in the beginning. For example, I can believe in the spaghetti god if I want to. And if He calls for the killing of all consumers of competing spaghetti brands, it is allowed. Because only the act, i.e. killing all consumers of another "pasta brand", would be a criminal offence and the state would intervene, but then with full strength. In my opinion this is unimaginable in Europe and not covered by religious freedom.

And whoever may think that I compared it to spaghetti only as a humorous metaphor may be proven wrong. In 2005 a self-proclaimed prophet and physics expert founded the "Church of the Flying Spaghetti Monster" in the USA. This Church, with a name that is extremely bizarre to Europeans, was founded due to a dispute between Christian fundamentalist movements that could not agree on the name of the Creator who should be represented in the doctrine of "creationism" that was to be taught in schools in the state of Kansas. Bobby Henderson, an advocate of the theory of evolution, insisted during the debates that he also was allowed to create a "God" along with the associated religious doctrine, covered by the First Amendment. A parody at the beginning. This has become a legal church in some countries. In New Zealand, the priests of the "Spaghetti God" have even been allowed to hold wedding ceremonies since December 2015. Despite the humorous development of the church, there is a profoundly serious issue behind its founding. That is, that the freedom to believe what you want, and if you have to believe in a God made out of wheat, is an essential part of the US-American philosophy. Because the founding fathers, who once migrated from Europe to America, were also persecuted for their faith. The same happened and continues to happen to many other religions, such as the Bahai, who are able to practice their faith in the USA without further ado. And so my first visit of a religious institution, even before the beginning of the actual journey with my group, led me to an architecturally very impressive Bahai Temple in Wilmette, in the north of Chicago.

The religious community of the Bahai, which is persecuted in several countries of the Middle East and Asia, is already established in the USA since 1800. The philosophy of the Bahai centralizes the idea of a unified religion which uses various elements of common religions. Based on the premise that all prophets turn to the one Creator and proclaim the doctrine of peace among all people.

The aspect of mutual peace, as a universal principle, seems to be of particular importance for the Bahai faith. In Wilmette one of the most beautiful temples of this religious community can be found. Others are located in Germany, Uganda or Israel, among others.

The USA are the country of contrasts and religious freedom. It is no coincidence that this masterpiece of artistic architecture was built here. It is a symbol and fortress against all those systems that regard the right of freedom of religion as a threat to their own predominance.

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As former chairman of the Central Council of Oriental Christians in Germany and ambassador of the association, it is particularly important for me, while looking at the persecution of Christian denominations in the Middle East, Africa and Asia, to remind political actors of the aspect of religious freedom always and everywhere.

It does not matter which religion and it does not matter in which God, which deities one believes. Even to believe in nothing is an utter right. Even to believe in a Spaghetti-God, the Sun-God, the Devil, Santa Claus or the Sandman is absolutely legitimate and from the perspective of a US - citizen a matter of course. Unfortunately, this is not the case everywhere in the world. Blasphemy laws and the division of the world into "believers" and "unbelievers" suppresses the natural diversity of faith. In some Muslim countries, for example, the Bahai are persecuted or at least impeded in their interpretation of faith.

However, every person in the world should have the right to follow his or her personal faith.

Simon Jacob,
February 2, 2020,
Wilmette, Illinois

Further links related to the article:

[Church of the Flying Spaghetti Monster](#)
[Bahai - House of Worship/Wilmette](#)
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