

# Public Domain

by Steve Krulick, Citizen

## Flagging Enthusiasm (Part 2)

*"In the context of the Pledge, the statement that the United States is a nation 'under God' is an endorsement of religion. It is a profession of a religious belief, namely, a belief in monotheism... The text of the official Pledge, codified in federal law, impermissibly takes a position with respect to the purely religious question of the existence and identity of God." – Judge Alfred T. Goodwin, 9<sup>th</sup> Circuit Court of Appeals, *Newdow vs. US Congress* (2002)*

I estimate I've recited the *Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag* several thousand times since pre-school. Its dull, monotone cadence has carved a deep groove into my synaptic pathways. Being such a robotic ritual at school, one went into trance mode instantly, hardly noting the words anymore, or what they even meant. Indeed, with one's lips on automatic, the mind would ponder unfinished homework, upcoming tests ... or the tight pants at the next desk.

So whose idea was this? After all, among *all* the nations, *only* the USA and the Philippines even have such a formula for pledging fealty to a cloth icon!

In 1891, after his radicalism got him fired from Boston's Bethany Baptist Church, a Christian Socialist minister named Francis Bellamy (cousin of famous socialist Edward Bellamy, whose 1888 utopian novel *Looking Backward* spawned an elite "Nationalizing" movement) started working for the popular (500,000 circulation) *Youth's Companion* magazine. In 1888, the magazine began a campaign to sell American flags to the public schools, which had rarely displayed them until then. By 1892, the magazine had sold American flags to about 26,000 schools. (Pure patriotism? Ha! "Ka-ching!")

As part of the 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Columbus "discovering" America, Bellamy and the magazine saw an opportunity to further promote flag sales to *every* US school, and lined up the National Education Association, Congress, and President Harrison to back their scheme for a public school observance of Columbus Day with a national proclamation, and a flag ceremony for 12 million kids as the centerpiece.

As part of the package, Bellamy penned (or adapted from a lesser-known Francis Bellamy – the record is uncertain!) an oath that read: **I pledge allegiance to my Flag and the Republic for which it stands; one Nation indivisible, with Liberty and Justice for all.** He had considered adding *Equality* and *Fraternity*, but thought them too controversial for school use. Though a minister, he also rejected any religious references as unsuitable for a universal, inclusive, nationalistic oath primarily meant to heal the still-divisive wounds of the Civil War.

He also said it was to teach obedience to the state as a virtue, and invented a salute to go with it... a stiff uplifted right arm (*see photo*). There's evidence that Hitler's National Socialist salute derived from the "Bellamy Salute"; for obvious reasons, the embarrassing gesture was replaced with hand-over-heart in 1942. But if this were a class of *German* kids saluting the red, white, and black Hakenkreuz Nazi flag, wouldn't you cringe for the poor, coerced, brainwashed little fascist robots? Well...?

Anyway, the Pledge underwent some further changes (which Bellamy opposed) in 1923-4, making

it more specific to the *USA* flag. Congress officially recognized the Pledge of Allegiance in 1945.

Finally, the words "under God" were added by Congress and President Eisenhower in 1954, after much urging by the Knights of Columbus. Why?

Blame the Cold War and McCarthyism! According to David Greenberg at *Slate.com*: "In April 1953, Rep. Louis Rabaut, D-Mich., formally proposed the alteration of the Pledge in a bill he introduced to Congress. The next year, it was endorsed by the Rev. George M. Docherty, the pastor of the Presbyterian church in Washington that Eisenhower attended. In February 1954, Docherty gave a sermon – with the president in the pew before him – arguing that apart from 'the United States of America,' the Pledge 'could be the pledge of any country.' He added, 'I could hear little Moscovites [sic] repeat a similar pledge to their hammer-and-sickle flag with equal solemnity.' Perhaps forgetting that 'liberty and justice for all' was not the norm in Moscow, Docherty urged the inclusion of 'under God' in the Pledge to denote what he felt was special about the United States.

"The ensuing congressional speechifying – debate would be a misnomer, given the near-unanimity of opinion – offered more proof that the point of the bill was to promote religion. The legislative history of the 1954 act stated that the hope was to 'acknowledge the dependence of our people and our Government upon... the Creator... [and] deny the atheistic and materialistic concept of communism.' In signing the bill on June 14, 1954, Flag Day, Eisenhower delighted in the fact that from then on, 'millions of our schoolchildren will daily proclaim in every city and town... the dedication of our nation and our people to the Almighty.' (That the nation, constitutionally speaking, was in fact dedicated to the opposite proposition seemed to escape the president.)"

Ike went on: "In this way we are reaffirming the transcendence of religious faith in America's heritage and future; in this way we shall constantly strengthen those spiritual weapons which forever will be our country's most powerful resource in peace and war." (Amazing that the US prevailed in *three* wars under the *old* Pledge... after a whole Pledge-less century!)

This step was clearly outside the Constitutional authority of the Legislative and Executive branches. The new wording clearly violated the Establishment Clause of the 1<sup>st</sup> Amendment; reciting the whole 1954 version of the Pledge forces a person to swear belief in a monotheistic God. The 2002 *Newdow* decision of the 9<sup>th</sup> Circuit Court of Appeals said: "The mere enactment of the 1954 Act in its particular context constitutes a religious recitation policy" and put persons, particularly students, "in the untenable position of choosing between participating in an exercise with religious content or protesting... There can be little doubt that under the controlling Supreme Court cases the... policy fails the coercion test."

I, for one, have chosen to protest... silently, but respectfully. The courts, since 1943 (even before the 1954 addition), have upheld my right (and yours!) to NOT have to recite the Pledge at all, *for any reason of conscience*; yet how many people have the courage to *not do so* in public? But, since the current Pledge *is* unconstitutional, robotic, coercive (which belies there even *being* "liberty and justice for all"!), and arguably *is unnecessary*, why do we even bother with it at all?

In Part 3: Final arguments, and my proposal.