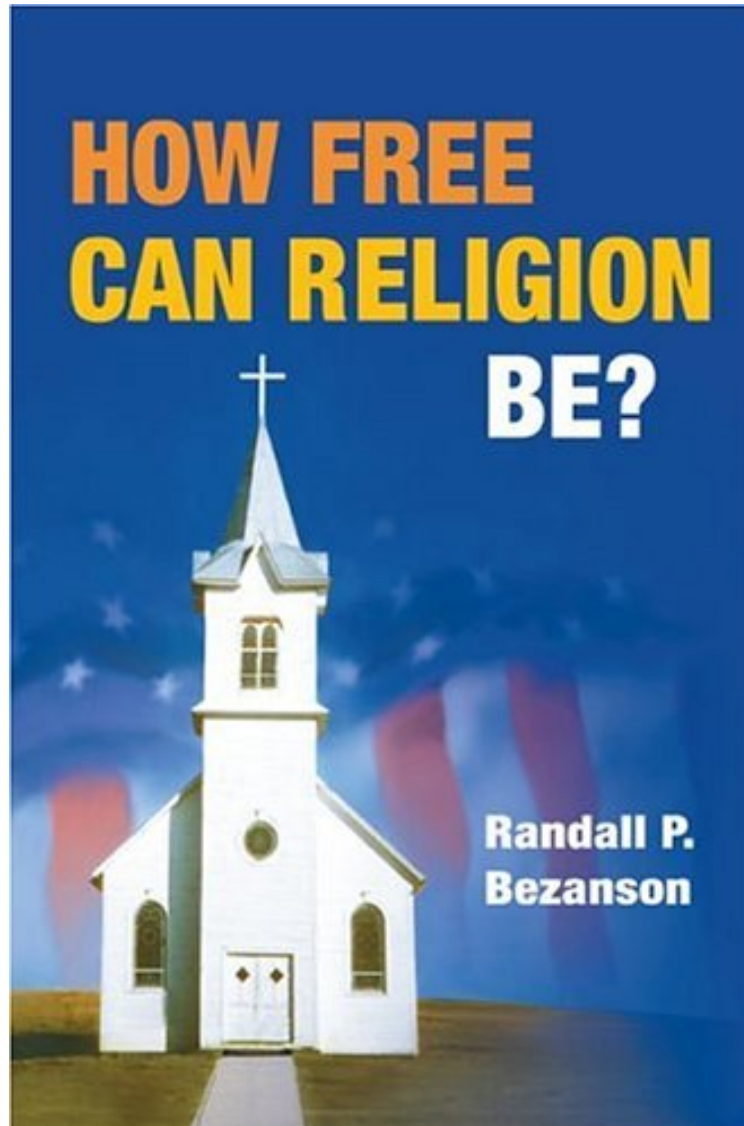


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## How Free Can Religion Be?

*Randall P. Bezanson*

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**Randall P. Bezanson : How Free Can Religion Be?** before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised How Free Can Religion Be?:

Randall P. Bezanson's How Free Can Religion Be? explores the Supreme Court's varied history of interpreting the religious guarantees outlined in the First Amendment. The book discusses eight provocative Supreme Court decisions

to track the evolution of Free Exercise and Establishment Clause doctrine, focusing on the court's shift from strict separation of church and state to a position where the government accommodates and even fosters religion. Beginning with samples from the latter half of the nineteenth century, the detailed case studies present new problems and revisit some old ones as well: the purported belief of polygamy in the Mormon Church; state support for religious schools; the teaching of evolution and creationism in public schools; Amish claims for exemption from compulsory education laws; comparable claims for Native American religion in relation to drug laws; and rights of free speech and equal access by religious groups in colleges and public schools.

"In this dense but rewarding study, Bezanson examines how the U.S. Supreme Court has interpreted the First Amendment's guarantee of religious freedom. Since the late 1980s, the court has held that the government can support, and even encourage, religious practice as long as it does not endorse one religion over another. Bezanson looks in detail at eight cases, beginning with *Reynolds v. United States* (1878), which upheld a law banning polygamy, then practiced by the Mormons. He also analyzes cases in which the Amish questioned compulsory education laws, fundamentalists protested school curricula that included evolution, and Native Americans sought protection for the use of peyote in religious ceremonies. The inclusion of lengthy quotations from the court records, and dialogues between lawyers and justices, add immediacy and authenticity. Unfortunately, because Bezanson's arguments are subtle and nuanced, he is unlikely to reach a broad general audience. "(July) - Publishers Weekly, March 22, 2006