



Name: _____

Date: _____

Religion and the First Amendment DISCUSSION: Religious Diversity

Quotations 1 and 2 below refer to a U.S. News and World report poll. They are from the following Religious and Ethics program: SPECIAL REPORT: Exploring Religious America, Part Five: Comments and Analysis May 24, 2002 Episode no. 538 (<http://www.pbs.org/wnet/religionandethics/week538/specialreport.html#right>)

Quotation 1

Bob Abernethy comments: *One of the things that some polls have indicated is that we can, at the same time, hold the belief that our religion is true and that there is truth in all religions -- that we do this -- that we don't seem to find any conflict with that.*

Quotation 2

Dr. John Green comments: *One of the most interesting things was an apparent disjunction between the great deal of tolerance that individuals in all the religious traditions expressed towards other faiths, but at the same time, a real ignorance of other faiths -- many people admitting that they didn't understand the beliefs of other groups and had never even met another member of that group.*

Quotation 3

James Merritt, President of the Southern Baptist Convention, said in an interview: *A lot of times what people are interested in, in these interfaith gatherings is basically, "Let's all come together and, implicitly, "let's affirm the truth claims of one another and let's affirm that we're all equal and that your claim is no more valid than mine and mine is no more valid than yours."*

Questions for discussion:

1. Do you think it is possible for a person to believe his or her religion is true and still respect the truth of other religions?
2. Is it easier to be tolerant and accepting of a religion about which you have some knowledge and understanding?
3. Do you think that supporting constitutionally protected religious freedoms requires you to believe that all religious beliefs are equally valid?
4. Can you think of instances where one person's religious freedom might clash or interfere with another's?
5. What do these three statements suggest to you about Americans' attitudes toward religious diversity?

Discussion Instructions:

1. All students read and think about the discussion question.
2. Each student takes a turn to speak, uninterrupted, for about a minute, while the other students just listen.
3. When everyone has had a turn to speak in this way, the group has a discussion for about 5 minutes.
4. Each group selects a reporter who describes the group's discussion to the entire class, without telling any one person's opinions.