

# Religious Issues Within the Supreme Court

## Jehovah's Witnesses and The Law

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### Introduction

Jehovah's Witnesses, believers in the second coming of Christ, often face legal challenges due to their strong religious convictions and mission to share their beliefs. Founder Charles Taze Russell viewed the group as spiritually separate from earthly concerns, prioritizing their allegiance to heaven (Abrahams, 1977). This has led to instances where Jehovah's Witnesses have sought exemptions from certain laws. We've focused on three court cases involving Jehovah's Witnesses to explore their relationship with the law and public perception.

### Symbol of Jehovah Witnesses



### Court Cases

#### Hall vs. Commonwealth

- Hall vs. Commonwealth was a case in 1948 that involved a minister in the Jehovah's Witness church along with four other members of the Jehovah's Witness church. The group entered the apartments of individuals so they could deliver some words on their religion and invite them to a lecture.
- The accused "warned to desist and contended that conviction for trespass violated his right to freedom of speech, freedom of the press, freedom of assembly, and freedom of worship guaranteed to him by amendments 1 and 14 of the Constitution," (*Hall v. Commonwealth*)
- The decision of the case ruled that the Minister was convicted and fined for trespassing.

#### The State of Illinois v. E.G., a minor

- Ernestine Gregory, a minor diagnosed with leukemia in 1987, needed blood transfusions for treatment, but her Jehovah's Witness mother, Rosie Denton, refused consent.
- The State of Illinois filed a neglect petition to the juvenile court in order to have a temporary guardian give consent for the transfusion on behalf of Ernestine.
- After having received multiple blood transfusions, Ernestine was able to take the stand and refuse the treatment based on her first amendment right to freely exercise her religion.
- Later on, the court ruled that Ernestine was medically neglected, but recognized her as a mature minor with the right to refuse treatment.

#### West Virginia State Board of Education vs. Barnette

- Dealt with issues of compelled speech and the First Amendment in the context of public education.
- The case revolved around the West VA's policy requiring students to recite the Pledge of Allegiance and salute the flag.
- The Barnette family objected to this requirement on religious grounds, as their beliefs prohibited them from making such pledges.
- The court sided with the family, stressing that individuals can't be forced by the government to express beliefs conflicting with their religion. This underscores the importance of protecting individual freedoms and dissenting opinions, stating that government-mandated expression can't override constitutional rights

### Conclusion

Jehovah's Witnesses have had a long history of relationship with the law and this continues to be an issue today. While many people believe that they are fully exempt from the law, there have been many examples of both sides. Many court cases do support Jehovah's Witnesses' beliefs but many other final decisions hold them accountable because of many other factors. These cases show that Jehovah's Witnesses are usually favored by the law, and their religious practices and beliefs are respected. We believe in the importance of this research as it complicates topics like religious freedoms and freedom of speech, and deepens our understanding of how new religious movements come in contact with the law.

### Citations



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