

Alabama judge's robe displays Decalogue: Following in the footsteps of Justice Roy Moore

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Following in the footsteps of deposed Alabama Supreme Court head Roy Moore, another judge in that state has raised controversy with a public tribute to the Ten Commandments—this time on his robe.

Covington County Circuit Judge Ashley McKathan began wearing a judicial robe embroidered with a golden-lettered version of the Ten Commandments the week before Christmas, according to news reports. Attorneys who practice in his Andalusia courtroom have objected to the display and asked for continuations of their cases because of it. But McKathan has reportedly denied those requests.

One of the attorneys, Riley Powell, said he objected because the display is a distraction. “I was representing an airline pilot who was accused of driving under the influence,” he said, according to the *Mobile Register*. “It’s not that I am anti-Christian in the least. In fact, on a personal level, I respect what Judge McKathan is doing very much.” But Powell went on to say that the judge creates a great distraction in the courtroom and may influence juries by wearing his personal views on his robes.

McKathan said he is aware there could be court battles over his robe because “there is a potential constitutional issue.” He said he does not want a legal fight but is prepared should one come.

Last year an Alabama judicial-ethics panel forced Roy Moore out of his job as the state’s chief justice for violating ethical guidelines. Earlier, Moore defied a federal court’s order to remove a massive granite monument engraved with the Ten Commandments that he had installed in the rotunda of the state’s judicial building in Montgomery.

Moore, too, had been an obscure circuit judge before rising to prominence for displaying a smaller hand-carved tribute to the Decalogue in his Etowah County courtroom. He won election as the state's chief justice, calling himself the "Ten Commandments Judge."

McKathan, who like Moore is a Baptist, offered a view of the commandments' relationship to the law very similar to Moore's. "I see the Ten Commandments as a connection to the truth," he told the *Register*. "The scriptural truth is the underlying foundation for the law. It has sustained Western civilization for centuries."

The *Montgomery Advertiser*, in a December 16 editorial, decried McKathan's tactics. "As in Moore's case, the issue here is not the merits of the Ten Commandments," the newspaper said. "The issue is the glaring impropriety of a judge, presiding in a system dedicated to fair and impartial treatment under the laws of the state and nation of all who face charges before it, injecting a set of religious beliefs into that system. It's not about the Ten Commandments; the issue would be the same if McKathan's embroidered words were those of the Koran or the scriptures of any faith."

The editorial concluded: "Has nothing been learned from the Moore case?" - *Associated Baptist Press, Religion News Service*