

Bernie Sanders Wants to Shred the Constitution

Bernie Sanders eviscerated the Constitution in front of the nation this week by ripping to shreds its prohibition on the use of a religious test for public office.

Sen. Sanders was participating in the nomination hearing for Russell Vought to be the deputy director of the White House Office of Management and Budget. In the course of the hearing, Mr. Sanders took it upon himself to tear the Constitution into little tiny shreds, appoint himself theologian in chief for the United States of America and disqualify himself and not Mr. Vought from public office.

Article VI of the Constitution flatly prohibits the use of a “religious test” to determine fitness for federal office. Here’s how the text reads (emphasis mine):

“...no religious test shall ever be required as a Qualification to any Office or Public Trust under the United States” (capitalization as in original).

It’s critically important to notice that last phrase: “under the United States.” That’s a reference to the federal government. It is not a reference to state governments, which are allowed, even today, under the Founding Fathers’ Constitution, to use any religious test they want to. Eight of them still do.

The religious tests the Founders were thinking of here were doctrinal, sectarian, denominational tests that varied from state to state, in view of the historical fact that 10 of the 13 original states had established Christian churches, and used religious tests that reflected the Christian denomination which had been enshrined as the official church of that state. Some states had the Episcopal Church as the established

church, others the Congregational, and so forth and so on. Regardless, every state at the time of the founding had a religious test for public office.

Some of these perfectly constitutional and permissible tests were quite detailed. For instance, Delaware's first constitution required all public officials to make the following declaration (emphasis mine):

"I, _____, do profess faith in God the Father, and in Jesus Christ His only Son, and in the Holy Ghost, one God, blessed for evermore, and I do acknowledge the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testament to be given by divine inspiration."

In Pennsylvania, in the constitution which Benjamin Franklin helped draft, legislators were required, before taking their seat and casting their first vote, to "acknowledge the Scriptures of the Old and New Testament to be given by divine inspiration."

So religious tests at the state level were and still are perfectly constitutional, since Article VI has never been amended to extend its prohibition to the states.

But the founders were quite adamant that no religious test would be used as a condition of serving in the federal government. One reason is that such a religious test was simply unnecessary. Whatever religious vetting needed to be done would have already been done at the state level, since it was customary for elected officials to begin their political careers at the state level.

And second, they realized the virtual impossibility of getting every state to agree to a religious test that varied from the one they used in their own state. So the founders wisely prohibited the use of a religious test to determine fitness to serve in the national government.

(It should be noted that the ban on a religious test is a ban on the federal government, not on voters, who remain free to use whatever religious test they want in deciding which candidates deserve their vote.)

This brings us to Bernie Sanders and his shameful treatment of Mr. Vought. Here is a transcript of their exchange, in which Sen. Sanders seeks to compel Mr. Vought to reject fundamental doctrines of the Christian faith in order to be allowed to serve in the federal government. Sen. Sanders own religious proclivities remain murky, although he appears from all indications to be an atheist of Jewish ancestry.

Sanders: And that is in the piece that I referred to that you wrote for the publication called Resurgent. You wrote, "Muslims do not simply have a deficient theology. They do not know God because they have rejected Jesus Christ, His Son, and they stand condemned." Do you believe that that statement is Islamophobic?

Vought: Absolutely not, Senator. I'm a Christian, and I believe in a Christian set of principles based on my faith. That post, as I stated in the questionnaire to this committee, was to defend my alma mater, Wheaton College, a Christian school that has a statement of faith that includes the centrality of Jesus Christ for salvation, and . . .

Sanders: I apologize. Forgive me, we just don't have a lot of time. Do you believe people in the Muslim religion stand condemned? Is that your view?

Vought: Again, Senator, I'm a Christian, and I wrote that piece in accordance with the statement of faith at Wheaton College:

Sanders: I understand that. I don't know how many Muslims there are in America. Maybe a couple million. Are you suggesting that all those people stand condemned? What

about Jews? Do they stand condemned too?

Vought: Senator, I'm a Christian ...

Sanders (shouting): I understand you are a Christian, but this country are [sic] made of people who are not just—I understand that Christianity is the majority religion, but there are other people of different religions in this country and around the world. In your judgment, do you think that people who are not Christians are going to be condemned?

Vought: Thank you for probing on that question. As a Christian, I believe that all individuals are made in the image of God and are worthy of dignity and respect regardless of their religious beliefs. I believe that as a Christian, that's how I should treat all individuals . . .

Sanders: You think your statement that you put into that publication, they do not know God because they rejected Jesus Christ, His Son, and they stand condemned, do you think that's respectful of other religions?

Vought: Senator, I wrote a post based on being a Christian and attending a Christian school that has a statement of faith that speaks clearly in regard to the centrality of Jesus Christ in salvation.

Sanders: I would simply say, Mr. Chairman, that this nominee is really not someone who this country is supposed to be about.

That last statement of Sanders should send a chill down the spine of everyone who loves the Constitution and who loves this country as founded. Senator Sanders, in a transparent violation of the express standard found in the Constitution, is perfectly willing to impose a severe religious test on applicants for public service, a test that trashes an element of Christian thought that has been foundational since the days

of Jesus.

In fact, most of what we know about hell we learned from Jesus, who talked more about the eternal consequences of rejecting him than anyone else in the Bible. Jesus himself declared that there is no path to salvation apart from him. "No one comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6).

Senator Sanders has essentially hung out a "Christians need not apply" sign in the federal window, in a blatant and reprehensible display of Christophobic bigotry, hate and prejudice. His religious animosity cannot be allowed to stand. Perhaps inadvertently, in his ignorance of the Constitution and his grotesque effort to disqualify Mr. Vought, he has actually revealed himself to be the one who is not fit for public service.

And Senator Sanders, your argument is not just with the Constitution. It is with Jesus. I would suggest you take this issue up with him at your earliest convenience. Eternal issues are at stake.

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