

Has Our Government Become the Friend of Religious Liberty Again?

Over the last seven decades, since the *Everson* decision of 1947, the federal government has been the implacable foe of religious liberty.

In the *Everson* ruling, the Supreme Court grabbed an obscure phrase from a letter by Thomas Jefferson—"a wall of separation between Church & State"—misinterpreted it to say the opposite of what Jefferson meant, then inserted it into Supreme Court jurisprudence as if it were Holy Writ. What Jefferson meant by his phrase is that the church is protected from the interference of the state, not that the state is insulated from the influence of the church.

Since then, the courts have been waging all-out war on the public acknowledgment of God, whether that acknowledgment is expressed in school prayer, Bible reading in schools, Ten Commandments monuments on public property or invocations at public meetings and graduation ceremonies.

All that changed this week when President Trump's legal team at the Department of Justice came out in support of Christian baker Jack Phillips of the Masterpiece Cakeshop in Colorado.

Phillips royally offended the delicate snowflakes in the Gay Gestapo in 2012 by politely declining to bake a wedding cake in celebration of a same sex "wedding," even though such "marriages" were against the law in Colorado at the time. (The couple had gone to Massachusetts to get married—thank you, Mitt Romney—and then came back to Colorado to celebrate.)

Phillips is obviously a man of sincere Christian faith. He closes his shop on Sundays, won't do cakes that celebrate

Halloween and won't participate in events that involve the use of alcohol.

He has been beaten about the head and shoulders by the legal system and by the anti-Christian bullies and bigots in the homosexual movement for the last five years. But now, in a huge moment for lovers of freedom everywhere, President Trump has put the weight of the federal government behind the First Amendment and religious liberty. The Department of Justice, under Attorney General Jeff Sessions, has filed a friend-of-the-court brief on Phillips' behalf with the Supreme Court, which will hear his case this fall.

Our government is now, for the first time since the advent of President Obama, the friend of religious liberty rather than its foe.

The Colorado constitution is utterly unambiguous on the matter: "The free exercise and enjoyment of religious profession and worship, without discrimination, shall forever hereafter be guaranteed." This clear provision was shredded in Phillip's case when the Colorado Civil Rights Commission discriminated against Phillips by trashing the "free exercise" of his Christian faith and prohibiting "his enjoyment of (his) religious profession."

The federal constitution is likewise unambiguous: "Congress shall make no law ... prohibiting the free exercise" of religion." Whatever else has happened, Phillips' freedom to exercise his deeply held religious faith has been prohibited in this case, something both Colorado and the federal government are flatly, inarguably and unmistakably forbidden to do.

Rather than being able to enjoy his religious profession, he was punished for it. In fact, he was required to attend a re-education camp and then provide regular reports to prove he was in compliance with the diktats of the miserly, mean-

spirited grinch in Colorado state government. This might be fine in the old Soviet Union, or in Communist China or in some benighted Muslim country, but it is not fine in the United States of America.

So whether you consult the Colorado Constitution or the federal Constitution, government clearly has been in the wrong here, and the Trump administration, to its everlasting credit, is determined to do something about it.

The brief also cites the Constitution's guarantee of freedom of speech. If a man has freedom of speech, he has freedom to speak, and he has freedom not to speak. It is wholly unacceptable for government to compel him to say something that violates his personal religious beliefs.

Here is an excerpt from the brief:

A custom wedding cake is a form of expression, whether pure speech or the product of expressive conduct. It is an artistic creation that is both subjectively intended and objectively perceived as a celebratory symbol of a marriage. Forcing Phillips to create expression for and participate in a ceremony that violates his sincerely held religious beliefs invades his First Amendment rights.

President Trump, of course, remains a controversial and polarizing figure. But for everyone who loves freedom, the Constitution and the First Amendment, today is a day to rejoice. President Trump is keeping the promise he made to the American people to protect religious liberty, and for that he is to be commended.

And God is to be thanked, as long as we can still do it in public without being punished, penalized, fined, fired, gagged or put out of business altogether. Perhaps this can be the day on which the ship of state changes course and starts protecting religious liberty rather than squashing it like a

little tiny bug.

Today is a day to get the word out about the president's commitment to protect the free exercise of religion against even the dark, hateful and repressive forces of the radical homosexual movement. It is time once again, as Leviticus 25:10 (KJV) and the Liberty Bell put it, to "Proclaim liberty throughout all the land unto all inhabitants thereof." {eoa}

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