

Is This the End? The Rise of Christophobia in America

America has always been a place where Christians were free to worship and live according to their consciences. In fact, our country was built upon the principles of religious tolerance, individual liberty and the right to dissent. In our founding documents, the source of these rights and freedoms is clearly acknowledged as God, not the government.

Yet the drastic changes we have experienced in the past half-century have so turned our culture on its head that to exercise those rights and freedoms means a Christian often risks marginalization, repression and even outright persecution.

As I've written in *Is This the End?* there are five distinct stages of religious oppression now occurring in our nation that when fully formed, ultimately result in Christian persecution. All of them emerge from a growing Christophobia exhibited by certain members of government in our country.

Stage 1: Stereotyping

Today, Christians are often stereotyped as ignorant, uneducated, backward, inhibited, hateful and intolerant. Even the president joined in when, in 2008, he said of workers who vote according to their values, "They get bitter, they cling to guns or religion"

Sometimes the media even features Christians as evil antagonists, holier-than-thou bigots who sit on their high horse and judge others harshly, like the prison warden in the movie *The Shawshank Redemption* who recites the Bible but abuses inmates. While it's true that some Christians represent the faith poorly, these stereotypes grow out of a rising prejudice in our culture. Not to mention, they are a denial of

the indispensable role Christianity has played in the development of American culture and the American ideal, from higher education to the free market to health care to equal rights to the rule of law.

Stage 2: Marginalizing

What many secularists want is for Christianity to be displaced from the center of American life. If the church must be allowed to exist, they want it confined to the realm of personal privacy and denied any effect on public life. You'll notice this sentiment when politicians and pundits carefully choose the phrase "freedom to worship" over "freedom of religion." The first is meant to confine us, and the second is meant to free us. They'd rather us marginalized as MSNBC personality Chris Matthews once tweeted, "If you're a politician and believe in God first, that's all good. Just don't run for government office, run for church office." Matthews' rule would have disqualified almost everyone who founded this country.

Stage 3: Threatening

Marginalizing religious expression from academic, institutional, corporate or public arenas is not enough for those who are Christophobic. They are determined to make Christians pay a price even when privately performing their activities. For example, an intern at one California university was terminated and threatened with expulsion from a graduate program for simply discussing her faith with co-workers, even though she did it only in her off hours. There are countless other examples, including many examples of high school students who have been denied the opportunity to start Bible clubs and practice their religion openly in government-funded schools.

Then, in 2014, the chief executive of a top internet company was forced to resign when it was discovered he had contributed

\$1,000 to support a California bill which was deemed “bigoted” by secularists. The bill, by the way, passed overwhelming (making most californians bigots?). Then, it was overturned by the Supreme Court. That bill defined “marriage” as a religious term used to define a union with a man and a woman, which was also a position Barack Obama held to during the 2008 presidential election as it was the position of every Democratic president before him. Were they once bigots too?

Stage 4: Intimidating

If the first three stages do not silence us, then elected officials begin to exercise overreach and outright intimidation, and sometimes they use their positions to sanction such intimidation. Such was on egregious display just last month when the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights Chairman, Martin R. Castro, stated in a letter to the president that “religious liberty” and “religious freedom” are “code words for discrimination, intolerance, racism, sexism, homophobia, Islamophobia [and] Christian supremacy” He didn’t write that letter just to the president. His memo was meant for us, Bible-believing Christians whom he aimed to intimidate. He is clearly Christophobic, and we’re not intimidated by it.

Stage 5: Litigation

A growing number of Christians and Christian organizations are being taken to court for refusing to compromise their deeply held religious convictions. In 2013 a Catholic hospital was sued because it did not offer abortion services to a client. The case was an attempt to force all Catholic hospitals to perform abortions. As the editors of *National Review* noted, “The issue is not whether those who wish to avail themselves of certain services will be able to, but that those who object to them must be forced to participate.”

Unfortunately, there are far too many other examples to mention them all here, and plenty of recent ones. But unless

there is a major turnaround, we can expect lawsuits and court judgments against Christians who practice their faith to escalate. This is especially true since the outgoing administration is responsible for replacing more than 300 judges across the country.

While I do think America is a long way from the kind of persecution we typically think of when we use that word, I never dreamed that Christians would be stereotyped, marginalized, threatened, intimidated and litigated against as they are today.

It's far more serious than we realize. {eoa}

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