

The Mayor of Atlanta Declares War on Religious Freedom

It was bad enough that Kasim Reed, the Mayor of Atlanta, declared open war on freedom of speech and religion by terminating the job of fire chief Kevin Cochran because of his views on homosexuality. But his reasons for doing so are even worse. Did Mayor Reed not even see the extraordinary irony of his words?

In 2013, Fire Chief Cochran, a committed Christian who is active in his local church, wrote and self-published a Bible-based, 160-page book that contained a few lines speaking against homosexual practice (along with other sexual sins) in very strong terms.

According to Cochran, he got verbal clearance to publish the book by the proper city authority and also gave a copy to the mayor personally, claiming that the mayor promised to read it.

But when word got out about the contents of the book, gay activists demanded that Mayor Reed dismiss Cochran. Instead, he suspended Cochran from his job for 30 days without pay – this alone boggles the mind – and required him to go to sensitivity training. (Apparently, it is forbidden even to believe what the Bible says about sexuality. You must be reprogrammed if you are to be a public servant.)

Then, earlier this week, once the suspension was over, Mayor Reed fired Cochran. And that is when the semantic circus began.

Speaking at a press conference on Tuesday, Mayor Reed said, “The city’s position is a very clear one. The city’s nondiscrimination policy, endorsed by my office and by the Atlanta City Council, unequivocally states that we will not negotiate. We will not discriminate on the basis of race or

gender or religion or creed or sexual orientation or physical ability or gender identity.”

Take a moment to read that last sentence out loud slowly: “We will not discriminate on the basis of race or gender or religion or creed”

Mayor Reed, this *is* discrimination on the basis of religion.

These are Kevin Cochran’s deeply held religious beliefs, based on the Bible and 2,000 years of Church teaching, whether you agree with them or not.

That’s the whole reason that we have these protections in our Constitution and Bill of Rights. Yet you have trampled on these very freedoms in the name of non-discrimination.

Continuing with the mayor’s comments, he said, “Any person that violates this conduct or creates an environment where we believe that that is a concern, will not be a part of our administration. Said another way, we have a strong nondiscrimination policy,” said the mayor as he engaged in an egregious act of religious discrimination.

And notice that, to my knowledge, no one has ever brought a charge against Cochran that he ever discriminated against anyone based on their sexual orientation or gender.

In fact, after his firing, Cochran explained to Todd Starnes that, “The LGBT members of our community have a right to be able to express their views and convictions about sexuality and deserve to be respected for their position without hate or discrimination. But Christians also have a right to express our belief regarding our faith and be respected for our position without hate and without discrimination. In the United States, no one should be vilified, hated or discriminated against for expressing their beliefs.”

How then could Mayor Reed say, “This is not about religious

freedom, this is not about free speech. Judgment is the basis of the problem.”

He further stated, “I want everyone who works in the Atlanta Fire and Rescue Department to feel welcome,” everyone, it appears, other than those with conservative biblical beliefs about sexuality and marriage.

Mayor Reed said, “I appreciate Chief Cochran’s service as fire chief. His personal religious beliefs are not an issue at all, despite the number of comments and emails I have been receiving on a daily basis. The city and my administration stand firmly in support of the right of religious freedom, freedom of speech and the right to freely observe their faith.”

Come again? This would be similar to saying, “This has nothing to do with the color of a man’s skin, since we wholeheartedly oppose discrimination based on skin color. We are simply firing Mr. Cochran because he is black.”

Remarkably, the mayor continued to emphasize this same point: “Let’s stop trying to make this about ‘religious freedom,’ when it’s about making sure we have an environment in government where everyone, no matter who they love ... can do their job and go home without fear of being discriminated against. That’s what this is about.”

To repeat: Everyone, other than born-again, Bible-based believers.

As for “everyone” feeling welcome, “no matter who they love,” what about those who love God and are convinced that homosexual practice is a sin?

And then there was this patently absurd argument: “Every single employee under the fire chief’s command deserves the certainty that he or she is a valued member of the team and that fairness and respect guide employment decisions. ... If we

had made the decision to retain Chief Cochran ... folks in the first rescue department who may have been discriminated against in some future occasion would have had a valid case in my mind. But after the fire chief so clearly stated his position on a number of issues, I thought that it created a potential liability for the city."

What? He fired Cochran because, in the future, he might one day discriminate against someone? That's like arresting someone because one day, that person might commit a crime.

And how are gay activists responding to Cochran's dismissal?

The statement of Alex Wan, the only openly gay member of Atlanta's City Council, was representative of many others, not only applauding the mayor but also repeating his doubletalk: "I support the administration's decision to terminate Kelvin Cochran's employment with the City of Atlanta. This sends a strong message to employees about how much we value diversity and how we adhere to a non-discriminatory environment."

Diversity? A non-discriminatory environment? Seriously?

Cochran, for his part, is praising God and standing strong, looking forward not backward.

Looking at the bigger picture, you can expect a strong backlash against the mayor's actions and words. As I said earlier this week, I'm looking for 2015 to be the year of pushback.

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