

Why Angry Atheists Are Working to Ban Gideon Bibles

The virulently anti-Christian Freedom From Religion Foundation (FFRF) is at it once again. What are these atheists so angry about this time?

Apparently, Gideon Bibles resting in hotel table drawers are just too much to bear for the self-proclaimed freethinkers, atheists, and agnostics at FFRF.

That's right. They are trying to ban the Bible. After losing battle after battle in courts on claims based on clearly flawed constitutional analysis ranging from attacking "In God We Trust" and college football chaplains to the National Day of Prayer and cheerleaders' spirit banners, they have now turned their targets toward Gideon Bibles in hotel rooms.

How did this latest battle begin? On October 15, 2015, FFRF Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor spoke at Northern Illinois University on the topic, "Women Without Superstition: No Gods—No Masters."

While in town, Ms. Gaylor and her husband, FFRF Co-President Dan Barker, stayed at the Holmes Student Center Hotel in DeKalb, Illinois. They were shocked, horrified, and dismayed to discover a copy of the Bible—placed by a Christian group, the Gideons, in their hotel room. They unbelievably claimed to be "proselytized in the privacy of their own bedrooms." Who knew a closed Bible's mere presence qualified as proselytizing. Yet, they called the Bible "obnoxious" and claimed that the mere presence of the Bible in a state-run lodging was "inappropriate and unconstitutional."

Absurd.

Once again, the FFRF seems to forget not only the meaning of

the Constitution, but also the meaning of words such as “proselytizing.”

Five days later, FFRF sent a letter to Northern Illinois University (NIU), stating in part:

“Providing bibles to Holmes Student Center Hotel guests sends the message that NIU endorses the religious texts. Including bibles sends the message to non-Christian and non-religious guests that they should read the bible, and specifically the version of the bible provided: the Gideon Bible. Certainly, if guests want to read this religious text during their stay, they can bring their own copy or access any of the numerous churches or libraries near the university.”

No one is making any guest open the Bible. No one is making them read it. In fact, the university is not “providing bibles;” it is allowing a Christian group to place literature, the Bible, in hotel rooms much like a pizzeria may leave coupons. I’ve been arguing religious speech cases just like this one for decades at the Supreme Court. The university is free to allow religious texts to be placed just as it is permitted to allow other literature to be placed in its hotel rooms. It can allow all or none.

FFRF is simply wrong on the law.

FFRF claims the Bible should be banned because they find it “obnoxious.” Yet, in reality, the Supreme Court has stated just the opposite. It has held that adults should be able to withstand “speech they find disagreeable,” without imagining that the Establishment Clause is violated every time they “experience a sense of affront from the expression of contrary religious views.” By extension, requiring the elimination of Bibles in hotel rooms owned by public universities would, as the court has found in other contexts, “lead the law to exhibit a hostility toward religion that has no place in our Establishment Clause traditions.”

There is no coercion. There is no proselytizing happening here. Instead, it's once again clear that those holding themselves out to be freethinkers are threatening smaller institutions with constitutional claims that would fall flat in court. FFRF is in the business of making threats because they know that any time they go to court, they always lose.

The Constitution is not on their side. And with these latest shenanigans, neither is common sense.

Yet, within a day of FFRF's fatally flawed letter, NIU backed down from these anti-Christian bullies and announced they'd be removing all Bibles from the rooms, something they should not feel threatened and bullied to do.

According to FFRF, the University of Wisconsin and the University of Iowa have similarly removed Bibles from hotel guest rooms after being threatened by these angry atheists.

Never missing a chance to spread their closed-mindedness, FFRF's press release includes a link to purchase FFRF Bible Warning Labels that read, "Warning: Literal Belief in this Book May Endanger Your Health and Life" complete with the symbol for poison.

FFRF must once again be stopped from poisoning our society with their flawed legal arguments and bullying tactics. Christian groups like the Gideons have placed Bibles in hotel rooms for decades. It doesn't violate the law.