

Atheists Attack Justice Alito After Claims Religious Liberty in America Under Fire

Atheist activists are frustrated over a recent speech by Supreme Court Justice Samuel Alito, during which he discussed religious liberty and warned about the essentiality of helping nonbelievers see its value.

What Alito Said About Religious Liberty

Speaking at a recent conference in Rome for the Notre Dame Law School's Religious Liberty Initiative, Alito described the dire state of religious liberty in many places. He also discussed atheism, nonbelief and the dismissive nature some take to faith.

"Religious liberty is under attack in many places because it is dangerous to those who want to hold complete power," he said during the keynote. "It also probably grows out of something dark and deep in the human DNA, a tendency to distrust and dislike people who are not like ourselves."

Alito went on to discuss the "turn away from religion" that is helping fuel problems regarding religious liberty.

"Polls show a significant increase in the percentage of the population that rejects religion or thinks it's just not all that important," he said. "And this has a very important impact on religious liberty because it is hard to convince people that religious liberty is worth defending if they don't think that religion is a good thing that deserves protection."

The conservative justice, who recently made headlines for writing the Dobbs decision overturning Roe v. Wade, the 1973 Supreme Court verdict legalizing abortion across the U.S.,

said the problem isn't just indifference or ignorance but "growing hostility to religion" or "traditional beliefs that are contrary to the new moral code that is ascendant in some sectors."

Why Atheists Are Reacting

These comments frustrated the Freedom From Religion Foundation (FFRF), an atheist activist group, with non-theists calling the comments "disturbing" and accusing Alito of framing "nonbelievers as obstructor's of religious liberty."

"Alito appeared to single out nonbelievers as implied enemies of religious freedom," the FFRF wrote in a statement.

Annie Laurie Gaylor, co-president of the organization, said nonbelievers have always been the "most ardent defenders of religious freedom." She also questioned how Alito could be seen as giving a "fair hearing" to "nonreligious appellants."

At the center of the dispute seems to be the definition of religious freedom and liberty, with the FFRF statement differentiating between Alito's view on the matter and atheist activists' framing.

"If Alito's definition of religious liberty actually means privileging religion and religionists, he's right that nonbelievers will challenge such interpretations," the statement read. "If by 'religious liberty' Alito means that believers can take away other peoples' reproductive freedoms or be exempted from civil rights ordinances against discrimination, then that is a redefinition of 'religious liberty' non-theists emphatically will take exception to." {eoa}

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