

Giant Texas Cross Sparks Atheist Lawsuit (and You Won't Believe Why)

Lifelong atheist Patrick Greene has a huge problem with a giant cross under construction alongside Interstate 37 in Corpus Christi, Texas—a city whose name literally means “Body of Christ.”

“It’s tacky as (expletive),” Greene told me.

The 230-foot tall cross is being erected on property owned by Abundant Life Fellowship—paid for by donations.

Pastor Rick Milby said it will be the largest cross in the western hemisphere. So tall, in fact, that the church was required to install a lighted beacon on the top.

Greene said the cross is a safety hazard and said it should not be seen from the highway.

“I don’t think it should be within eyesight because it jeopardizes people’s safety on the road,” he said.

So the San Antonio atheist filed a lawsuit.

But Greene did not file a lawsuit because he believes the cross is tacky. Nor did he file a lawsuit because of potential safety hazards.

He filed a lawsuit because the mayor and other city leaders attended a groundbreaking ceremony for the cross.

“When I saw the mayor in her official position and the council in their official positions were attending a groundbreaking ceremony for a Christian symbol—that smacked right in the face of the Constitution of the state of Texas,” he said.

And he also sued Preacher Milby.

Milby was accused of violating the law by inviting the mayor and the council members to the groundbreaking, the *Caller-Times* reports.

"It's ridiculous," the pastor told me. "He's attacking my rights and the rights of the mayor. The groundbreaking was on a Sunday, and these are Christians, and they have a right to their faith."

Think about that for a moment: The atheist sued a preacher for building a cross on church property in a city named Body of Christ.

"It's shocking to me that we've gotten to a point in society where we have atheists suing pastors for crosses erected on church property," attorney Jeremy Dys told me.

Dys is with First Liberty, a law firm that specializes in religious liberty cases.

Milby has since been dropped from the lawsuit. However, the mayor and council members are still facing litigation.

"No matter what belief you have, this is the name of our city and it was my constitutional right to attend, and I will never regret being there for this wonderful moment," Mayor Nelda Martinez told the *Caller-Times*.

Greene said he had no problem with the mayor attending the ceremony as a private citizen. But attending in her official capacity was a violation of her oath of office.

Attorney Dys called that a load of hooey.

"You can't ban people from going to a church," he said. "This guy is trying to use the legal system to ban city council people from attending any type of church service. To get the court to admonish them for daring to go to a church service is

just wrong.”

I reminded Greene that the church was building the cross on property they owned with money they collected. So what right did he have to tell them what they could or could not build?

“Church property or not, the reverend showed incredibly poor judgment in putting it where everybody can see it—just because he wants to proselytize his faith and get converts,” he said.

It’s true there are plenty of signs along Interstate 37. So I don’t see the harm in adding one more—especially a sign that provides directions to the highway to heaven.