



PITFALLS OF RELIGIOUS LIBERTY

Both the American Humanist Association (AHA) and the Freedom From Religion Foundation (FFRF) applauded the passage of HR1150, the Frank R. Wolf International Religious Freedom Act, after President Obama signed it this past December 16th. The measure amends a 1998 law "to state in the congressional findings that the freedom of thought and religion is understood to protect theistic and non-theistic beliefs as well as the right not to profess or practice any religion." The AHA noted that "non-theists are now recognized as a protected class" and cited the act as "a significant step toward full acceptance and inclusion for non-religious individuals, who are still far too often stigmatized and persecuted around the world." (1)

It sounds very good. But we have already seen how "religious freedom" at the state and national level is being used as a bludgeon against religious and other minorities here in the U.S. It seems that an international version – which has the force of law only with respect to the U.S. State Department's doings – could be similarly abused. In addition to the AHA and the FFRF, the Family Research Council (FRC) praised this measure. The FRC is a group that opposes LGBT rights and embryonic stem-cell research. It was designated a hate group by the Southern Poverty Law Center in 2010. Meanwhile, Americans United for Separation of Church and State seems so far to have taken no notice of the new law.

It is well to consider how even "mainstream" religious leaders view "religious liberty." On the day the new law was signed by President Obama, for example, a Catholic website published an article by Jeffrey Mirus entitled "Religious freedom, Meaningless Without Truth." Mirus is President of Trinity Communications and, according to the catholicculture.org website, "has been a leader in Catholic education and the dissemination of Catholic information for over 40 years. He has co-founded a Catholic college, authored and published numerous scholarly

books, pioneered Catholic Internet services, [and] founded a non-profit corporation to advance the Catholic Faith through education and the media." Yet here is what Mirus wrote: (2)

"[R]eligious liberty derives its value and potency from the authentic duty of each human person to conform his mind to the ultimate reality that underlies everything. This conformity of the mind to reality is actually the very definition of truth. The refusal to accept that truth exists is, in fact, a denial of reality. It forces us to ride a rollercoaster of ever-changing values articulated and imposed arbitrarily by cultural pressure and political force."

This bears careful re-reading and consideration. For it is a concise, if frightening, statement of the medieval belief that fueled centuries of religious wars as well as continuing hatred and persecution into the modern day. What Mirus means, of course, is that "the ultimate reality that underlies everything" is his particular theology. Therefore it is "the authentic duty" of all to "conform his mind" to this metaphysical scheme. For this is "actually the very definition of truth." It follows that any objection to this "ultimate truth" and the "duty to conform" to it is impermissible. Rather, only a vigorous enforcement is acceptable. As for progress in human understanding and moral practice, this is only "a rollercoaster of ever-changing values," while the persuasive power of facts and reason is "imposed arbitrarily by cultural pressure and political force."

It is a horrific view. Worse, any other faith-based ideology could be substituted in this scheme for the Christian/Catholic version. And any disagreement can only be resolved violently. Mirus himself makes this clear in how he begins and ends his remarks, using the example of pre-Christian Jewish fanaticism. But he seems either not to grasp the enormity of the cruel consequences of this, or actually revels in it. Here is how he begins and ends his essay: (2)

“U.S. President Barack Obama praised the Maccabees on Wednesday at a White House Hanukkah reception. The Maccabees were a family of brothers who, following their father’s lead, defended Israel against conquest by pagans in the second century before Christ. Praising Jews who ‘dare to observe their faith’, Obama said: ‘Everybody in America can understand the spirit of this tradition. Proudly practicing our religion, whatever it might be—and defending the rights of others to do the same—that’s our common creed.’ ... We can only hope that there is still at least some danger for politicians in praising ancient heroes – in praising men and women who, were they present today, would slay them where they stand.”

Nothing shows better the importance and urgency of a reconceptualization of religion. Specifically, no theology can be accepted as an alternative or “add on” to the reality that is imposed on everyone by objective facts and settled reason . No “conformity of mind” can be tolerated beyond that which naturally leads people to believe that 1+1=2 or to the wide application of scientific principles to ensure, for example, the safe and proper functioning of modern technology. It is simply a lie to say that “cultural pressure and political force” are the only reasons not to persecute LGBT people or to ban contraception and such things as embryonic stem-cell research.

Real religious liberty is and must be like any other kind of liberty. It does not come at anyone’s expense. Thus, when someone says that “religion” justifies their being exempt from behaving reasonably towards others, it is a sure sign that their “religion” is not religion at all.

(1) <https://thehumanist.com/news/national/international-religious-freedom-bill-heads-president-includes-language-protect-humanists-nontheists> accessed 12/29/2016

(2) Jeff Mirus PhD, “Religious freedom, meaningless without truth” 12/16/2016 [<https://www.catholicculture.org/commentary/otc.cfm?id=1437>] accessed 12/29/2016

**YOUR GENEROUS DONATIONS
TO THE NTCOF ARE NEEDED,
APPRECIATED,
AND TAX-DEDUCTIBLE!!**

All NTCOF events can be found through our website calendar , or our meetup page, from which you can RSVP, at:
- www.meetup.com/church-of-freethought -
JOIN THE NTCOF MEETUP GROUP !!!

Social Luncheon: Today, immediately after our Service, join us for lunch and discussion at the Jason’s Deli on MacArthur Blvd just south of 635, at 7707 N MacArthur Blvd, phone (972) 432-0555.

Freethought Salon: Discuss today’s service topic or other conundrums of interest. It happens most non-first Sundays of the month, over breakfast, at the Hilton DFW Lakes Hotel restaurant “The Vineyard” - inside the hotel - in Grapevine beginning 10:30 AM.

Game Night: Nearly every Friday night at the IHOP on 2310 Stemmons Trail (I-35), near Northwest Highway (Loop 12). Plan to arrive at about 7:30 PM, and stay late playing Le Havre, Carcassonne, and other fun games!

Freethought Book Club January 14, 2017 5:30 pm, THE BOOK: Good without God by Greg Epstein, Humanist Chaplain at Harvard University Location: Farina’s Winery on Main Street in Grapevine

Communitas Dinner Group: (To be Announced)
Have Another Idea? Email or call! Read bulletins & presentations and post on the FORUM at www.churchoffreethought.org LIKE US at www.facebook.com/northtexaschurchoffreethought/ and sign up for our Twitter feed at twitter.com/ntcof !

**PLANNED FOR NEXT MONTH:
“GOOD NEIGHBORS”
> Sunday, February 5, 2017 <
COMFORT INN DFW AIRPORT NORTH
(Take the Freeport Parkway exit, then the frontage road east just past Best Western;
service starts at 10:30 but come early for coffee, snacks - you can bring some! -
and conversation)**

The North Texas Church of Freethought
The Fellowship of Unbelievers

Pastor (It’s a Job Description, NOT a title!)	Tim Gorski
Presenters	Thomas Christian Williams Tim Gorski
Social Media Czar	Aaron Kelton
Book Club Lord	Nirav Assar
Welcome Coordinator	Mark Barnick
Videographer:	John Gauthier
WebPage/Management	Saturn Consulting

mailing address: 1001 N Waldrop Dr #815
Arlington, TX 76012
(214) 702-2050

**Website: www.churchoffreethought.org
Email: info@churchoffreethought.org**