



American Fascism: Government Trying to Control Church Sermons

When you hear about government controlling church sermons, you might assume that China or Cuba would be the scene of such tyranny. But now the United States is also, with Iowa state officials not only claiming the power to determine what is and isn't a "religious purpose," but also, shockingly, to control church sermons.

At issue is the Iowa Civil Rights Act and a state bureaucracy's position that churches are, to use the tendentious designation conjured up by judges decades ago, "public accommodations." This makes them subject to the same rules as businesses; meaning, they don't get to determine who uses their own facilities, paid for with their own money. This also could have a bearing on sermons. As WND.com [wrote](#) Tuesday, "The Iowa Civil Rights Act bans places of 'public accommodation' from expressing their views on human sexuality if they would 'directly or indirectly' make 'persons of any particular ... gender identity' feel 'unwelcome.'"



But this blatantly unconstitutional law has made Christians feel more than unwelcome, and, consequently, some have filed a lawsuit. The *Des Moines Register* [provided](#) some background July 6:

Two conservative Iowa churches contend the Iowa Civil Rights Commission is violating their rights to free speech and religious liberty by censoring their views on human sexuality and forcing them to open restrooms to members of the opposite sex.

The Fort Des Moines Church of Christ filed a federal lawsuit Monday in U.S. District Court in Des Moines claiming the commission's interpretation of state civil rights law prohibits church members from making any public comments — including from the pulpit — that could be viewed as unwelcome to people who do not identify with their biological sex.

The other religious entity suing the government is "Cornerstone World Outreach, a nondenominational, Bible-based church in Sioux City," reports the *Register*. The city of Des Moines is also named in the suit because it enacted an ordinance nearly identical to the state law. As for more recent developments, WND tells us that lawyers for the [Alliance Defending Freedom](#), who are representing the plaintiffs, "have filed a reply in support of their motion for a preliminary injunction that would protect the church members' constitutional rights while the case plays out."

But what's playing out in America is alarmingly un-American. For example, the *Register* informs that



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Ben Hammes, a spokesman for Iowa Governor Terry Branstad, said “The governor has confidence in the commission to enforce the laws we currently have that protect religious institutions’ right to exercise a religious exemption while protecting personal rights.” The problem?

“Institutions,” religious or otherwise, *don’t have constitutional rights*.

People have constitutional rights.

Thus, the only rights to protect are “personal rights” — and using someone else’s privately funded facilities isn’t among them. The free exercise of religion is, however.

Note also that both our national Constitution and the [Iowa Constitution](#) state that the legislature “shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof.”

And they don’t say that this free exercise is only guaranteed *in church*.

In other words, if the First Amendment guarantees a right to something — let’s say, to criticize homosexual behavior — then people must be free from government compulsion in that area in church, outside of church, anywhere. For, again, these are rights for *people*, not places.

The *Register* also reports that Kristin Johnson, director of the Iowa Civil Rights Commission, defended her state lawmakers’ tyranny by noting “that state code provides some exemptions for *bona fide* religious institutions engaged in activities with a *bona fide* religious purpose” (Emphasis added.) My, how magnanimous of them.

So now not only are constitutional religious freedoms supposedly limited to “religious institutions,” but to only those with “religious purposes” — and “bona fide” ones at that — as defined (narrowly) by government. But “purposes” don’t have constitutional rights, either.

Of course, “religious” practices such as human sacrifice are prohibited everywhere. But if a religious practice is constitutionally protected, then, again, government has no legitimate power to prevent people from engaging in it — anywhere.

And consistency is the very soul of religious practice. After all, one thing any serious person of faith learns early is that he’s obligated to live his principles at all times; it would be ridiculous to say, for instance, that it’s wrong to lie in church — but lying to make money is different because “that’s business” (no, that’s hypocrisy). Likewise, if a doctor knows that “abortion” is actually pre-natal infanticide, it’s not reasonable to say, “Well, okay, then you don’t have to perform abortions in church. But we expect you to do it at your hospital job.” Or, would the militant secularists compel a pious Muslim to serve pork and alcohol in his restaurant, contenting themselves with the idea that “hey, it’s not like we’re forcing him to do it in his mosque!” Principles don’t cease to be principles beyond the church house door. (In fact, secularists [have defended](#) the “right” of Muslim women to wear “religious” garb, the hijab, while working in someone else’s business.)

But truly shocking is the belief that government has the legitimate power to control even sermons. As the *Register* writes, citing Drake University law professor Maura Strassberg, “Strassberg said sermons that stick to human sexuality matters pertaining to theology would be constitutionally protected. But she suggested situations could arise where a preacher’s remarks could cross over the line into harassment. ‘There is a line: You can go from, ‘This is what God believes’ ... to ‘You are bad, so we don’t want you here,’ Strassberg said.” Really? What if a pastor is addressing a group of Satanists, who are in his church merely to subtly disrupt? Sure, it may not be the best approach to evangelization, but to claim he has no right to do it is plainly unconstitutional.



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First Amendment aside, while it's bad enough that government has long told private entities whom they must serve, now the state is going a most ridiculous bridge too far in telling private entities how they must serve them. The absurdity can be illustrated by taking this "don't offend the public" principle closer to its logical conclusion. Should a business be allowed to serve alcohol or pork since that may offend Muslims? Should an atheist group open to the public be allowed to criticize religion since this might offend believers? Whether you serve up a sermon, a seminar, a service, or something else, most everything offends someone and most everyone is offended by something. Will most everything be made illegal?

Of course not — only things offending "protected classes," as the government discriminates among feelings, sensitivities, and groups. As to this, a 2007 amendment to the Iowa Civil Rights Act added "gender identity" and "sexual orientation" to the qualities that afford someone special protections. And isn't that special? As America becomes Amerika, we've traded protected speech for protected classes.



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